

**Practical Counseling Skills for Imams**  
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This workshop is designed for the Imams of the Masajid who are often sought out for counseling and advice by the families and couples who are having family and marital problems.

The objectives of the workshop are:

1. To provide an overview of basic counseling skills necessary to assist such families and the couples in distress.
2. To provide an opportunity to the Imams to share the kind of cases they often end up dealing with, the difficulties they run into and how they are currently handling these cases – what works and what doesn't.
3. To learn some basic interview skills, assessment skills, and counseling skills.

The entire workshop is interactive.

Participants are expected to come prepared to discuss at least one or two of the cases they have dealt with in recent past or are dealing with currently.

## Counseling Process and Basic Skill Set

The following is a guideline of things to remember and follow in the process of Counseling and Guidance.

### To Begin With

1. Be aware of your personal prejudices and biases.
2. Remain neutral and objective – Do not take sides.
3. Be aware of your own emotional reactions and do not allow them to color your perceptions and interpretations of events, and your responses.
4. Do not be judgmental.
5. Do not rush the process.
6. Do not accept the responsibility to solve the problems.
7. Refer the case to a professional counselor if it is too complicated or if you feel uncomfortable with it.

### Assessment Phase

1. Set **Ground Rules** for the meeting
  - a. One person speaks at a time.
  - b. No interruptions
  - c. No Arguments
  - d. Time Limit
2. See the couple (in case of marital counseling), or the family (in case of family counseling) together for the first meeting with the objective of **identifying the major issues** and complaints of the parties. Keep it short, simple and to the point.
3. Take a **brief history** of the marriage and the problems.
4. Then meet with them individually to **further assess**: a) their individual perceptions of the issues, b) what precipitates them, c) how they affect them and the relationship, and d) what they have done to solve these issues and e) what are their expectation of you.
5. Schedule another joint meeting to share your understanding and assessment of the overall issues and problems. Their agreement or disagreement should indicate to you whether you properly understood the issues. By the end of this meeting, all should be in **agreement on the major issues** that need to be dealt with.
6. **Communication Skills** (Most Important)
  - a. Listening
  - b. Feeding Back
  - c. Appropriate Response
  - d. Empathy

## Counseling Phase

1. Determine their individual and collective **goals**.
2. **Prioritize** the goals and objectives
3. Make sure not to tackle all the problems at one time, but only **one at a time**.
4. Get an **agreement on which goal** they want to work on first.
5. Make them think about their individual **contributions to the problem**.
6. Ask them what they can do individually to remove their contribution to the issue.
7. And what they think the other person would have to do to resolve the issue.
8. Based on their answers to #6 and #7, get them to develop a **joint plan of action**.
9. Warn them not to be other-focused in resolving the issue, but to **be self-focused**.
10. Set up a **follow up** session in a week's time.
11. Hold them accountable for following up on **their plan**.
12. Related goals may be added to the plan one at a time.
13. Emphasize that they are **not stuck** with this relationship – they can separate.
14. **Guide** but don't give advice and solutions.
15. Do teach them the rules of Shari'ah, but **do not preach**.
16. Do not ask them to just be patient, make dua, and give each other another chance.
17. If you feel uncomfortable with a specific issue, **refer** them to a professional counselor.

## Family Violence

1. Carefully gather all information on the nature of violence, recent history, frequency, severity, perpetrator and the victims.
2. Determine how violent episodes are triggered.
3. Find out if the authorities have been involved and any actions have been taken.
4. Top priority in such cases should be safety and security of the victims. Never treat family violence lightly.

## **Common Mistakes**

1. Not making a good assessment the underlying real problems
2. Rushing to give advice
3. Lecturing/Preaching
4. Taking Sides
5. Sounding biased towards men
6. Asking women to be patient and give the men another chance
7. Sticking to the dictates of Fiqh without understanding the dynamics of the problems
8. Underestimating the consequences of family violence
9. Not taking appropriate action to ensure the safety and security of the victims
10. Not following up

Remember you cannot resolve their problems. They have to resolve them themselves.