

THE *original*  
COUNSELLING CARDS

INSTRUCTION BOOKLET



LISA ATKINS



**THE *original***  
**COUNSELLING CARDS**

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## INTRODUCTION

'The Original Counselling Cards' are unique emotions cards for adults, designed to support easy communication in a variety of situations. These cards can be used by couples for relationship problems, by single individuals to clarify their own feelings on any matter, and they are a valuable tool for therapists. Adults with neurodiversity and highly sensitive individuals may also find these cards useful.

There are 120 cards in the deck, depicting 25 positive emotions, 83 negative emotions, 23 influences, and one 'Blank Card' for any other emotion. They come with an exclusive 'Spread Mat' to help users track their emotional journey and to reveal any events, fears, or external influences that may be on the scene. Instructions are provided in this booklet.

A word from the author: *'Therapy requires*

*talking about our emotional journey and how it makes us feel, but talking about emotions doesn't come naturally to many of us. We go blank, we get confused or bewildered, we panic, we get angry, or we walk away. Adult emotions are complicated and often hard to describe. So, if you struggle to answer the question: "and how does that make you feel?" as much as I do, or if you are looking for a way to put a difficult emotional situation into context, or perhaps you simply want to communicate with someone to solve a problem, I hope these cards help you to clarify how you feel and to start a supportive conversation going forward'.*

Lisa Atkins.

## THE COUPLE SPREAD

This spread is to be completed by a couple, Person A and Person B. If you have one deck between you, Person A completes the spread first (instructions below), takes a picture of their completed spread, and then passes the cards and Spread Mat over to Person B. The aim of this activity is to clarify how both parties feel, how their emotional journey has unfolded, what influences are affecting the situation, and where both parties desire to be in the future. There may be some surprises, so please respect your partner's view to allow for constructive conversations.

**STEP 1:** Open the Spread Mat on the 'Couples Spread' side. The bottom row is compulsory: notice questions 1, 2 and 3 on the mat.

**STEP 2:** Person A looks through the cards and picks 1-2 cards to represent where their situation started. There is a card menu to help with this. Place these cards on the mat under question 1: 'I Started Our Journey Here'.

STEP 3: Person A then picks 1-3 cards to represent where they are now. Place these cards on the mat under question 2: 'I Am Currently Here'.

STEP 4: Person A may move their attention to the top row of the mat, and place any additional cards into the following optional areas: 'What You Show Me', 'My Fears', and 'External Influences'. These are not compulsory, but they can add context as to why Person A is where they are.

STEP 5: Person A then picks 1-2 cards to represent their desired outcome. Place these cards on the mat under question 3: 'My Desired Outcome'.

STEP 6: Set a timer for fifteen (15) minutes. Person A now explains to Person B why they selected their particular cards, starting with question 1: 'I Started Our Journey Here'. There are prompts on the Spread Mat to help with this: answer the prompts to support a clear and structured explanation. Person A's

explanation, once finished, should have described their emotional journey and revealed any events, fears, or external influences that affect them.

**IMPORTANT:** Person A should not use this time to be accusatory or critical towards Person B. Person A should simply focus on communicating their own feelings, and Person B should simply listen. Should an argument occur, or if some emotions are too difficult to discuss, stop the exercise. A relationship therapist is needed to facilitate this conversation going forward. If Person B does not wish to visit a therapist, Person A can still visit one alone for further advice.

**STEP 7:** Should Person A have successfully finished explaining their spread, Person B can now repeat the exercise, picking their own cards and placing them on the mat, and taking fifteen (15) minutes to explain their selections to Person A.

**STEP 8:** In the event that, once both spreads

are finished, both Person A and Person B have very similar outcome cards (e.g., both parties want to reconcile or both parties want to separate), you can discuss an amicable plan as a couple. A relationship therapist could help with this.

In the event that Person A and Person B both have different outcome cards (e.g., Person A wants to reconcile whereas Person B wants to divorce) and you are both immovable in your desired outcomes, then a relationship therapist will help to find a gentle way forward, particularly if there are other factors involved (e.g., children, finances, careers, etc.). Please respect the feelings of your partner if they have caused you surprise: the aim of this exercise is for *both parties* to be able to communicate their feelings to their partner in a clear and structured way.

In the event that Person A and Person B both have neutral outcome cards (e.g., both parties are disinterested) or you don't feel any further forward, you may both wish to discuss the several options available (e.g., reconciling or separating) and the merits of each one. A

relationship therapist could help to unpick what each party truly wants and the best way forward for your unique circumstances.

## THE SINGLE SPREAD

This spread is to be completed by Person A alone. The aim is to untangle and clarify how you feel about a particular situation, whether in a relationship or outside of one. You need a notepad and a pen.

STEP 1: Open the Spread Mat on the 'Single Spread' side. The bottom row is compulsory: notice questions 1, 2 and 3 on the mat.

STEP 2: Look through the cards and pick 1-2 cards to represent where your situation started. There is a card menu to help with this. Place these cards on the mat under question 1: 'I Started My Journey Here'.

STEP 3: Pick 1-3 cards to represent where you are now. Place these cards on the mat under question 2: 'I Am Currently Here'.

STEP 4: You may now move your attention to the top row of the mat, and place any additional cards into the following optional

areas: ‘What I Show The World’, ‘My Fears’, and ‘External Influences’. These are not compulsory, but they can add context as to why you are where you are.

STEP 5: Pick 1-2 cards to represent your desired outcome. Place these cards on the mat under question 3: ‘My Desired Outcome’.

STEP 6: Take your notepad and pen, and write down why you selected these particular cards, starting with question 1: ‘I Started My Journey Here’. There are prompts on the Spread Mat to help you compose a clear and structured answer. Your written answers, once finished, should resemble your emotional journey and reveal any events, fears, or external influences that affect you.

STEP 7: If you require some additional help in finding a practical solution to your emotional situation, make an appointment to see a therapist, taking your cards/notes with you to help you communicate your feelings.

## WITH A THERAPIST

Instructions for couples: Should you and your partner decide to visit a therapist to help with your situation, let the therapist know before the session that Counselling Cards have been used as a self-help communication tool at home. Your therapist may continue to use them, or they may like to try an alternative method to further develop your conversation with your partner. If you have particular trouble articulating how you feel (e.g., too emotional, too angry, or your mind simply goes blank), your cards can help with this.

Instructions for individuals: Should you decide to seek help from a therapist alone for an emotional situation, let the therapist know before the session that emotional discussions can be tricky for you, and that you have some helpful notes from using Counselling Cards as a self-help tool at home. The therapist will be able to ask you the right questions to help you communicate. Take your cards with you in case they come in handy.

Instructions for therapists: Taking a relationship 'outside' to a therapist can be a daunting prospect for many individuals and couples. Talking about feelings is very difficult, articulating emotions is a skill, and given that up to 65% of adults are visual learners, images/prompts has been shown to be very useful. These Counselling Cards can be used as an ice-breaker, as a prompt, as a full activity or as a diffuser, and the Spread Mat can be used to bring structure to a complex emotional situation.

Ice-breaker example: place the cards on the table and ask the couple/individual to pick any cards that they connect or relate to. This provides a good introduction to the session by introducing deeper emotions in a detached and accessible way.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Atkins designed these cards not from a professional standpoint but as a highly sensitive individual to help other people who, just like her, find it hard to communicate their feelings. As an introverted person who ‘feels’ her way through life, she became frustrated by the lack of tools available to help her articulate her emotions in highly stressful situations. She hopes, with the creation of these beautiful cards, that many others will find them as useful as she does in identifying how they feel about a situation before having a conversation with friends, partners, or professionals.

Lisa Atkins works in academia (UK) and has a doctorate in fertility law. She has an undergraduate degree in law and a masters degree in law, and teaches medical law and criminal law. She designed these cards as a personal project of her own. She is not a therapist; she is simply a fellow human being hoping to help other sensitive souls by creating a valuable source that she needed,

but could not find.

## DISCLAIMER

These cards are a useful self-help tool for the identification and communication of feelings and for bringing perspective to complex emotional situations, but they are not designed to replace therapy in serious situations: they can be used as a first step towards therapy and as a useful resource during therapy. Please visit a therapist if, after using the cards at home, a relationship situation still feels unsolved, or an emotional problem still requires assistance.

