

## Practitioner Profile

### An Interview with Ed Coombs, MBA, CFP®, LMFTA

*You walk into a bar and meet a fire fighter, financial planner and a therapist and they are all sitting talking about their jobs. What do they all have in common? The desire to help people in tricky situations. This is me in a nut shell, I have thrived most in my life when I am helping people with really difficult topics or situations. Along this road I have earned an MBA and an MA in Counseling. As well as the CFP® certification. I am currently working as a therapist to help couples and individuals heal their trauma and its impact on their financial lives. When people come to understand how what happened in their past haunts their present and gain the confidence to rewrite the story of their life they find increasing amounts of love and compassion for themselves and others in their lives. This change in perspective also helps them to use money in a way that is more congruent with their own personal values and ethics.*

#### **Q. Define what you do professionally.**

A. I operate a couples' counseling practice in Charlotte, NC. I enjoy working with couples to help address effectively their personal and interpersonal relationship with money. My training as both a certified financial planner and marriage and family therapist helps me to speak both languages well. In addition, I focus on the ways that developmental trauma, including emotional abuse/neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, play out in couple and family conversations about money. My focus is on treating couples holistically and engaging them in the integration of emotion, behavior, and thought. As increased integration occurs, effective communication blossoms. I am also a Ph.D. student at Kansas State University in their financial planning program. I am actively engaged in researching how attachment theory and affect regulation theory apply to the experience of financial satisfaction and financial account management.



#### **Q. What activities encompass your professional responsibilities?**

A. I meet with couples typically on an hourly basis weekly for counseling. During that time we may engage in a number of processes, including but not limited to empathic listening, EMDR, and family of origin work.

**Q. How long have you been engaged in your professional activity?**

A. I have been practicing as a marriage and family therapist for four years. Prior to that I worked at Vanguard Mutual Funds for almost four years. My first career was as a professional firefighter.

**Q. What led you to your professional calling?**

A. I eventually realized that money and couples is a very difficult dynamic to address, that is not well addressed in pop culture, the field of financial planning, or marriage and family therapy. This recognition grew out of experiences I watched in my own family, stories I heard in the fire station as a professional firefighter, and experiences at Vanguard Mutual Funds. Last but not least, my own marriage and trying to communicate about money is one of the hardest. My work as a marriage and family therapist has helped me to see how the deep legacy of family functioning and organization profoundly shape how each person experiences and interacts with money. It is both about the money and not about the money. My professional calling is to help couples move from pain and misery talking about their finances, to mutual love and respect, leading to an increased intimacy in their relationship.

**Q. How are you paid?**

A. My clients pay by the hour for the counseling that I offer.

**Q. What theoretical framework(s) guides your work when dealing with clients?**

A. Family Systems/Bowen – This gives me the broad framework for looking at the totality of the system across parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, grandparents, step-parents.

Attachment theory – A deep understanding that we are psychologically and physiologically wired for connection is a primary basis of my work. My goal is to help clients that have insecure attachment styles move towards earned secure attachment. Which opens them up the experiences of trusting and loving themselves and others.

Affect Regulation Theory – When we understand what is happening to our body physiologically and its impact on our emotional and feeling states, it helps to increase awareness and move towards learning how to find regulation during times of distress.

Internal Family Systems/Structural Dissociation – Both of these models help provide a psychodynamic view of functioning and a way of addressing unresolved traumatic issues from the past. Psychological splitting or dissociating is a pervasive part of traumatic reaction and being able to understand and work with split of memories is critical for trauma recovery.



**Q. What needs to happen so that 10 years from now we can say that financial therapy is a respected field of study?**

A. Far more quantitative and qualitative research needs to happen in the applied forms of financial therapy. I think that the field of financial therapy can look at other specialized fields of practice to help set out our developmental framework. One area of specialty that I am particularly interested in

borrowing models from is sex therapy. Sex, like money, is a complex phenomenon that is multi-dimensional and requires tremendous skill to be able to enter into that very private part of life.

**Q. How would you like to see practitioners from the Mental Health side using financial therapy?**

A. I would love mental health practitioners to consider doing some of their own money work. Understanding the basis of their financial narrative and the ways that they explicitly and implicitly impose their difficult and conflicted affective states on their clients.

**Q. How do you think practitioners from a different home discipline should use financial therapy?**

A. I would love it if financial planners could develop the professional muscle to allow for couple distress and struggle to enter the financial planning conversation. It is wonderful to focus on the positive and set goals, yet realizing that there are places in which couples feel unresolved around each other and money is a huge barrier to implementing or maintaining the financial plan. It is what gets said in the car ride to the financial planning office and on the way home that matters more than what happens in the office.

**Q. If others are interested in finding out more about you personally and professionally, where can they obtain this information?**

A. The best place to track me or learn more information is on my website at [www.carolinascouplescounseling.com](http://www.carolinascouplescounseling.com)

Feel free to email be questions at [ed@carolinascouplescounseling.com](mailto:ed@carolinascouplescounseling.com)