

## **exEXPERTS transcript: Kim Bowen on discernment therapy**

**TH:** Welcome to today's podcast everybody. I'm TH, and Jessica and I are happy and thrilled to have Kim here today. Kim Bowen, she is the CEO and founder of The Marriage Place. I found Kim, and you'll hear on many of our podcasts how I found people randomly trawling the internet, but I found Kim on Clubhouse, and she was talking about a bunch of stuff that I had never heard about before. You may not have heard of it, it's called discernment therapy. It's probably not what you think. I was thinking of like shock treatment or something like that. It scared me. Discernment therapy scared me.

**Kim:** It's a big word.

**TH:** I was in this Clubhouse group and all of my fears were calmed. I had to reach out to Kim. Welcome Kim to our podcast today.

**Kim:** Thanks. I'm excited to be here, really.

**Jessica:** We're so glad you're taking the time. And especially we feel like most people, TH and I and a lot of other people listening, also probably have no idea what discernment therapy is.

**Kim:** It's a terrible name, isn't it?

**TH:** It is. I think you need to rebrand it.

**Jessica:** But also tell us first how you even got into this because your story, your background, is so interesting how you started The Marriage Place?

**Kim:** My husband and I were going through a difficult time. We had a really good strong marriage. We were best friends when we married, had our ups and downs, and just over the years, some problems came up we weren't able to work through. Some resentment built and I wanted out. We went to lots of marriage counselors and found out that most of them don't know what they're doing. I mean, it was an awful experience and a lot of money and a lot of wasted time, which only builds up more hopelessness that your marriage can't be saved. We were able to get through that and we've learned some things. We teach at The Marriage Place for people in that same situation, but I was determined I was going to do it differently. I was going to figure this out. I spent a lot of years training with the best of the best in this business.

**Jessica:** Just to be clear, your personal experience going through marriage counseling successfully, because you stayed together, but unsuccessfully in the sense that the experience was not a good one for you [it was horrible] was what motivated you to then decide to get your own degree?

**Kim:** Yes, well, I was already working on counseling, but I hadn't specialized. [Okay] And that's when I decided to specialize. [Okay] The Marriage Place has grown so fast, we now have coaches and counselors that work for me. We have three offices, and we work with clients all over the world. We have an international base.

**Jessica:** Would you say The Marriage Place specializes specifically in discernment therapy?

**Kim:** It does. It specializes in relationships. Whether that's improving the relationship you're in, whether that's discernment therapy, or whether that's--we also have a whole segment of when your spouse wants a divorce and you don't. We know how to help people to figure out 1) can it even possibly be saved? You'd be surprised how many of them can be, and if not, then how to get that person back on their feet.

**Jessica:** First of all, just a side note, we need to do a podcast on that. Because [inaudible]. No, for real.

**Kim:** Well, it's huge.

**Jessica:** Yeah, that's it. That's such an interesting topic. But we're going to try to focus--

**Kim:** Stick with this.

**Jessica:** Yeah, but I mean, because I would think that discernment therapy would be a kind of marriage counseling.

**Kim:** Right, but it's not.

**Jessica:** Tell us.

**Kim:** With marriage counseling you are working with, hopefully, mostly, two people who want to have the singular goal of working on the marriage, improving the marriage, getting past an affair, doing some healing, whatever. They have a common goal. Discernment counseling is usually two people who don't have a common goal. Either, one, we call leaning in, which is the one who wants to save the marriage, and the other one is the leaning out. They're the ones that either are 99% sure they don't want to save the marriage or they just really don't know. They just really don't know what they want. Discernment counseling is a way to go in and work with them together and individually to help them make a good, intentional decision, and not a knee jerk reactive, emotional place of I'm just miserable and I want to get some relief right now. Because we find that those are the types of people who regret it. I mean, this is a big deal. It's a big deal to blow up a marriage.

**Jessica:** When I was getting divorced from my first husband who was a good friend of TH from growing up, my older sister had also been divorced before she got married a second time. I remember, I got divorced basically because of infidelity, and I was kind of like, I'm out. I'm done. I'm out. It's okay, it's fine. We're done. I remember my sister was the one who said to me--he was asking me to please go to marriage counseling to try to save it, and I was like, I don't think this can be saved for me personally. My sister was the one who said to me, just go so that you know later that you did everything that you could have done and didn't make a rash decision.

**Kim:** Because here's what's important about that Jessica, everybody has patterns of behavior, right? I don't have to be with a client very long, I can talk to you for about 10 or 15 minutes, ask you the right questions, and I can tell you exactly the dynamic that was going on in your relationship. Because patterns repeat, right? Even though they're different faces with different stories and different elements, it's the same basic pattern. We laugh and say, "Show me the thumbprint, I'll show you the thumb." If I see certain behavior, or a couple gets to a certain place, I know five steps back what

got you there. It's so important that you know that, because otherwise you're going to take you into every relationship that you are going to have, whether it's romance, whether it's your kids, whether it's with your friends or your family. It's so important to know what patterns that you're engaging in that aren't helping you be more relational.

**Jessica:** Okay, so for people listening to be clear, discernment therapy, discernment counseling, interchangeable it seems, is basically when one person has one foot out the door, and the other person still wants to stay together? [That's right] That's the premise of what this type of counseling is? Okay. [That's right] What are the methods or the tactics? I'm sure to some extent that it varies based on people's individual experiences, but what are the main methods that are used for people to understand whether or not this is would be something that they would want to pursue?

**Kim:** You want to know how discernment works and how we structure it. It is actually very structured. Most counseling, we work with whatever shows up in the room. Discernment, we do the same, but we have a very structured base to start from. How it works is you will come in, and we'll start with you together, and you get one to five sessions to come to a decision. The reason that we limit it to that is so if you're the person who's wanting out and you're desperate to get out, you're not going to want to come in for three months of marriage work, or to even talk about it. You don't even have to come for five sessions. You decide at the end of every session if you want another one, but we don't let it go longer than five. [Okay] Okay? And during that time, we are looking for some specific things. We want to know, if somebody has got one foot out, they usually have one of three divorce narratives. Some of it you divorce for freedom: I've just got to get out of here. They are fantasizing about what life will look like without this person in their lives. We want to make sure that fantasy is realistic. We want to make sure that you're not following a pipe dream with your feet in the clouds and going to get severely disappointed. We want to make sure you know whether it's going to affect you financially, how it's going to affect you emotionally, how it's going to affect you, your friend group and your extended family and any children. We just want you to take a good look.

**Jessica:** You want to scare the bejesus out of people.

**Kim:** No, we want to prepare you. We want to prepare you.

**TH:** You have to make an educated decision. It can't be emotional. Divorce is so emotional if you totally have a knee jerk reaction. Okay, so finish what you were saying.

**Kim:** Then there's the divorce narrative of divorce is a relief, and for this person, they're usually with somebody who is draining them. Either they are suffocating them because they know they want out, and they're begging them to keep trying or to do something different. Maybe they're controlling, or even somewhat abusive. They're threatening. They're telling you if you divorced me I'm going to make your life miserable. I'm going to take all your money. You're going to be out on the street. They may say you're ruining your kids, you're a terrible mother, or you're terrible father because you're even doing this. For you, you just want out from under the pressure.

**Jessica:** It's so relatable. So far both those descriptions are so relatable.

**Kim:** Well, for me I had all of them. Then there's the divorce narrative of this is a reluctant letting go. This is the person who has thought through the consequences, they know that this is going to be a huge upset, but they still feel so very hopeless.

They're convinced that nothing can change, their spouse won't change, they can't really change, and the only option they have is divorce. The process of discernment counseling, we're trying to help you make one of three decisions, because that's really all you've got. One is to leave things the way they are now, which for some people, that's a good thing. If you've just found out your spouse has cheated on you, you've got to have time to process that and get over the shock. If you're not ready to open yourself up and be vulnerable to somebody you can't trust, so you're not ready to work on it. You're probably not ready to leave it because you're still in such emotional turmoil. So that's the leave things the way they are now but to help you provide a safe space for you to do that, meaning good boundaries, so that you're not being pressured all the time. You're giving yourself permission to heal up. The second decision is move toward divorce. If you choose to move toward divorce, like I said, we want you to see all the aspects of that. We want you to understand what types of divorce are offered, and which ones are more child friendly and co-parenting friendly.

**Jessica:** For that you're talking about you will go over things like mediation, collaborative divorce, and litigation? Okay, so you're helping them understand really there are different divorce choices. I love it. Okay, go ahead.

**Kim:** We'll teach them how to find a divorce attorney. If it's somebody local, we'll give you names of people who do collaborative divorce, because we honestly feel like that's the only healthy way to divorce where everybody's not trying to get something over on somebody else. Then the other one is move towards saving the marriage. If that's the decision you make, we ask that you have a six month period where you take divorce off the table, you roll up your sleeves, and you get in there and you work on it. Most people don't see that as even a possibility when they come in or they wouldn't have one foot out the door, but about half the people choose it.

**Jessica:** Interesting.

**TH:** Isn't that amazing? Half the people choose to stay.

**Jessica:** - to stay together. Here's my question. Out of those half that choose to stay together, what percentage would you say actually lasts?

**Kim:** A little bit more than 45%.

**Jessica:** Oh, so 50%? So 25% of the people that come to you to start, oh no, not necessarily. But okay, half of-- got it.

**Kim:** It's still a good number.

**Jessica:** That's a very healthy number.

**Kim:** And the people that don't, that move toward divorce, usually have a much better divorce.

**Jessica:** Right, because they've gone through this process. You're saying you give them one to three sessions, but it's kind of up to them, right? [One to five] One to five sessions, they come in, after each of those sessions they decide whether or not they're going to come back. What do you do after the first session when you have the person who is one foot out the door who's like, I don't even want to come back for a second session? Where do they go from there?

**Kim:** But they have a choice. So we say, "Okay, so you've made the decision to go toward divorce. Do you want to come back and talk about how to do that and what that looks like?" Hopefully, they'll say yes. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes they're like, "Yeah, no, I'm out." Sometimes they're out and they want to screw the person over. Hey, but I'll tell you what, that first session is a doozy, because you're going to get whiplash. The focus of these sessions is not your partner. Let's say if your partner cheated on you, it's real easy to come in and just really, this is a scumbag, he cheated on me. You can't control any of that. It's happened. But we want to look at you, and we want to see what you have brought into the marriage as far as patterns and behavior that might be getting in your way or might be something you're going to continue afterwards that might bring you the same type of people. We tend to be drawn to the same person over and over because patterns repeat. That's what they do. It's not blaming you for the marriage ending or your husband's infidelity, but it is helping you get a really good look at yourself.

**TH:** Right. Why that was even allowed. It's not necessarily your fault. I mean, Jessica and I have both been in marriages like that, and for me, I would imagine that there are people that come to you, "I felt like the cheating was the last straw." That was like my, alright, wham bam, I'm out. Right, all this other stuff is stacked up. What do you do in that situation? I know, for me, it wasn't a healthy marriage, so this wouldn't have worked for me because I'm so much happier on this side that I know --

**Jessica:** It may have gotten you a better, more user friendly divorce experience.

**TH:** It may have, and honestly, I literally dragged him to talk to people, mostly to talk about how we were going to tell our kids. Like, you go figure your own shit out, I'll figure myself out, but we have to work together to be on the same page and what this message is to our kids. That was the only way that we were ever together with any kind of professional helping us or talking to us.

**Kim:** In our world today, we don't handle conflict very well. It's not role modeled. I mean, look at the politicians, everything is about winning. It's about hurting the person who is against you or opposes you. In marriage, when you do that, the damage is so devastating. Divorce doesn't have to happen. In some situations they need to happen, and if they do though, we can minimize so much of the pain and the anguish and the hurt for everybody if we do this with some dignity and respect.

**TH:** It's also the messenger. I'm sure that I've heard a lot of chirping from a lot of different people, but if you are telling me this, it may resonate differently. Everybody's got an opinion, everybody's got advice. This is like a safe space. You don't know anything about us, and somehow your ears clear up a little bit more and your brain makes space to hear what you have to say versus a bunch of noise out there. I think that's important to decipher between the noise and the real guidelines.

**Kim:** The kind of people that I'm going for truly though are the ones who, you know, 80% of the people who file for divorce never went to counseling.

**Jessica:** Is that true?

**Kim:** That is true.

**Jessica:** 80%, that is a huge statistic.

**Kim:** And it's crazy to me. But then again, after my experience with marriage counselors, I'm not surprised because most of them suck.

**Jessica:** I understand that you guys didn't, TH, and maybe this is wrong for me to say because again, like whatever, even though he cheated, we went for a couple of weeks. Well, I really was out. [You were out] And we listened to her and she actually said my stance on going to marriage counseling was we've been together for 18 years. If I at any point had wanted to go to marriage counseling, I would have expected him to respect the fact that I wanted to go and I would have expected him to go. Listening to my sister, I felt that out of respect for him and the amount of time that we had been together and our young children, I will go, but I made it very clear to him that I was only willing to go under the auspices of he really wanted to stay together and he really wanted to make it work. Because I said to him, I don't need to go to a marriage counselor for them to tell us they think we should get divorced. I already think we should get divorced. If you think that you're going to be putting in the effort to try to fight to stay together, I'm willing to go and try to get on that page and hear where you're coming from. I don't know that I can do that. We went and part of what she said was that I had already asked him to move out, and she said that he needed to move back in and that he was going to have to move back in for three months, she said. My first reaction was, I don't know what day of the week it was, maybe it was like a Tuesday, I'm like you committed it on Sunday. I needed a few more days before the idea of him even coming back into the apartment. Then when he moved back in, honestly, I would say it was probably less than two weeks, I was like I just can't. I literally wanted to peel my own skin off.

**Kim:** I so question that. I mean, nobody likes to throw somebody under the bus, but that kind of therapy of get him back in the house. This is somebody who cheated, right? [Yes] I would have been like, hell no. You've got to earn your way back in.

**Jessica:** Well, part of it was also that we needed to start going on dates. And by the way, I love the idea of being in a relationship and having regular date nights. I think it's so important to woo your partner and to be able to [have fun] and look pretty. I love dates. But I think after the first or second time, I'm like, I don't think I want to date my husband. It was just under such different circumstances.

**TH:** No, you didn't want to date him. You didn't want to date him.

**Jessica:** Right. But anyway the idea that people who have gone through a cheating situation, I can sort of understand that more that those people might be less inclined to go to marriage counseling. But the idea that as a whole statistic in marriage that 80% of people don't go to therapy before deciding to end their marriage, I find it quite, almost shocking.

**Kim:** It's alarming actually. I will tell you, if your marriage has one of the three A's: abuse, affairs, or addiction, untreated addiction, [those are hard to get past] those are tough, and those aren't the typical -- Most marriage therapists take the approach of let's play nice, let's get you back closer together. That's ridiculous. You're in this place of hurt, betrayal, devastation. You're not going to want to go on date nights. You're not going to want to have sex with your husband again. You're not going to want him to move in. That's kind of really bad advice. Most marriage therapists don't even really give you advice. They just tell ask you, "Well, how do you feel about that?" and, "How do you feel about this?"

**TH:** Right, I had a lot of that.

**Kim:** Yeah, we don't do that. We jump in. I've had clients in front of me where I look at him and I'm like, well, you're a narcissistic asshole. [I love it] That's why your wife

doesn't want to have sex with you. Knock this off. We're very directive, but we're truth tellers. That's what we call ourselves. We're truth tellers. We don't just listen and try to get your marriage back together without healing and some of the deep personal work that that requires. Date night, I hate that stuff. I just do.

**Kim:** What's so great among all the other things that you do but really came out in this podcast is you're not siloing anything. You're looking at the whole path. Her, him, or she, he, or whoever's in the relationship, each person and then together. What I think Jessica and I both learned since our separations 12 years ago, 12 plus years ago, is that we're only where we are today because we recognized and took responsibility, which is not an easy thing to do. [You know, it isn't] It's a humbling thing to do, but I had been in relationships after my separation, and I didn't fully repeat, but I did a little repeat. I did a little of I can fix him, I can change him. I can make him who I think he's going to be. I think he's got that potential if I just dig in.

**Kim:** So where we would go back and look and say, "What is this place in you that you are attracting and attracted to people that need that kind of fixing?"

**TH:** Yeah, I don't do that anymore. I have recognized it and owned it. And no, it's not my responsibility [good] and I'm in an amazing relationship with someone who takes his own responsibility and doesn't "woe is me" all the time.

**Kim:** A lot better, isn't it?

**TH:** It's great and I feel less stressed. It's not my responsibility.

**Kim:** But I feel like most marriages that end don't need to.

**Jessica:** Most.

**Kim:** Most.

**Jessica:** Very interesting. Well, listen, really this conversation could go on for the next two hours. We're definitely going to have to have you back to continue this discussion and answer questions from people who are listening now. Let us know what your questions are for Kim about discernment therapy, things like that, that we can incorporate that into the next time that we speak with her, because this is a fascinating discussion and definitely needs to be continued. In the meantime, for people who are interested in reaching out to you directly or finding The Marriage Place near them, what are the best ways for them to find you?

**Kim:** The best ways to work with us or to find out more information about us is to go to the website. It's [www.themarriageplace.com](http://www.themarriageplace.com). We have all kinds of ways for you to reach out. You can fill out a contact form, an email, you can text, or you can pick up the phone and call. It just depends on your level of comfort and how much reaching out you want to do. But there's so much really good free information. We put a lot of quality content out there that's free, that people can just--people spend hours reading our blogs and pulling off resources because it's good stuff.

**Jessica:** That's amazing. We're going to have links to all of that on our site as well so anyone listening, you can also find that through the [www.exexperts.com](http://www.exexperts.com). Any last words, TH?

**TH:** No, just really do reach out to Kim. Even though in my situation I didn't seek out any kind of professional help for our marriage, we didn't have resources like this.

There were no Kims that I was aware of. I think what Kim's also said a lot in this podcast is basically make sure that your therapist is working for you. She said it multiple times. I'm sure there are great therapists out there for couples, [there are] but make sure that you're with the right one, because experience speaks that that's not always the case.

**Kim:** The one thing that I would recommend for people who are looking for somebody that they want to see locally, if they don't want to work with us long distance, is to interview people and ask them how much of their caseload is couples work and how much is individual. I wouldn't work with anybody who has less than a 75% couple ratio.

**Jessica:** Oh, okay. That's a great tip. Excellent. Well, thank you again Kim so much for your time. We're going to have a lot more information about this to come.

**Kim:** Great. Thanks guys.