

Relationship of Generation Z with Separated Parents: Basis for Counseling Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between parent-child communication and romantic relationship satisfaction among Filipino Generation Z individuals from separated families and used the findings as the basis for a counseling intervention program. An explanatory-sequential mixed-method design was employed. The quantitative phase involved 131 college students aged 18–28 from selected educational institutions in Lipa City who met the study criteria of parental separation and past or current romantic relationship experience and were recruited through purposive sampling. The How is Your Family? —Brief Scale for Adolescents and the Relationship Assessment Scale were administered online. Weighted means and Pearson product-moment correlation were computed using SPSS. Six participants with the lowest quantitative scores were

subsequently interviewed, and the transcripts were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Parent-child and family communication was rated Average, with mean scores of 0.80 for communication with the father, 1.27 with the mother, and 0.76 with the family, yielding a composite mean of 0.96. Romantic relationship satisfaction was High, with a composite score of 27.15. Parent-child/family communication was not significantly related to romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.077$, $p = .382$). Qualitative findings nevertheless revealed two recurring coping trajectories: Psychosocial Withdrawal and Overcompensating Relational Patterns. The findings indicate that parental separation did not statistically determine romantic satisfaction in this sample, but it remained meaningful in how participants managed trust, vulnerability, responsibility, and conflict. The SURVIVE-G Program was therefore developed to strengthen resilience, relational boundaries, communication, and healthy intimacy among Generation Z students from separated families.

Keywords: *Generation Z, parental separation, parent-child communication, romantic relationship satisfaction, psychosocial coping, counseling intervention*

INTRODUCTION

Family relationships remain a primary context in which young people learn trust, communication, emotional regulation, and expectations about intimacy. Parental separation can alter this context by changing residence, daily routines, parental availability, and patterns of interaction. Research has associated parental separation with risks to emotional and relational adjustment, although the magnitude and persistence of these effects vary according to conflict, caregiving quality, developmental stage, and the support available after separation (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019; Karhina et al., 2023). A relational-health perspective likewise emphasizes that the quality and consistency of caregiving relationships, rather than family structure alone, shape later adjustment (Frosch et al., 2019).

These concerns are particularly relevant to Generation Z individuals who are entering young adulthood and forming increasingly consequential romantic relationships. Earlier family experiences may shape beliefs about

commitment, trust, conflict, and emotional closeness. Philippine and international studies have described fear, mistrust, low self-worth, and uncertainty about marriage among some young adults from separated families, while others report intentional efforts to construct relationships differently from those they observed at home (Madla et al., 2019; McAdam, 2023). Research on emerging adults further indicates that parental separation can be associated with differences in commitment, satisfaction, or emotional intimacy, although these outcomes are not uniform (Ludden, 2023; Xerxa et al., 2019).

The post-separation parent-child relationship is therefore a key relational domain. Continued communication, emotional availability, and a sense of belonging may serve as protective resources, whereas conflict, inconsistent contact, perceived abandonment, and limited emotional disclosure may reinforce vulnerability. Studies of father-child relationships after separation show that contact has become more common, but regular contact does not always translate into emotional depth (Berrington et al., 2023; Van Spijker et al., 2022). Other work emphasizes that a supportive parent-child relationship can buffer some negative consequences of separation and support adaptation across family transitions (Kleinschlömer & Krapf, 2024; Rejaän et al., 2024).

Despite a growing literature on parental separation, the thesis identified a local gap concerning the specific relationship between post-separation parent-child communication and romantic relationship satisfaction among Filipino Generation Z individuals. Much of the existing work addresses general distress, adjustment, or family functioning, while fewer studies integrate quantitative relational measures with qualitative accounts of how young adults interpret and manage these experiences. The present study therefore examined the frequency and quality of parent-child/family communication, assessed romantic relationship satisfaction, tested the relationship between the two variables, explored how parental communication was experienced in relation to romantic life, and used the integrated findings as the basis for a targeted counseling intervention program.

Literature Review

Generation Z and Parental Separation

Parental separation is a family transition that can reorganize caregiving, household roles, emotional support, and the everyday availability of parents. Its effects are heterogeneous: some young people experience distress, anxiety, confusion, and instability, while others adapt through supportive caregiving and changes that reduce exposure to parental conflict. Longitudinal and population-based work indicates that parental separation can coexist with other adverse life events and mental-health risks, making it important to interpret the experience within the broader context of family resources and stressors (Karhina et al., 2023; Raley & Sweeney, 2020).

For Generation Z, parental separation may intersect with developmental tasks involving identity, autonomy, and the formation of adult relationships. Experiences of abandonment, rejection, or disrupted parental availability can become emotionally salient during this transition. Marici et al. (2023) linked perceived rejection, abandonment, and neglect with shame and guilt in adolescents, while Sabillo (2024) described how parental separation can disrupt stability, social relationships, and psychosocial well-being. These findings support the need to examine not only whether parents separated but how young people experienced relationships after the separation.

At the same time, adaptation is possible. Family transitions do not produce a single developmental trajectory, and some young people develop resilience, stronger self-awareness, and more intentional relational choices. This variability is central to the present study because it avoids treating parental separation as a deterministic predictor of later relationship failure. Instead, the study examines how communication and lived experience may shape distinct patterns of coping and relational functioning.

Parent-Child Communication After Separation

Parent-child communication after separation is shaped by contact, emotional availability, trust, and opportunities for disclosure. D'Onofrio and Emery (2019) noted that separation can alter parenting and family interaction during periods when both parents and children are adjusting to new arrangements. Berrington et al.

(2023) further showed that patterns of father involvement after separation reflect both continuity and change, while Van Spijker et al. (2022) reported increasing father-child contact alongside the persistence of relationships that remain comparatively weak in emotional closeness.

The quality of communication is particularly important because routine interaction and emotional intimacy are not equivalent. A young person may continue to speak with a parent, share household tasks, or maintain regular contact while withholding feelings, problems, or vulnerable experiences. Perceived rejection or abandonment can heighten caution in disclosure and contribute to emotional self-protection (Marici et al., 2023). Conversely, supportive and responsive parent-child relationships can buffer some of the negative consequences associated with parental separation (Kleinschlömer & Krapf, 2024).

Belonging within post-separation families also depends on how young people maintain relationships across households and communication channels. Rejaän et al. (2024) found that adolescents' sense of belonging in post-divorce families is related to contact with mothers and fathers. Such findings support a relational focus that considers the quality of connection rather than family structure alone and provide a basis for examining communication with the father, mother, and family as distinct but related domains.

Romantic Relationship Satisfaction and Relational Carryover

Romantic relationships may become a domain in which earlier family experiences are repeated, resisted, or reinterpreted. Qualitative research has documented fear, trust difficulties, and uncertainty regarding marriage among young adults from broken or separated families (Madla et al., 2019). McAdam (2023) similarly examined how parental divorce may influence college students' views of romantic commitment and life satisfaction. These studies suggest that family-of-origin experiences can remain psychologically relevant even when young adults consciously seek different relational outcomes.

The relationship between parental separation and later romantic quality is nevertheless not uniform. Ludden (2023) reported differences in dimensions of romantic relationship quality among emerging adults with different family backgrounds, while Xerxa et al. (2019) emphasized the complex role of separation within broader family conflict and child adjustment. Positive relationships themselves can also support well-being, suggesting that young adults may create satisfying romantic bonds despite difficult family histories (Mertika et al., 2020).

The literature therefore supports two possibilities that are not mutually exclusive: family disruption can leave relational vulnerabilities, and young adults can intentionally construct healthier partnerships. This tension is important for interpreting the present study, in which romantic satisfaction was examined statistically while participants' narratives were used to understand how trust, boundaries, conflict, and personal agency operated beneath the quantitative scores.

Counseling Interventions and Relational Resilience

Counseling interventions for children and young people experiencing parental separation commonly focus on emotional processing, coping, communication, and adjustment to family transitions. Rich et al. (2023) identified strategies for supporting adolescent mental health after parental divorce, while Novo et al. (2019) reported benefits of an education program addressing mental-health problems in separated parents. These interventions illustrate the value of structured support that helps families respond to separation without assuming that all affected children will experience the same difficulties.

Systemic and family-oriented approaches also highlight the importance of relationships surrounding the young person. Carr (2024) reviewed family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems and emphasized the evidence base for working with relational contexts rather than isolated symptoms. In the Filipino setting, where family obligations, interdependence, and extended-family involvement can shape adjustment, interventions need to be culturally responsive and attentive to the way young adults balance autonomy with continuing family ties.

The literature reviewed in the thesis consequently supports a targeted intervention rather than a generic program. The study's counseling output was designed to respond to the specific relational patterns emerging from

the mixed-method findings: emotional withdrawal and guardedness on one hand, and hyper-responsibility or relational over-functioning on the other. This emphasis reflects the broader evidence that post-separation outcomes depend on how individuals process experiences, access support, and build new relational skills.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framing

The thesis was anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Social Learning Theory provided a lens for understanding how relational behaviors may be observed, internalized, and reproduced or deliberately rejected. Ecological Systems Theory broadened the analysis by locating the individual within interconnected family, peer, school, cultural, and temporal contexts. Together, the theories supported an interpretation in which relational patterns reflect both learned behavior and the continuing influence of multiple social environments.

The study's conceptual paradigm positioned Generation Z individuals with separated parents at the center of two relational domains: the parent-child relationship and romantic relationships. These domains were examined as distinct but potentially connected experiences, with the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings serving as the basis for a counseling intervention program. The original conceptual figure is retained below to preserve the thesis framework.

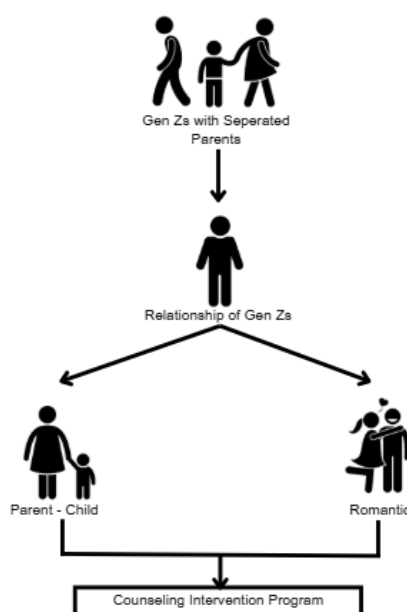


Figure 1. *Research Paradigm of Relationship of Generation Z with Separated Parents: Basis for Counseling Intervention Program*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory-sequential mixed-method design. The quantitative phase was conducted first to measure parent-child/family communication and romantic relationship satisfaction and to test the relationship between these variables. The qualitative phase followed to explain and deepen the quantitative findings through participant narratives. This sequencing was consistent with the thesis rationale that survey

patterns could be clarified through interviews and was considered appropriate for examining relational experiences within the Filipino context (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020).

Research Locale

The study was conducted among college students from selected educational institutions in Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines. The locale provided access to Generation Z students who met the study's inclusion criteria and enabled the researcher to administer the quantitative instruments and follow-up qualitative interviews within an educational setting. The manuscript did not identify the participating institutions individually, and this article retains that level of description.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The quantitative phase involved 131 college students. Eligible participants were Generation Z individuals aged 18–28 years who had experienced parental separation, defined in the thesis as the cessation of parental cohabitation because of relationship breakdown regardless of legal status, and who had past or current romantic relationship experience. The sample included 83 females (63.4%) and 48 males (36.6%), and participation was voluntary.

Purposive sampling was used because the study required respondents with specific lived experiences relevant to the research questions. Purposive sampling is appropriate when participants are intentionally selected because they possess characteristics or experiences central to the inquiry (Campbell et al., 2020). After quantitative analysis, the 10 respondents with the lowest scores were identified and six were purposively selected for the qualitative phase to provide detailed accounts that could illuminate the statistical findings.

Research Instrument

Two standardized questionnaires were used. Parent-child and family communication was measured with the How is Your Family? —Brief Scale for Adolescents. The instrument contained 14 items across three subscales: communication-connection with the father (five items), communication-connection with the mother (five items), and communication-connection with the family (four items). Higher scores indicated better communication and connection. The thesis reported an internal-consistency coefficient of 0.80 for the instrument.

Romantic relationship satisfaction was measured using the seven-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Participants rated general satisfaction with a current relationship on a five-point response format; those not currently in a relationship were instructed to rate their previous relationship. Higher scores indicated greater relationship satisfaction. The thesis reported alpha reliability of .881 and internal consistency of .86. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for the qualitative phase, validated by three field experts, and used to explore the lived experiences underlying the quantitative patterns.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained institutional approval and distributed formal permission requests before data collection. After informed consent was secured, the standardized questionnaires were administered through Google Forms to allow respondents to participate conveniently while maintaining confidentiality. Completed quantitative data were checked and submitted for statistical analysis.

Following the quantitative phase, six purposefully selected participants were invited to semi-structured interviews. The interviews explored communication with parents, experiences of romantic relationships, coping responses, and perceptions of how parental separation shaped later relationships. Participants were briefed before the interviews, and a licensed counselor was available in case the discussion produced emotional distress.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Weighted means summarized parent-child/family communication and romantic relationship satisfaction, while Pearson product-moment correlation tested the relationship between the two principal variables at the .05 level of significance. The analysis retained the scoring and interpretive conventions of the standardized instruments used in the thesis.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the analytic narrative. Themes were reviewed and refined with expert input, and the study also used brief post-analysis member-checking conversations with participants to assess whether the identified patterns resonated with their experiences. Quantitative and qualitative results were then integrated in the interpretation.

Ethical Consideration

The study followed the ethical guidelines cited in the thesis for guidance and counseling research. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and right to withdraw, and confidentiality was maintained in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Because parental separation and romantic relationships are sensitive topics, interviews were conducted in Filipino when appropriate to support participant comfort and comprehension; debriefing and access to counseling or support services were available if needed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parent-Child and Family Communication

Table 1. *Summary of Generation Z Perceptions of Parent-Child and Family Communication*

Domain	SD	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Communication with the Father	0.83	0.80	Average
Communication with the Mother	0.82	1.27	Average
Communication with the Family	0.75	0.76	Average
Composite	0.80	0.96	Average

Legend: 2.00–1.51 = High; 1.50–0.51 = Average; 0.50–0.00 = Low.

Communication with fathers, mothers, and the family was interpreted as Average. The composite mean of 0.96 (SD = 0.80) indicates that respondents generally maintained functional communication after parental separation, but the scores did not reflect consistently high openness or emotional closeness. Communication with the mother obtained the highest mean ($M = 1.27$), followed by communication with the father ($M = 0.80$) and family communication ($M = 0.76$). Item-level interpretation in the thesis showed that routine interaction was more evident than emotionally vulnerable disclosure.

The qualitative accounts clarified this pattern. Participants described relationships that could appear normal or functional while still containing emotional distance. Some reported limiting what they shared because they expected misunderstanding, feared renewed hurt, or did not want to add to family problems. This distinction between contact and emotional depth is consistent with evidence that post-separation father-child contact may be maintained even when relational closeness remains limited (Berrington et al., 2023; Van Spijker et al., 2022). It also supports the view that supportive parent-child relationships can act as buffers, whereas perceived rejection or abandonment may complicate trust and disclosure (Kleinschlömer & Krapf, 2024; Marici et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that the central issue was not the absence of communication but its emotional quality. Participants often preserved practical or routine interaction while regulating vulnerability. This pattern became a key part of the first qualitative theme, Psychosocial Withdrawal, and helps explain why average parent-child communication could coexist with continuing family contact.

Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Table 2. *Generation Z Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships*

Indicator	SD	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Partner makes respondent happy	1.21	4.08	Somewhat Happy
General relationship satisfaction	1.06	4.19	Somewhat Satisfied
Relationship compared with most	0.99	4.15	Somewhat Good
Wish respondent had not entered relationship	1.31	3.63	Rarely
Relationship met original expectations	1.10	3.56	A Lot
Love for partner	1.04	4.24	A Great Deal
Problems in the relationship	0.94	3.30	A Moderate Amount
Composite Total	7.65	27.15	High Satisfaction

The RAS results showed High romantic relationship satisfaction, with a composite score of 27.15. Participants reported strong love for their partners and generally favorable evaluations of their relationships, although they also acknowledged a moderate amount of relationship problems. The high overall score demonstrates that parental separation did not preclude respondents from forming relationships they experienced as satisfying and meaningful.

Interview accounts indicated that some participants intentionally tried to avoid repeating parental patterns. They emphasized communication, mutual responsibility, and boundaries when resolving conflicts. Romantic partners also served as sources of emotional support during periods of distress related to family experiences. This finding complicates deficit-oriented assumptions about children of separated parents and is consistent with literature showing substantial variation in adult romantic outcomes after parental separation (Ludden, 2023; McAdam, 2023). The results further support the idea that positive relationships can become important resources for well-being and intentional relational growth (Mertika et al., 2020).

Relationship Between Parent-Child Communication and Romantic Satisfaction

Table 3. *Relationship Between Parent-Child/Family Communication and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction*

Variables	r	p	Interpretation	Decision
Parent-child/family communication and romantic relationship satisfaction	-0.077	0.382	Not Significant	Failed to Reject H_0

Pearson correlation showed no statistically significant relationship between parent-child/family communication and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.077$, $p = .382$). Because p exceeded .05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Within this sample, variation in the measured communication scores did not directly correspond with variation in romantic relationship satisfaction. The finding should therefore be interpreted as statistical independence between the measured variables rather than as evidence that parental separation has no relational meaning.

The qualitative phase provided context for this null result. Several participants explicitly described separating their romantic decisions from their parents' history, suggesting deliberate emotional compartmentalization and personal agency. Others responded to family disruption in divergent ways: some

withdrew from vulnerability, while others became highly intentional or over-responsible in relationships. These qualitatively different responses could coexist under similar family circumstances, illustrating why a simple linear association may not capture the complexity of relational adaptation. This interpretation is consistent with work emphasizing the complex interaction of family conflict, separation, and later adjustment rather than a single deterministic pathway (Xerxa et al., 2019; Raley & Sweeney, 2020).

Qualitative Themes: Two Relational Coping Trajectories

Table 4. *Integrated Qualitative Themes and Categories*

Theme	Core Pattern	Categories Identified in the Thesis
Psychosocial Withdrawal	Emotional self-protection through distance and reduced vulnerability	Distant parent-child connection; emotional disconnection; weakened attachment; social reclusion; impaired relational openness
Overcompensating Relational Patterns	Relational overdrive through hyper-responsibility, vigilance, and corrective effort	Maladaptive coping responses; socio-emotional vulnerability; increased intentionality and corrective romantic effort

Psychosocial Withdrawal

Psychosocial Withdrawal described a pattern in which participants protected themselves by restricting emotional exposure. Narratives included distant parent-child connections, difficulty sharing personal problems, weakened attachment, reduced social engagement, and emotional walls that extended beyond the family. One participant explained, “Hindi na po ako masyado nag-oopen up, sobrang laki ng binuild kong wall,” directly illustrating how withdrawal became a strategy for managing vulnerability.

This theme was not equivalent to complete disengagement. Participants often continued daily interaction with parents while limiting the depth of disclosure. The pattern is consistent with the quantitative finding of Average communication: contact remained, but emotional openness was uneven. Literature reviewed in the thesis similarly describes how parental separation and perceived rejection can contribute to internalizing responses, strained communication, or relational caution (Karhina et al., 2023; Marici et al., 2023; Sabillo, 2024). The theme therefore captures a self-protective adaptation that can preserve short-term emotional safety while limiting opportunities for deeper trust.

Overcompensating Relational Patterns

The second theme described the opposite behavioral direction: rather than retreating, some participants responded to instability through heightened vigilance, responsibility, and corrective effort. They reported strong concern about repeating parental mistakes, intense reactions to possible conflict or rejection, and deliberate attempts to maintain communication and relational stability. This pattern was described in the thesis as relational overdrive, in which apparent maturity or resilience could also carry emotional burden.

Participants’ accounts showed both risk and strength within this trajectory. Hyper-responsibility and reactivity could create exhaustion or imbalance, yet intentional communication and cycle-breaking efforts could also support satisfying partnerships. Research on belonging after family dissolution and on family transitions suggests that young people actively reorganize relationships rather than merely reproduce parental experiences (Rejaän et al., 2024; Raley & Sweeney, 2020). The theme therefore reinforces the study’s central conclusion that relational outcomes were shaped by coping processes and individual meaning-making, not by parental separation alone.

Counseling Intervention Implications: The SURVIVE-G Program

The integrated findings served as the basis for the SURVIVE-G Program—Strengthening Understanding, Resilience, and Voice in Generation Z from Separated Parents. The program was designed as a school-based

intervention addressing the two patterns identified in the qualitative phase. For students characterized by withdrawal, activities focus on gradual self-disclosure, trust, emotional regulation, and safe relational connection. For students characterized by overcompensation, the program emphasizes boundary-setting, reduction of excessive relational responsibility, and differentiation between past family experiences and present relationships.

The program uses small-group support, expressive activities, reflective exercises, peer mentoring, psychoeducation, and guided relationship scripting, with implementation led by guidance counselors and supported by trained peers and wellness facilitators. Proposed evaluation includes reflective logs, relational assessments, behavioral tracking, and follow-up. This targeted approach is consistent with evidence supporting counseling, psychoeducation, and systemic interventions after parental separation (Carr, 2024; Novo et al., 2019; Rich et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study found that Generation Z respondents from separated families maintained an Average level of parent-child/family communication while reporting High romantic relationship satisfaction. Communication with parents and family was characterized by continuing contact and functional interaction, but qualitative accounts showed that emotional disclosure was often selective. Romantic relationships, in contrast, were frequently described as meaningful sources of support and as spaces in which participants intentionally attempted to build healthier patterns than those they had witnessed in their families.

The quantitative analysis found no significant relationship between parent-child/family communication and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.077$, $p = .382$). This finding indicates that the quality of one measured relational domain did not statistically determine the other within the sample. The qualitative results nevertheless showed that parental separation remained psychologically relevant through two distinct coping trajectories: Psychosocial Withdrawal and Overcompensating Relational Patterns. These trajectories demonstrate that similar family disruptions can be managed through opposite relational strategies, ranging from emotional insulation to hyper-responsible efforts to preserve connection.

Taken together, the findings contribute a more differentiated view of relational adjustment after parental separation. The results do not support a deterministic assumption that parental separation inevitably produces poor romantic outcomes. Instead, they point to the importance of trust, vulnerability, boundaries, communication, personal agency, and coping style. The SURVIVE-G Program translates these findings into a counseling framework intended to help Generation Z students process family experiences without allowing those experiences to rigidly define their later relationships.

Recommendation

Educational institutions, guidance offices, and peer-support organizations should provide accessible programs for students from separated families that address emotional withdrawal, trust difficulties, communication, relational boundaries, and over-responsibility. The SURVIVE-G Program may be pilot-tested and evaluated in college settings, with implementation led by qualified guidance counselors and accompanied by clear referral procedures for participants who require more intensive support.

Counselors, teachers, and peer facilitators should receive continuing preparation in trauma-informed practice and adolescent or young-adult development so that support is responsive without assuming that all children of separated parents experience the same outcomes. Family-centered initiatives may also distinguish between parent-child concerns and romantic relationship concerns because the present study found that these domains were not statistically related and may require different forms of intervention.

Future research should replicate the study with larger and more diverse samples and may examine additional family-system variables such as birth order and sibling relationships, which were identified in the thesis as relevant directions for further inquiry. Longitudinal and intervention studies could also determine how the two

coping trajectories change over time and whether counseling support produces sustained improvements in communication, trust, boundaries, and relational well-being.

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