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Practitioner Profile: An Interview with Anne Brennan Malec, Ph.D.

Anne Brennan Malec
Symmetry Counseling

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Practitioner Profile

An Interview with
Anne Brennan Malec, Ph.D.

Dr. Anne Brennan Malec is the founder and managing partner of Symmetry Counseling, a counseling, coaching, and psychotherapy group practice located in downtown Chicago. She has been the driving force behind Symmetry Counseling's success – what started in 2011 with six offices and five counselors now houses over 25 clinicians.

Dr. Malec initially had a career in business and made a significant shift in 2000 when she began her training in the fields of Marriage and Family Therapy, and later, Clinical Psychology. Dr. Malec earned her Bachelor's degree from Villanova University in Accountancy and holds two Master's degrees: a Liberal Studies degree from DePaul University and a Marital and Family Therapy degree from Northwestern University. Dr. Malec earned her Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She gained significant clinical training and experience through affiliations with The Family Institute at Northwestern University, Neuropsychological and Rehabilitation Consultants, Chicago Center for Family Health, Advocate Masonic Ravenswood Family Practice Medical Center, Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Dr. Malec published her first book, "Marriage in Modern Life: Why it Works, When it Works," in May, 2015, and she was named the 2015 Alumnus of the Year at The Family Institute at Northwestern University. She is currently a member of the Financial Therapy Association, American Family Therapy Academy, American Psychological Association, American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, Alumni Advisory Board of the Family Institute of Northwestern University, and Professional Women's Club of Chicago.

Q. Define what you do professionally.

A. I am a licensed clinical psychologist and marriage and family therapist. I work with individuals and couples in managing life stresses and creating fulfilling and satisfying relationships. Most clients seek my services because they are struggling in some aspect of life, be it in their romantic relationships, family relationships, work, or with depression or anxiety. A growing number of clients request my help with financially-related stress.

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Q. What activities encompass your professional responsibilities?

A. In addition to providing clinical services, I also manage the day-to-day demands of Symmetry Counseling, write articles and blog posts, speak with the media, keep up with clinically relevant research, and promote my book. I am currently creating a lecture for the Master's degree students at The Family Institute at Northwestern University about financial therapy. Starting in October, I began pursuing graduate certificate in Financial Therapy through Kansas State University.

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

A. My work with clients began in November 2003, during my first year of training at Northwestern University.

Q. What led you to your professional calling?

A. While enrolled in the Liberal Studies program at DePaul University, I took a class titled "Resolving Conflicts in Organizations." I became very intrigued with the importance of determining needs and wants during the conflict resolution process, and I inquired from my professor what further training I would need to become a mediator. He shared that I would either have to become a lawyer or a therapist. Becoming a lawyer was not nearly as appealing, so I chose to become a relationship therapist.

Q. How are you compensated?

A. Insurance companies pay me for those clients that have health insurance. I also have self-pay clients.

Q. Do you work alone or do you have a team? Please explain.

A. I work alone when conducting therapy, but have 27 clinical colleagues and a two-person administrative team working with me at Symmetry. I am the only clinician within Symmetry that provides financial therapy, and I am continually building a network of local financial professionals with whom I collaborate and refer clients.

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Q. What theoretical framework guides your work when dealing with clients and/or conducting research?

A. I am a problem-centered and solution-focused therapist. My approach is to help my clients directly address and resolve the emotional, psychological, or financial issues that are getting in the way of healthy living. Over the course of my work with clients, there are times when it may be helpful to discuss family of origin issues, such as money behaviors clients learned from their parents.

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

A. We need to highlight this specialty in graduate schools of marital and family therapy, psychology, and social work. When I was in school, there was no mention of the financial stresses that individuals and couples often bring into the counseling process. This needs to change. The way forward is for pioneers in financial therapy to provide the training to students in the form of lectures or other coursework. In addition, we also need to provide training opportunities to clinicians that enable them to work more efficiently and confidently with their clients.

Q. What benefits can the Financial Therapy Association provide to others doing work that is similar to your professional activities?

A. Being a member of the FTA brought attention to my practice in the form of press inquiries. Over the years, I have been contacted by the following press outlets to discuss issues related to financial therapy: *Crain's Chicago Business, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Post, US News and World Report, and Money Magazine*. These opportunities promote my practice and highlight the benefits of financial therapy.

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

A. www.symmetrycounseling.com
www.drannemalec.com

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