five principles of couple’s work

1. **emphasize strengths & grow positive behaviours**
   - reasons for initial attraction to each other; assess & feedback strengths; encouragement of positive behaviour; learning from successful interactions; vulnerability behind demands & hostility

2. **modify emotion-driven maladaptive interactions**
   - therapists may highlight & interrupt these patterns in session; at home, ‘time-outs’, mental contrasting & implementation intentions can all have a part to play

3. **shared, non-blaming dyadic, understanding**
   - cooperatively arrived at ‘reappraisal’ may involve an understanding that both partners are trying to meet valid needs but that how they’re doing this is unhelpfully coloured by their pasts

4. **develop more adaptive communication skills**
   - helping speakers become more ‘self-focused’ (less blaming of others, more disclosing own emotions & vulnerability); helping listeners become more ‘other focused’ (body language, standing ‘in the other’s shoes, summarizing)

5. **‘elephants’: problem-solving and intimacy**
   - at the right time, it’s likely to be important to open up about any of a variety of potentially important avoided ‘elephant in the room’ topics; this can allow constructive joint problem-solving & deepen understanding & closeness

Andrew Christensen
‘A unified protocol for couple therapy’

*note importance of identifying & changing couples’ key distress-producing cause-effect chains*