

## **Do You Accept Every Referral? I Don't.**

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Although people call seeking to set an appointment and expect a booking, they first must chat with me by phone.

During that conversation, I come to understand the nature of the problem and what the caller thinks should be done about it. I also ask who the caller thinks should attend counseling. Finally, I ask questions related to domestic violence as well as drug and alcohol use. Some of these conversations last 5 to 15 minutes.

I screen out at least one third of referrals on the basis of that conversation, for any number of reasons:

- Very often people want to see me on an individual basis for a couple related issue. I rarely do this.
- People also call with child related concerns hoping I will just go ahead and book an appointment to meet with the child alone. I never do this.
- Separated parents call seeking me to meet with them on a one-sided basis hoping to bolster support for a custody and access dispute. I never ever do this.
- Sometimes people advise of the problem, past efforts to address the problem and then indicate they want more of the same. I rarely do this.
- Sometimes people call expecting some forms of counseling I do not provide or psychological or educational or psychiatric assessments. Clearly I cannot accept these referrals.
- At times, there may be concerns for the safety of a client or sobriety. As such, it may be premature to accept the referral.

Bottom line: I do not set an appointment without having first chatted with the person by phone.

I have come to learn that I may be somewhat unique in this regard. It seems the majority of counselors will just go ahead and set an appointment on the basis of any referral. While that may make for a good billing scenario, I think it discourteous to persons seeking counseling. While it may not be a waste of my time in view of receiving a payment, I think it is a waste of the person's time and money if the referral turns out to not be appropriately suited or takes you off to a less than desirable start.

Not accepting every referral on face value makes for better customer service and better business.

### **About the Author**

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert in social work, marital and family therapy, child development, parent-child relations and custody and access matters. Gary is the host of the TV reality show, *Newlywed, Nearly Dead* and the parenting columnist for the *Hamilton Spectator*. He is the author of *Marriage Rescue* as well as hundreds of other articles related to personal, family and married life. Gary maintains a private practice in Dundas, Ontario, providing a range of services for people in distress. He speaks at conferences and workshops throughout North America. For more info go to: <http://www.yoursocialworker.com>