

# Award for Innovation in Couples Counseling 2025 – Netherlands

**Couples counselling practice De Relatiespecialist has developed a unique programme combining therapy, education and structure to help parents stay together. We learn more about this innovative approach as we speak to Arjan Geurtsen.**

Research shows that a quarter of couples split before their eldest child turns four, and a quarter of divorces end in a contested divorce, even though both parties wanted to settle the matter amicably.

To address this, De Relatiespecialist has developed the LiefdeFM method: a four-month programme that combines evidence-based therapeutic approaches with practical relationship knowledge to help couples build a strong, lasting connection.

The firm's founders, Annemieke Visser and Arjan Geurtsen, are not only partners in business but also in life, having been together for 15 years and raising three children. Focusing exclusively on couples with children living at home, De Relatiespecialist offers a single product: a structured programme that combines counselling with videos and home assignments.

## Breaking the Cycle of Same-Old Arguments

"Our programme is called LiefdeFM (in English: LoveFM)," Arjan explains. "The idea is that our customers have been playing the same channel (IrritationFM, FightingFM, IgnoringFM) for years. It's time to change



*Arjan Geurtsen and Annemieke Visser, founders of De Relatiespecialist*

the channel. We developed LiefdeFM after seeing that regular couples counselling often delivers sub-optimal results."

Scientific research supports this, showing that traditional couples counselling has a success rate of only 40–60 per cent. Arjan believes a key reason is its narrow focus on talking. "Couples in crisis need more than conversation," he says. "They've lost the belief their relationship would last forever. That shakes everything: their future, their family, their sense of self."

LiefdeFM is designed to provide the structure and support couples need. From the start, they commit to four months, avoiding the common drop-out point after a heated argument. "That low is part of the process," Arjan says. "When couples keep going, they see it was a turning point."

## Real Lasting Change Happens at Home

Besides the in-depth counselling sessions with a specialized therapist, the programme also moves part of the work to where it matters most: home. Videos and assignments help couples build new habits in small, consistent steps. They rediscover the joy of being together and learn to talk about difficult topics without conflict. "It's practical, structured and supportive," says Arjan. "Exactly what's missing in most counselling, and exactly what makes the difference."

"Our mission is to help parents build emotionally healthy relationships with themselves and each other," he adds. "Children will copy what they see at home. If we keep this movement going, couples counselling could be redundant in a few generations."

## Specialists Who Go All-In for Couples

From a two-person team, De Relatiespecialist has grown to five therapists, all fluent in English and Dutch, and is now the highest-rated practice in the region. The growth is fuelled by its sharp focus. "Other therapists may do burnout coaching, midlife coaching, job coaching and couples counselling," says Arjan. "By specialising in counselling for couples with children, we can fully get to the heart of the matter."

Therapists are trained to remain impartial about whether a couple stays together or separates, which works if clients are unsure of what they want. But Arjan sees things differently when couples do want to stay together. "In that case, it helps to have a counsellor who cares and will do everything possible to bring them closer. We make it clear: if you work with us, our focus is on getting you back together. If you're not sure that's what you want, it's better to go elsewhere."

A core part of the LiefdeFM approach is education. "People are more likely to change when they understand what's happening and why," says Arjan. Videos are an ideal tool for this, but require significant time and resources to create, which is why few other practices use them.

The results speak for themselves. More than 90 per cent of couples stay together after completing the programme.

## Innovation That's Changing the Industry

In the Netherlands, couples counselling is only covered by insurance if linked to a diagnosed psychological condition, such as depression. Many counsellors have waiting lists of several months, making access a challenge. Online therapy has helped by removing geographical barriers, but waiting lists remain common.

For Arjan, this is unacceptable. His solution is two-fold: offer part of the programme through video education, and maintain a team large enough to guarantee an intake within two weeks. "Our counsellors need a positive mindset and the ability to give couples confidence," he says. "Clients come to us in a difficult stage of life, so they need to feel at ease and trust the process."

Recently, De Relatiespecialist's success was recognised with the Award for Innovation in Couples Counselling 2025 – Netherlands, part of the Benelux Enterprise Awards. It is a fitting accolade for a team committed to giving families the tools to thrive.

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