

How to Get the Most from Couples Therapy

Most couples approach therapy with the idea that for their relationship to improve their partner must learn how to behave differently. Few people expect to focus on the role they play in contributing to the dysfunction in their relationship. It's much more common for partners to build a strong case for why the other person should do the changing.

Yet, the more you believe your partner should be different, the less initiative you will take to change the patterns between you. The hardest part of couples therapy is accepting that each of you will have to modify, adjust and change your own behavior for things to improve between you.

For couples counseling to be effective, it's important to remember that you can't change your partner and your partner can't change you. You can influence each other, but that doesn't mean that you can change each other. You becoming a more effective partner is the most efficient way to change your relationship.

To become a more effective partner it's helpful to consider the following:

- What can I do differently to help build a more loving, giving relationship?
 - In order to support my desired outcome for our relationship
 - What do I want to stop doing?
 - What do I want to start doing instead?

REMEMBER, YOUR PARTNER WILL BE ASKING THEMSELVES THE SAME QUESTIONS!

How to increase the value of each session:

It is helpful for the couple to put some thought into what they hope to accomplish in each session and to actively engage in choosing a focus for the day. It's helpful when each partner reflects on the outcome they desire from each session.

Ideas that can help you identify areas to focus on in session include:

- What would you like to be experiencing that you aren't experiencing now?
 - What are you longing for in this relationship?
 - What is most distressing about your interaction?
- In what ways would you like your relationship to be different?

Communication is the number one presenting problem in couples counseling.

The three most important qualities for effective communication are respect, openness, and persistence. Communication is how spouses share their thoughts, feelings, and needs with each other. However, most couples resort to the following behaviors when there is a conflict between them:

Attack Dominate Blame Criticize Disengage Withdraw Complain

Deny Use contempt Intimidate Interrupt Manipulate Ignore Distract

You will learn how to incorporate the following strategies when engaging in difficult conversations:

- Active listening
- Using "I" statements
- Paying attention to nonverbal communication
 - Being curious
 - Being empathetic
 - Remaining open
- Willing to compromise.

Learning to communicate in a healthy, productive manner will help strengthen the quality of your relationship so that you can deal with issues in ways that

support you as individuals and as a couple, even when there isn't a therapist there to moderate.

In couples counseling you can expect to:

- Learn what triggers or annoys you and your partner
 - Learn how to avoid triggering each other
 - Learn what to do when you do trigger one another
- Learn how to relate to one another with more empathy and compassion
- Learn how to manage conflict and disagreements in a calm and peaceful manner
 - Learn to be a more sensitive and loving partner

Couples therapy can help you and your partner reignite the spark between you and reestablish the emotional connection you experienced in the early days of being together.