

Ask Your Therapist

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What is Couples Counseling and when is it helpful to go there?

Have you ever heard of a couple who went to Couples Counseling and broke up right after? I have had many people tell me that Couples Counseling doesn't work because it makes people break up. That's not true! What is true is that most couples wait until the last minute (or beyond the last minute) to go see a therapist and the added stress of going to the therapist was more than the couple could take. In fact, couples who are in trouble should go to counseling as soon as they recognize that the situation is serious so that they can get help before it is too late. If a couple waits until both people are so fed up and exhausted that they can't stand each other, no therapist can remedy that! There is nothing to work with.

At that point, a temporary separation is often helpful to give both people time to regroup and rethink the situation. I have seen many couples reunite after a planned separation and be much more able to deal effectively with each other. It is another myth that once a couple separates there is no chance of reconciliation. The only time this is true is when one or both people are secretly using the separation as a way to get completely out, in which case it would have been better to just say so and be honest about what you want, get out and move on. But for the majority of couples who are sincerely trying to save their relationship, a trial separation can be a good thing.

When a couple comes for Couples Counseling the role of the therapist is to act as an interpreter to teach speaking and listening skills, clarify what one partner is saying to the other, help couples set boundaries, agreements, compromises and truces. I ask each person what they want from the session, from me and from each other. Sometimes people need support to be more truthful about their feelings concerning past events, or telling their partner what they want or need from them, or asking for forgiveness for "bad behavior" in the past. Sometimes one person needs support from the therapist to be able to bear the emotions of their partner. This is careful, respectful, attentive work that goes on in a couples session.

In general, Couples Counseling tends to be short-term, from 2 to 8 sessions. Sometimes the therapist will identify an issue with one of the partners that is affecting the couple to the point where they can't progress until that issue is handled by the person, such as addictions, compulsions, affairs, health issues, etc. Sometimes the individual therapy will run parallel with the Couples Counseling and sometimes it will take precedence over the couples work.

A good relationship is a blessing and a source of nourishment and strength in Life and a troubled relationship is a drain and a source of bitterness and sorrow. If

you know anyone whose relationship could use some help, perhaps you could encourage them to get the help and support they deserve.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information.

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