

How to Get the Most Benefit From Couples Therapy

Please consider the first four questions before we meet. Please answer questions individually. The more active you choose to be in between sessions, the more benefit you will get of our time together.

- 1. What do I need to do to be a more effective partner?**
- 2. Why would it be difficult?**
- 3. How strong is my motivation?**
- 4. Think about what you can do to make a positive difference for your partner and start doing it before you come in to the first session / next session.**

Common reasons for partners seeking couples therapy:

- Communicate more effectively**
- Make an important decision**
- Grow as a couple**
- Reconnect with partner**
- One partner wants to separate (sometimes hidden agenda)**
- Solutions for disagreements**
- Feel understood and respected by partner**
- More/less independence in relationship**
- What is your reason(s)?**

Goals and Objective of Couples Therapy:

- Your job is to create your own individual goals and objectives for how you want your relationship to be.**
- My job is to help you get that kind of relationship. An essential component of my job is to teach you how to respond differently and more effectively to your partner when you are under stress without violating your core values or deeply held principles.**
- The major aim of therapy is to increase your knowledge about yourself, your partner and the patterns of interaction between you.**

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Key questions for each partner to work with during couples therapy:

- ***What kind of relationship do you want to build together?***
- ***How do you see yourself in that relationship?***
- ***What kind of partner do you aspire to be in order to build that relationship?***
- ***Why is it hard for you to be that kind of partner?***
- ***What individual work do you need to do to be the kind of partner you aspire to be?***
- ***What will it take to close the gap between how you are now and how you want to be?***
- ***Why is your partner distressed and what is your part?***
- ***How can you work as a team and support each other?***

To create the relationship you envision it can be very challenging at times. Sometimes you might feel that you are on the hot seat and you might be wondering how bringing forth anxiety and fears can possibly help you forward. It takes time, effort and the willingness to stretch your individual comfort zones to reach your goals, work as a team and support each other in an ongoing way. You both need to look inside yourself and recognize patterns of reactivity and then consciously work on improving your reactions to problems and to each other. You will at times be asked to do what you can even though your partner is not doing his/her part yet. If you both are waiting for the other to do the changing we might have to wait a long time.

Ineffective ways partners respond when feeling a threat or high stress:

- ***Blame or attempts to dominate***
- ***Disengage/withdraw***
- ***Resentful compliance***
- ***Whine***
- ***Denial or confusion***

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- How do you respond under stress?*
- How would you like to respond instead?*

Partners tend to respond in ineffective ways:

- To avoid emotional discomfort.*
- To be right (and your partner wrong)*
- To be a better person*
- Bad habits*
- Don't know how to react differently*

Aim at being a more effective partner

Couples therapy is most beneficial if you have more goals for yourself than for your partner. You can't change your partner. You have probably tried that for a while now. What you can do is influence your partner and change the way you interact with your partner. You both need to improve your responses to a problem; your thoughts, feelings and beliefs about the problem and about what you can do, rather than focusing on what your partner should do to improve.

It is most beneficial if you have an agenda. It is less beneficial to show up at your appointment without an idea about what you would like to work on other than the latest disagreement or fight.

- 1. Reflect on why you are in therapy and your goals for therapy**
- 2. Think about the next step you can take to get closer to where you want to be in your relationship**

The three most important qualities for effective communication are respect, openness and persistence.

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Learning to communicate effectively is a big part of your therapy:

- Thoughts, feelings and beliefs about yourself, your partner and the state of your relationship***
- Dreams and visions for yourself and your life together***
- When and how did it start to go wrong / your first disillusionment***
- Wants and needs that you feel alone with***

When you are able to communicate in an open and honest way without blaming your partner for how you feel - you are taking responsibility for yourself and your actions - you are on the right path to a more fulfilling relationship!

This document is adapted from: “How to get the most from couples therapy” by Ellyn Bader, Ph.D. and Peter Pearson, Ph.D. from The Couples Institute www.couplesinstitute.com