

# How to Talk to Your Partner About Couples Counselling



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## How To Talk To Your Partner About Couples Counselling In Order To Cultivate a Healthy, Loving Relationship

This brochure will help you to clearly and effectively discuss the issue of entering couples counselling with your partner. This is not an easy process, so take it step-by-step beginning with clarifying some of the following concepts for yourself.

Understand what a loving committed relationship entails and what it takes to create such a relationship.

A loving relationship involves two people who make a commitment to the process of helping the relationship grow and succeed. A healthy relationship takes a lot of effort and regular, healthy communication. Relationships have difficult times and occasionally require tune-ups. Unfortunately most couples have never had the advantage of any formal training on how to work out problems or communicate openly. Resentments can build easily, so be careful not to let hurtful problems stew. The longer you wait to get help, the harder it will be to heal the relationship. During difficult periods it can be very helpful to have third party assistance to re-establish the communication process. Couples counsellors are specialists who know how to be effective in creating a successful relationship. The therapist has learned techniques that can help you to make your relationship a loving one. Therapy is an investment in the success of your relationship.

## Clearly Outline the Positive Reasons Why You Want Couples Counselling

Although you may be feeling angry, hurt or you can only think of how you want your partner to change (or how you want to punish your mate), for the purposes of trying to get help it is best to think of your reasons for wanting counselling in terms of how you would like the relationship to be in the future. For example, "I would like to be more effective at working out our problems without hurting each other" and "I would like to be able to talk more intimately with you." Write down your reasons for wanting to enter into counselling and then alter any "I want you to change" statements into "I want the relationship to be (positive change)." Leave out the "You do wrong!" comments - they will not help at this time. If trying to sound positive feels too difficult, then talk with a friend or a therapist for support and advice. These suggestions will go a long way toward opening your partner to the idea that the relationship can improve.

## What Not to Say

Don't blame your partner, don't yell at your partner, and don't present a list of too many topics or complaints (it could be overwhelming). Do not say anything if you feel that it would put you in danger of being physically hurt. You may choose instead to discuss your options privately with a counsellor first.



## Set aside Time to Convey the Desire to Get Help

Approach your partner by saying that you would like to set aside some time to talk about something important and, when would be good for you. Then try to express how important the relationship is to you and the reasons that you feel you both could benefit from counselling (don't say what your partner is doing wrong).

Listen carefully to the response you receive while trying to empathize with your partner's position (you may want to share some of your concerns about entering therapy as well). Try not to be triggered into negative habits and patterns. Do, however, stand firm in your desire for positive change for both of you.



## What You Will Do if You Are Not Successful?

Unfortunately, your partner may be very resistant to the idea of counselling. Individuals can get to a point in their relationship where they feel so bad that they would rather end it than continue with the negative feelings. Remember that you have not tried everything until you have been to counselling. There is hope!

## Stick with the Recent Past When Talking About Problems in the Relationship

It is harder to change the past than the present or future. People forget and disagree about what happened in the distant past. Try to avoid going into the past for reasons to start couples counselling. Keeping the focus on the here and now will allow you to remain focussed on positive change for the relationship.

## Make the Decision Simple

Contact several therapists by telephone who specialize in couples counselling. Briefly discuss your situation and ask the therapist for his or her reaction. Ask the therapist to outline his or her training and experience with the issues you present. If you feel comfortable, then talk further about financial arrangements (fees), cancellation policies and the times that are available for an appointment.

## Relationship Rescue Guidelines

### •Do Something Different

Don't keep doing the same thing. Change any pattern that is under your influence. Be sure not to do anything unethical or dangerous, but get creative. Try to blow your partner's stereotype of you. Think about what you would normally do next and do something different that will promote fairness, trust and honesty.

### •Practice Compassionate Listening

Even if you feel attacked or you do not understand your partner's actions or words, imagine that they are feeling scared or hurt at the moment when there are problems. Try getting into their shoes or skin and try to understand how they are seeing or feeling in the situation. Be sure that you understand and that your partner feels understood before you respond.

### •Think

In the heat of the moment, we might make decisions or take action out of anger, hurt, fear or frustration. Take a few deep breaths and wait to calm down and get some distance before you make any hasty decisions or take impulsive actions. If necessary take a "time-out" well before you say or do something you will regret later.

### •Use the Past

Think about what has worked in similar situations in the past and consider how you can use that to help you this time.

## Prepare for Your Partner's Reaction

For a long time there has been a stigma associated with psychotherapy. Even though this is changing, most people still feel some degree of uneasiness about asking for help. Your partner may experience shame, ridicule, betrayal, humiliation, inadequacy,

or a fear that the "family secrets" will be revealed. In addition, your partner may fear that the relationship has failed because you are introducing the subject (and that therapy will only accelerate the process). He or she may also be concerned that you and the therapist are going to "gang-up" possibly for the purpose of proving your mate is a bad person. Your partner may feel that the situation is hopeless

and that it cannot get better because you have tried very hard and things have not changed. If your partner says there is not a problem or that only you need help, gently remind your partner that all relationships consist of two people with actions and reactions. If your partner will only agree to participate for your benefit, then say, "That's fine, we'll both go as a favour to me. You can provide important historical information which will make my therapy much more effective." Once your mate feels more comfortable, he or she may decide to fully participate. Despite all of the difficulties you are both experiencing, a part of your mate "knows" that things need to change. Hopefully you can face the challenge of entering therapy together as a team.