

IS MARRIAGE COUNSELING RIGHT FOR YOU?

Get The Facts
Today!

- 👉 How Will I Benefit?
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Compliments of
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UNDERSTANDING YOUR FIGHTING PATTERN

When we love each other, we can also trigger strong emotions in each other. These feelings can be both very positive and very negative. Unfortunately couples often get stuck in patterns of interaction in which they keep triggering negative emotions in each other. Initially these negative patterns are caused by misunderstandings, i.e. by situations in which we send our partner emotional signals that are unclear, or in which our partner somehow misreads our emotional signals. Over time these patterns take on a life of their own, taking over more and more aspects of the relationship: Escalations happen quicker and quicker, and the relationship comes to feel more and more unsafe, and there are fewer and fewer opportunities for being close and feeling loved.

Negative patterns are often maintained by our desperate and often counter-productive attempts to connect with our partner, to fix our relationship and to protect ourselves from emotional pain and stress. The first step in getting out of your negative patterns is gaining a better understanding of it. If both partners understand their fighting pattern, they can start to step back from it and talk about it, instead of getting caught in it.

The second step is learning to show your partner your deeper, softer feelings once again. We are all very vulnerable when we love. But in these negative patterns, we start protecting ourselves, and we lose touch more and more with our deeper and softer feelings. If we can take the risk to show our partner our deeper feelings once again, then we can bring back the feelings of love, connection and safety that got lost in the negative pattern. Aside from revealing their deeper feelings to their partner, partners often also need to learn to send each other clearer messages about their emotional needs, and they need to learn how to respond to their partners' emotional needs.

HOW WILL I BENEFIT?

Seeking out therapy is an individual choice.

A number of benefits are available from participating in psychotherapy. Therapists can provide support, problem-solving skills, and enhanced coping strategies for issues such as depression, anxiety, relationship troubles, unresolved childhood issues, grief, stress management, body image issues and creative blocks.

Many people also find that counselors can be a tremendous asset to managing personal growth, interpersonal relationships, family concerns, marriage issues, and the hassles of daily life. Therapists can provide a fresh perspective on a difficult problem or point you in the direction of a solution.

The benefits you obtain from therapy depend on how well you use the process and put into practice what you learn. Some of the benefits available from therapy include:

- Attaining a better understanding of yourself, your goals and values
- Developing skills for improving your relationships
- Finding resolution to the issues or concerns that led you to seek therapy
- Learning new ways to cope with stress and anxiety
- Managing anger, grief, depression, and other emotional pressures
- Improving communications and listening skills
- Changing old behavior patterns and developing new ones
- Discovering new ways to solve problems in your family or marriage
- Improving your self-esteem and boosting self-confidence

IS IT MY FAULT?

It's not about me.

Anger is the most frequently misunderstood emotion. Because of this, it is the emotion that has the most destructive effect on relationships. Since so many of us never learn how to experience and express our anger in constructive ways, it often comes out hurtfully, is taken too personally and creates alienation between us and our partners.

When I feel angry I need to own it. It's not about my partner; it's about who I am and how I am reacting to my perceived reality. That means that I need to take responsibility for my anger. That is, I have the responsibility to be aware of it as an emotion I am feeling and the responsibility to figure out what I need to do about it in order to take care of my self. This is true whether I choose to express it to my partner in a constructive manner or choose to dismiss it as an unhealthy or inappropriate reaction.

When my partner is feeling angry about something that I have done, I also have a responsibility: the responsibility to remember that **it's not about me**.

That means that I will listen respectfully to how my partner feels even though it pertains to me and I don't like what I am hearing. I will listen knowing that my partner is sharing with me who he or she is, knowing that this is an act of intimacy. Specifically, this is an act of conflict intimacy, the kind of intimacy that we are all less comfortable with.

So I may have to push myself to really listen, to remain calm and not think about my response. I will remember that I do not have to defend myself, for what I am hearing is about him or her, **it's not about me**. Instead of getting defensive, I will listen like a friend, curious to understand what he or she is telling me about him or herself. And I will put myself in his or her shoes and try to find empathy for his or her experience.

To help deepen this process of conflict intimacy, I will ask a few questions. None that has anything to do with any defensive agenda of mine, but only questions to help me and maybe help him or her understand and learn about him or herself.

A caring listener does not bring the focus back to him or herself, and does not try to problem solve. This listener helps the intimacy being offered by hearing it, understanding it and helping the speaker to learn more about him or herself.

When we know that **it's not about me**, we can listen, can remain caring, and can resist the tendency to become defensive. When this happens, the conversation, our self- knowledge, the level of respect and intimacy in the relationship, and the relationship itself can evolve.

PRACTICE THE FOLLOWING

Responding rather than Reacting to Your Partner.

1. REMEMBER: It's not about me! S/he and I are separate people and I must listen to what is important to my partner. S/he is describing and sharing her/his experience. We are different people with different viewpoints.

2. As you notice yourself reacting with words or strong urges to speak, disagree, explain yourself, etc., *take 6 deep, slow belly breaths*, and it does not count if you do this to attract attention. You are doing this to soothe and calm yourself so that you can listen to your partner's perspective. The only way the two of you can have a healthy relationship is by knowing how you each see things differently.

Your goal is to be *two separate and equal people* who are speaking, sharing and earnestly working to understand two different perspectives.

3. When your partner has finished speaking, to be certain you have understood what was said, STATE THE OBVIOUS.

For example, "You are really mad. It's hard for me to listen, I want to defend myself, but I will calm myself and respect what you have to say."

Stating what is obvious about your partner, and real for you helps you to calm yourself and gives you an opportunity to *switch from reacting to*

responding, thus engaging your thoughts *and* feelings while putting your needs, thoughts and feelings second to your partner who is speaking and sharing. You can wait for your turn. Waiting is an act of personal and relationship respect as well as an act of maturity.

4. Then as you calm and push yourself to stay focused on what your partner is saying, ask him/her TWO questions. These are questions designed to objectively and empathetically learn more about what your partner is feeling, thinking and needing. These questions are genuine and designed to help your partner really share and describe his/her feelings.

For example, “How long have you been angry with me about this?” or “What first made you angry?” and “Do you have other feelings about this?”

Each time you practice this new set of behaviors you will find this becomes easier and that you are able to remain in the conversations longer and to a more productive end.

In fact, I can speed up and make the whole process much smoother for you. Call me for a free consultation at 650-2017-1864.

THE PROCESS OF THERAPY

Every therapy session is unique and caters to each individual and their specific goals. It is standard for therapists to discuss the primary issues and concerns in your life during therapy sessions.

It is common to schedule a series of weekly sessions, where each session lasts around fifty minutes. Therapy can be short-term, focusing on a specific issue, or longer-term, addressing more complex issues or ongoing personal growth.

There may be times when you are asked to take certain actions outside of the therapy sessions, such as reading a relevant book or keeping records to track certain behaviors. It is important process what has been discussed and integrate it into your life between sessions.

For therapy to be most effective you must be an active participant, both during and between the sessions. People seeking psychotherapy are willing to take responsibility for their actions, work towards self-change and create greater awareness in their lives. Here are some things you can expect out of therapy:

- ❖ Compassion, respect and understanding
- ❖ Perspectives to illuminate persistent patterns and negative feelings
- ❖ Real strategies for enacting positive change
- ❖ Effective and proven techniques along with practical guidance

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your current situation, feel free to contact me at:

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