

## How To Get The Most From Couple Therapy

Most couples anticipate that being in couple therapy will support them in explaining their frustrations and distress with conversations eventually leading to a happier, more fulfilling relationship. However, human nature being what it is, most people hope that their partner will do the majority of the learning and changing.

My role as a therapist is to support both of you in understanding how you are together contributing to unhelpful patterns of communication and behaviour. I will support you in developing the skills for effective communication and fostering a relationship that honors both of your core values and deeply held principles as a partner.

To orientate you to the way I work with couples I have created this handout.

### Goals and objectives of couple therapy

The major aim of therapy is developing awareness of yourself, your partner and how you interact with each other. This awareness, alongside each partner developing new interpersonal skills for your relationship, is how unhelpful patterns of behavior can be changed and replaced with more helpful patterns. Learning effective communication skills are key to this

Couple therapy can help a couple to develop:-

- **Clarity: What type of life and relationship do you want to create?**
- **Integrity: Are you being the kind of partner you aspire to be?**
- **Reflection: Why do you / your partner get frustrated and distressed?**
- **Appreciation & Empathy: How do you support each other?**

To create sustained improvement in your relationship you need:-

- **Willingness to understand how you contribute to dilemmas and difficulties**
- **Openness to making some changes to the way you behave**
- **Time and motivation to persevere**

## Considerations for getting the most out of couple therapy

Attending regular couple therapy sessions and making the time to think about and use the work that you do in those sessions requires carving some time out from other areas of your life.

There may be time from your individual pursuits and/or professional life that you will need to relinquish to focus on your couple relationship.

You may need to experiment with being out of your emotional comfort zone as you try new ways of interacting and communicating. As your therapist I will support you in this.

Improving your reaction to, and the way you think about relationship problems and dilemmas is often more effective than seeking immediate solutions and/or expecting your partner to change.

Progress may be slow and frustrating at times in a world where we are often encouraged to seek instant gratification

It is helpful but not easy to become curious about the assumptions and judgements you make about your partner and the way they are.

Taking responsibility for your role in unhelpful patterns of behavior and communication is one of the best things you can do for your couple relationship

You can learn a lot about yourself by understanding what upset or annoys you, or what makes you anxious, and how you handle these feelings.

If you want your partner to change, do you think about what challenges they face in making that change, and what you can do to support them in changing?

Much can be learnt from disagreements, dissatisfaction with the current status quo, or a striving to make things better. Learning to navigate conflict as a way to learn and develop as a couple is key to a more harmonious relationship.

## Couple therapy will help you to develop skills for effective communication

Some of the ineffective things we do to cope in relationships are:-

- **Blame or attempt to dominate**
- **Disengage/withdraw**

- **Resentful compliance**
- **Whine**
- **Denial or confusion**

These are normal emotional reactions to feeling threatened, angry, stressed or distressed. Improving your relationship means finding more helpful ways of coping individually and as a couple with these reactions.

Important qualities for effective communication are:-

- Listening without judgement
- Managing your feelings and thoughts
- Expressing your thoughts and feelings calmly and clearly
- Being curious about yourself and your partner

Good communication is much more difficult than most people want to believe because you need to pay attention to:-

- **Coping with difficult emotions such as anger**
- **How you are communicating; shouting, whining, blaming, being vague etc**
- **Expressing clearly what is important to you**
- **How you're responding to the way your partner is responding to you**
- **Your partner**
- **How you can help your partner become more responsive to you**

No wonder effective communication is so hard, however couple therapy can provide insight, support, resources and a safe space for you as a couple to learn together how to communicate well.

**Please take some time to reflect on the above, you don't have to agree with all of it but being open minded to these ideas could be a good start to making a difference to your situation.**