

An Updated Guide to Successful Couples Therapy

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The following tips can help a couple understand ways to approach Couples Therapy in a manner that gives you the best chance to succeed.

Remember, you want a receptive partner: It is up to you to do everything you can to help your partner be open and flexible. It is human nature to want to blame others for the way things may not be working. However, when your partner is open and flexible, they are always more likely to be a better partner for you. Whenever possible, try not to blame your partner. There are always at least two sides to an issue.

Be open to learning from other successful couples: Couples therapy and being in a couple in general can be highly rewarding and a very challenging experience. However, there is a great deal of research that tells us exactly what couples who are happy together do that unhappy or divorced couples were not able to do. Ask your therapist for feedback and resources to learn more about specific communication ideas that work for the happy and together couples.

You must be genuine: It is important to express yourself to your partner in a way that does not promote a defensive response. However, we don't want to kid ourselves, our partners can often sense our attitude no matter what we say. Often our attitude leaks out in ways (active or passive behaviors) that have nothing to do with what we say. Therefore, pay attention to what is true for you and then look at how to express it in a useful and direct manner.

Be willing to learn about your attitude/energy: There are times when you may want to communicate, but just not be in the right frame of mind. Your frame of mind can shift very quickly and there are certain frames of mind that make positive interaction very unlikely. It is in your best interest to learn all of your internal signals that tell you when you are in the following states of mind: 1) Highly defensive or agitated - probably not a time to talk, 2) Somewhat defensive or agitated - probably not the time to talk, but you may be able to take a few minutes and shift your attitude, 3) Very open and warm - often, we forget to take advantage of these moments that may make us become much closer as partners.

Be persistent and come back: When you have conflict, always come back. It is not unusual at all for couples to have rough interactions. The best thing to do is agree to walk away and come back later. It can be difficult to want to come back to a conflict, as we don't want to have another fight. However, learning to trust that you can work through anything can build a deep and powerful sense of safety and friendship in your couple. When you return to the scene of

the conflict, be willing to not be right and learn something about yourself. Try to have an attitude of “no big deal, just a little conflict”.

Don't take yourselves too serious: Remember, it is a good idea to have fun and enjoy each other. The friendship you build in therapy can sustain your love relationship for many years.