

Benefiting from the Couples Counseling You Are About to Receive

Marriage Problems

Every couple that has made the decision to commit to couple's counseling is unique in the problems they are wrestling with. However, certain roots seem to be at the base of almost all problems. Generally, troubled marriages are those in which each partner devalues the partner and fails to take opportunities to show and tell the other how much the partner is valued.

Hope For Your Marriage

Take it as a given that 99% of all partners want their marriage to get better. Regardless of what you might think or feel, most partners are trying to improve their marriage. They might not be going about it effectively, but those are the skills and behaviors we will work on in counseling. As you enter into counseling – have HOPE that a majority of partner's motives are positive.

A troubled marriage is one in which partners devalue each other and fail to take every opportunity to show value each to each other.

LOVE is being willing to value your partner and committing to this goal during the course of marriage counseling. As the LOVE in a relationship has lessened people lose confidence that the marriage can ever improve. It is often their demoralization and loss of hope that prevents them from working on changing the relationship.

Marriage Solutions

If you desire to improve your relationship, you must work with the counseling staff and commit to do the following:

- Regain a willingness to work on improving your relationship and sustain that willingness long enough so that the marriage can bounce back. Long term harm may take longer to repair and you need to give counseling time to help you both make changes.
- Focus on the good things that you do. If you focus on the successes and try to ignore the failures for a period, you'll regain a sense of faith in the relationship and confidence that it can improve.
- Make the commitment to increase your efforts to value your partner in love at every opportunity through this healing process.

Adopt a Helpful Attitude

Marital problems tend to focus our attention on our own hurts and wounds. It is easy to see the ways you are hurt, the things that our partner is doing to devalue us, the ways our partner seems to be avoiding work, their apparent lack of faith in the relationship, or the unforgiveness the

partner harbors. Unfortunately, what you see when you are hurt, is often your partner problems and probably not your own. Everyone's natural desire is usually to change our partner.

The truth is.... The only person we can change is ourselves. Success in marriage counseling starts with focusing intently on how you can change your own behavior to make things better in your relationship.

Change what you can: your own behavior, thoughts and (eventually) feelings. Be the first to change; don't wait for your partner to change.

Most Importantly Be Patient with yourself and your partner during a season of repair. Long term changes won't occur overnight. Expecting perfection can cause additional hurt and disappointment.

How to Benefit from Counseling

1. Realize that counseling is not a miracle cure for all your marriage concerns. The fact is, with your counselors help, you will change your marriage. Much work can be done outside of the time you are with your counselor. The counselor will simply guide and demonstrate for you how to do that more effectively.
2. Be honest with the counselor. Trust, vulnerability and transparency are keys to healing your relationship.
3. Be honest with yourself. Try hard to understand your spouse and learn the skills worked on in counseling. Make an conscious effort to keep from sabotaging counseling because your confidence is at a low ebb.
4. Challenge yourselves to do the activities at home that you and your counselor agree will be helpful for improvement.
5. Please understand that your counselor is not a referee or a decision maker who will tell the two of you who is right or wrong. Instead, your counselor is a person who can show you how to resolve differences in a way that promotes valuing LOVE and avoids devaluing each other. Your counselor will focus more on how you are communicating and interacting than on whether you arrive at a solution to all your differences. The long term goal is to be able to resolve your own differences for the next fifty or more years.
6. Your counselor is not a tracker who seeks out your problems and eliminates them. Rather, your counselor is more like a guide, who will help both of you root out your negative interaction styles and develop solutions that work to promote love, work and faith.

Adapted from Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999.