



# Reluctant To Get Help

## Four Myths about Marital Counseling

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In our daily lives, there are lots of routine ways we check to make sure things are on track. Consider, for example, annual medical check-up, kids' report cards, car tune-ups, monthly bank statements, or the dreaded work evaluation. All are seen as a way to proactively detect and address problems to keep things on track. So, why are many people hesitant to seek professional feedback and help for their marriage?

Couples counseling can seem like a daunting step to take. Here are several misconceptions that explain many couples' reluctance to seek couples counseling.

### **1 Counseling is only considered as the last resort before the divorce lawyer.**

Many couples believe they should be able to solve their own problems. Others think that it's normal to bicker constantly or to grow apart after "the honeymoon stage is over," and so they suffer in silence for many years until the pain is too great to bear. Yet, so many of these unhappy couples could have

turned things around much earlier, before years of loneliness and resentment.

Marriage counseling shouldn't be reserved only for desperate times. Counseling can improve already sound relationships or help right the course in the first stages of bad patterns. In fact, couples that enter counseling early on, when they first begin to notice problems in their relationship, are often the best candidates for couples therapy.

### **2 If one person is not willing to go to couples therapy, then there's no point in going to counseling.**

So what do you do when you are motivated to make changes in your relationship, but your partner isn't willing to come with you? Begging, nagging or pleading for your spouse to enter therapy may backfire, causing more bitterness and resentment between the two of you. So by all means don't pressure your spouse to come to couples counseling, but don't give up either.

**Continued on Page 2**

Contrary to popular opinion, it takes one to tango. There are many things you as one member of the couple can do to change your relationship. In my private practice, I often help one partner identify ways to have more effective communication in their relationship and to set a tone of warmth and respect, which is likely to be reciprocated.

### **3 Religious people should seek marital advice only from pastors and not consult mental health professionals.**

Frequently, religious people may feel that they should only turn to pastoral counseling within their religious institution when facing marital difficulties. They often fear that a secular therapist won't value the sanctity of marriage.

Pastoral and counselor training regarding marital issues is often quite different. Clergy are usually trained in marriage counseling from a religious, often biblical perspective, while marriage counselors are trained in interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and healthy relationship patterns.

Pastors can play a critical role in providing prayer and spiritual guidance to troubled couples. Marriage counselors can help couples work through conflict and create practical ways to increase warmth, affection and intimacy. So combining these approaches of pastoral and marriage counseling can create a very positive synergy.

### **4 I know couples that tried therapy and still got divorced.**

Of course there are many divorced couples that have tried couples counseling and have still ended up divorced. These folks would not hesitate to talk openly about their failed attempts at counseling;

after all, it shows that they tried everything they could before getting divorced.

The irony is that the many couples who have had success with counseling don't want to share this with friends and family. Several of the couples in my private practice tell me that their family and friends don't know that they have any problems at all and would be shocked to learn that they had been in therapy.

So if we can't hear success stories from friends or family, how do we know that counseling can be beneficial?

The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy cites studies showing the efficacy of couples counseling. In a recent study, over 98 percent of clients of marriage and family therapists reported therapy services as good or excellent. In addition, almost 90% of clients reported positive results in their mood, physical health and job performance after receiving counseling.

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