

My Spouse/Partner Refuses To Come To Counseling

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It is fairly common when a couple is having conflict in their relationship that one of them may refuse to attend counseling with the other. There are often a variety of reasons why the partner won't come. Some possible reasons stem from frustration, anger, embarrassment, fear, and resentment. There may even be the belief that by ignoring the problem it will simply go away.

Whatever the stated reason about why your partner won't come to couples counseling, it is probably best to not dwell on it for too long. Someone who has to be "begged and dragged" to counseling probably isn't going to get much out of it anyway. So after you've asked a couple of times, and all you've gotten is passive or blatant refusal and resistance, does that mean you've come to a dead end and should just forget about it?

Absolutely NOT! Many clients benefit from counseling for a troubled relationship, even when their partner refuses to come. If you're wondering how that can be, here's how.

A relationship is like a machine with various moving parts. We counselors are trained to think of it as a "system." If you consider it to be like an engine, you know that an engine can operate anywhere from maximum performance and output, all the way down to not even being able to start. Most relationships that are struggling are somewhere in between. They are running, but not so smoothly. Belts may need to be tightened, a worn part replaced, some cleaning and lubrication, and a tune-up may restore the engine to running smoothly.

By one person making a few small adjustments in how they go about things, the rest of the system can't help but to be impacted. A few small changes in one person beget other changes in the other person, which often results in improvement. In other words, if you make some minor strategic changes, it's quite possible that your partner will respond with changes which you desire.

Discussing your relationship with an objective counselor, who can offer some strategic guidance and recommendations about what to do, can result in positive changes to the relationship. This can happen without your partner even stepping into the therapist's office. As long as one person desires and works for positive change, the relationship can be transformed.

Sometimes, the initial refusal on the part of the person who won't come, is because they do not want to be told by anyone what to do. Not by their partner or some counselor. They have become resistant to making changes and the relationship is "polarized." Continuing to demand change is probably not going to be too helpful, and may even make things worse. Counseling can help you to vent these frustrations which can be detrimental if done at home. But at the same time, counseling can help you develop new perspectives and ways of thinking about your relationship, which will lead to constructive action and improvement.

It is often said that "emotions can get the best of a person" and this can be true of us when we are frustrated by our circumstances. What is important to remember is that problems don't get solved from excessive emotion, but rather from clear headed reasoning and rational judgment, followed by reasonable action. Good counseling will always promote these principles for helping individuals improve their relationships, whether they come in alone or with their partner.