

# How to Suggest Couples Therapy to Your Partner

It is common for struggling couples to have one person eager to try couple therapy while the other one refuses. There are several reasons why a person is resistant or might lack the will or motivation to seek couples counseling.

First, there still is a stigma about asking for help. Many people believe that asking for help means they have failed in their relationship or/ and that there is something wrong with themselves or their partners.

It takes humility to acknowledge that you might not know all the answers to your problems, and it takes courage to hear what is not working in your relationship.

According to couples' therapist and researcher John Gottman, it often takes many years for couples to seek counseling after their problems have started. Among these couples, some use therapy as the last resort. They have many layers of built-up anger and resentment and find it extremely difficult to find the energy required to improve their relationship. For these couples, one partner is already emotionally out of the door.

However, for couples who want to work through issues, there is hope. Even relationships that have been seriously damaged can be restored with the right help.

**Here are several steps and strategies to influence your partner in attending couples counseling:**

## 1. Connect with your partner

It is not a good idea to bring up the subject of therapy shortly after a fight. It's crucial that you first connect emotionally with your partner. Wait until your partner is receptive after you both have done something pleasant or fun together. It could be after having taken a relaxing walk together, enjoying a fun movie, a delicious meal, or any activity that has brought you in connection with each other.

## 2. Prepare yourself for what you'll say to your partner and how you will say it.

It is important to be psychologically prepared for approaching your partner with your request.

Communication is 93 % non-verbal. The message your partner will hear is conveyed by your demeanor, attitude, tone of voice and facial expressions. You are much more likely to get your partner's collaboration when you adopt a positive and open attitude and speak with a gentle voice. When the 2 of you have connected and you feel psychologically ready, ask your partner if s/he is willing to have a conversation with you about your relationship.

Examples of how you can formulate your request is: ***"Darling I am wondering if you will be willing to have a conversation with me about our relationship sometime in the next couples of days?"***

If you believe it would be too challenging for you to make your request verbally, you could also make it in writing. You can leave a sweet note in a place your partner will see. The first few sentences can describe some of the qualities you appreciate about your partner and the following sentences would speak about your request for a conversation.

At this point your partner can say either yes, no or ask more questions.

If your partner says yes, thank him/her and schedule a time for the conversation.

If your partner asks more questions, answer them with an honest, open, and gentle attitude.

If your partner says no, respect his/her choice but ask him/her to explain why.

Do your best to address his/her concerns and allow the conversation to end respectfully. Your partner might need some time to get ready.

### **3. Having the conversation with your partner**

The conversation should start by you inquiring about what your partner wants. To inspire someone to do anything, there must be room for the expression of their wants.

Examples of how you can ask: Honey, if our relationship was good most of the time or more often what difference would it make for you?

Your partner might respond I would be happier, or I would be more relaxed, interested, loving, etc.

Or you can ask: If our relationship was good 100 % of the time, what do you think we will do more of or less off?

Asking these questions will let you know what your partner wants to experience in the relationship: confidence, feeling relaxed, secure, loved and cared for, wanted or desirable, etc...

If your partner starts making blaming comments such as: "You are the one causing the fighting" Respond by not getting defensive. Stay calm by telling yourself that underneath the blame, there is frustration and therefore something your partner wants. Then reply by acknowledging what you heard your partner say reflecting on his/her response: "I heard you say that I cause the fighting in our relationship" I imagine that you would really like the fighting to stop."

If you can reflect on your partner's blaming statement without getting angry and defensive, the conversation will soften, and you will get knowledge of your partner's experience and the changes s/he wishes for.

**4. Move the conversation about improving the relationship to get what you both want.**

It is important to speak about improving the relationship instead of changing your partner. This is because the conflict in a relationship is most often created by how the partner interacts with each other instead of the shortcomings in the characters. Even with the best intentions, we all have our blind spots and behave in ways that can be detrimental to our most cherished relationships.

When you feel that you are on the same page with your partner about your desire to improve your relationship and pattern of interactions, bring up couple therapy (or couples' workshop). Explain that they are designed to guide couples in becoming better partners for each other, reduce the fighting and increase physical and emotional intimacy.

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