

Creative Counseling Santa Barbara

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DO I NEED COUPLES THERAPY OR MARRIAGE COUNSELING?

What Research Reveals About Successful Couples:

- [“Failure to repair the inevitable conflicts](#) and disconnection that all couples face “is the leading cause of unhappy couples and relationship failure.” (Dr. John Gottman, PhD.)
- You can predict the healthiness of a relationship based on the “ratio of positive-to-negative emotions expressed during a conflict. A [positive-to-negative affect ratio of 5 to 1 or higher is healthy](#). That’s the average ratio in stable, happy couples. If the [positive-to-negative ratio is “1-to-1 or less, that’s unhealthy](#), and indicates a couple teetering on the edge of divorce.” (Psychotherapy Networker)
 - Positive Affect Examples:
 - **EMPATHY & COMPASSION:** Seeing from your partners perspective, understanding and respecting their experience (even if it’s different from yours)
 - **ACTIVE LISTENING:** Eye contact, not interrupting, only focusing on what your partner is saying...not what you want to say, head nodding, acknowledging statements (“wow I didn’t realize you experienced all that”, “yes I see”, “go on”, “can you clarify what you mean by xyz?”)
 - **ACKNOWLEDGE** partner’s concerns even if you disagree with them: “It sounds like you feel I did not support you when I walked away?”, “How could I have said that differently so you don’t feel criticized?”
 - **APPROACHABLE TONE & BODY LANGUAGE:** Maintain neutral and approachable tone (you can get your point across without yelling or using defensive language), keep body language open and inviting (sitting, laying down, arms unfolded, hands unclenched, brows and jaw relaxed etc.)
 - **VALIDATION** (validation does not equal agreement): “I can really see how that hurt you”, “I know you are struggling right now with my new work schedule...is there something you or I can do to help you feel better about this?”, “I can see how painful this is for you.” etc.
 - **SHOW LOVE:** Physical affection, hold hands, say “I love you” etc.
 - **SHOW COMMITMENT** to relationship: “I know we are struggling right now and I am totally committed to you and our relationship...just wanted you to know that I’m not going anywhere”, “Regardless how hard this is, you are the most important person to me and I’m sticking by you through thick and thin”, “I can see how my actions broke some of your trust in me and I will do whatever it takes to repair this because you are my partner for life” etc.
 - **STAY CALM:** Keep your heart rate and breathing down and slow, practice deep breathing exercises to reduce physiological activation (once your heart rate and breathing increases to a certain level you no longer have the ability to listen or have empathy and conflict will worsen)

Do I Need Couples Therapy or Marriage Counseling?

- Negative Affect Examples: **Showing resentment/contempt/disdain, eye rolling, yelling, name calling, silent treatment, threats to leave, finger pointing, criticizing, gritting teeth, mocking, pressured speech, physical reactivity (slamming doors, throwing things, breaking things, hitting etc) emotional or physical intimacy withdrawal as punishment, criticizing partner etc.**

What Can Help?

- According to AAMFT (**American Association of Marriage & Family Therapists**), research shows **"clients are highly satisfied" after attending sessions with Marriage & Family Therapists** (MFT). **"Clients report marked improvement in work productivity, co-worker relationships, family relationships, partner relationships, emotional health, overall health, social life, and community involvement."**
 - "Over 98 percent of clients of marriage and family therapists report therapy services as good or excellent."
 - Almost 90% of clients report an improvement in their emotional health, and nearly two-thirds report an improvement in their overall physical health.
 - "Over 3/4 of those receiving marital/couples or family therapy report an improvement in the couple relationship."
- **MFT's go** through rigorous education (**Master's Degree of Clinical Psychology**) and internship requirements (**3000 hours of clinical service under supervision of certified licensed professionals**) and are specifically trained to work with individuals, couples and families focusing on relationship problems.

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

As an MFT specifically trained to address the unique needs of couples i will:

- ✓ Assess the issues that may be interfering with your relationship
- ✓ Identify the patterns of engagement and ineffective coping skills surrounding conflict
- ✓ Understand each person's attachment style
- ✓ Explore unacknowledged primary emotions, fears & negative thoughts that drive each of you into patterns of protect/attack/defend
- ✓ Identify the unique strengths that each of you can utilize in the healing & repair process
- ✓ Develop a collaborative agreement between you and your partner to be on the same team vs fighting against each other. You are now allies against the negative patterns, emotions and thoughts each of you engages in and will now work together to make things better for BOTH OF YOU. This will increase your positive to negative ratio.
- ✓ Map out 1-3 short term goals for your relationship and what each of you can practice doing differently to immediately reduce some of the strain and discomfort. Then we will map out 1-2 longer term goals to create more stability, intimacy and longevity.

<https://www.creativecounselingsantabarbara.com/relationship-problems>