

Does Marriage Counseling Work?

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Marriage counseling may seem like a last resort, but it shouldn't be.

Marriage counseling has a stigma that it is only for couples on the brink of divorce. But what is the gain of waiting until your relationship is in crisis? Wouldn't you rather be happy now?

[Dr. John Gottman's research](#) shows that couples wait an average of six years of being unhappy before going to marriage counseling. His studies also show that couples who seek marriage counseling long before they have considered divorce have far more success than couples who wait until they want to end their marriage.

In almost all cases, the sooner you go to marriage counseling, the better. The longer you wait to start solving problems, the more time it will take to solve them. Hard feelings toward each other often don't go away overnight. In marriage counseling, you can learn strategies that help you and your spouse handle conflict while staying connected and respectful. Not only can counseling help you resolve current and past issues, it can teach you how to work together and stay connected when disagreements arise in the future.

Here's how you can maximize your likelihood of success when turning to marriage counseling:



- **Consider turning to Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT).** [Studies have revealed](#) that EFT has a 75% success rate, meaning that struggling couples report relationship recovery 75% of the time. Even more promising, 90% of couples report significant relationship improvements using EFT.
- **Find a therapist or counselor who is the right fit for both of you.** If one spouse does not feel comfortable with the therapist, they may not want to open up in session, or they may start each session in bad mood. It's okay if you don't feel comfortable with the first therapist you see. It's okay to shop around or ask for recommendations. Finding a therapist that you both feel comfortable can be a key component on your progress.
- **Much of your relationship success depends on your desire for success and willingness to make changes.** Couples who look for ways to improve their relationship are most often the happiest couples. A marriage counselor can ask guiding questions and help facilitate an open, thoughtful conversation between you and your partner, but they can't fix your problems for you. They cannot change your perspective for you, they cannot heal for you, they cannot apologize for you, they cannot forgive for you, and they cannot repair your connection for you. A marriage counselor can help uncover the work that needs to be done in your relationship, but you need to do the work.



Where Can I Find a Marriage Counselor?

Often, it's helpful to ask someone you trust for recommendations. This may help you feel a little more at ease in your first session.

If you can't afford to go to a private practice, you can research free counseling in your community. You can often find free counseling through universities or non-profit community counseling centers. Remember, it's okay to shop around until you find the right fit.

The Utah Marriage Commission currently offers free online marriage courses that can teach effective relationship skills. These courses don't replace therapy, but can make a positive impact on your relationship and supplement the work you do in marriage counseling.