

Couples Therapy: Myths and Reality

Maintaining a positive, supportive relationship with one's partner in the face of expected and unusual life stress is one of the biggest challenges many couples face. Not uncommonly, instead of pulling together to face life's difficulties, partners become disengaged or even hostile. The person you expect to always have your back begins to feel like the enemy. And sometimes it feels like the harder you try to fix the problem, the worse things get.

The good news is that a well-trained couples therapist can help most relationships that have hit a rough patch. According to recent studies, 90% of couples who see a well-trained Emotionally Focused Couples Therapist experience improvement and 70% report full repair of their relationship.

But here's the bad news: many couples that could benefit from this therapy are reluctant to get help. Unfounded beliefs and misconceptions get in the way.

Here is the truth about six common misconceptions:

1. The therapist will take sides.

With some therapists, this in fact may happen. But an Emotionally Focused Couples (EFT) Therapist is trained to recognize how both partners contribute to their dance of anger or disconnection. Successful therapy invariably requires each partner to understand his or her role in the couple's distress.

2. The therapist will tell us we should break up.

Again, there are probably some therapists who would make this judgment, but the role of an EFT Therapist is to help couples understand how their relationship has gone wrong and to guide them – for as long as they are willing to try – in how to repair it. The decision of whether to stay in a relationship always belongs to the couple.

3. We are too far gone; the situation is hopeless.

Many couples worry that their problems have gone on so long, there is no hope of improving their relationship. But even long-standing problems can be resolved with EFT therapy. The intensity of anger also does not necessarily indicate that a relationship can't be improved. The only clear sign that EFT therapy won't help is if one or both partners have become so disengaged they are no longer willing to try.

4. Talking about our problems will make things worse.

Many couples have experienced that their own attempts to talk about their problems *have* made things worse, so this concern is understandable. They may even have had previous experiences in therapy where talking *did* make things worse. However, an EFT Therapist is trained to create a safe space where problems can be discussed productively. In many cases, the therapist will be able to help partners see each other's struggles in new ways that open the door to healing and reconciliation.

5. Couples therapy is a waste of time and does not work.

Many therapists who see couples aren't trained in an effective model of couples therapy, and there is probably a significant risk that these therapists will not be helpful. However, EFT has years of research demonstrating its effectiveness in helping couples improve their relationships, and follow-up studies show these improvements are long lasting. EFT is one of a handful of couples therapies designated as empirically supported by the American Psychological Association. A therapist trained in EFT is guided by a roadmap that has one of the strongest track records in helping distressed couples.

6. We (or he or she) need individual therapy first.

A growing body of evidence suggests that successful couples therapy can actually reduce an individual's symptoms of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and other psychological disorders. At the very least, a stronger, more supportive relationship will reduce the suffering both partners experience when one partner is struggling with a psychological disorder. Couples therapy may not be the only treatment needed when a partner has significant psychological symptoms, but when the relationship has suffered, it is often the best place to start.

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