



Christian Counseling

Equipping People for Life...

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM MARITAL THERAPY

Looking at the high divorce rate of the last 30 years it might make you wonder if anyone can make it in a long term relationship.

John Gottman, a marital researcher at the University of Washington, has found in years of research that it is a profound friendship that keeps marriages strong.

Marriage opens the doors to many of life's most rewarding blessings. It is one of life's ultimate privileges and the core structure of a stable society. Legally, it is a partnership contract. Emotionally, marriage commits you to comingling your lives - side by side, hand in hand, heart to heart. When you agree to marry, you commit to joining forces for purposes of housing, finances, children, sex, leisure, fostering each other's realization as individuals, digesting disappointments, celebrating triumphs - together writing the music of your lives.

When two individuals form a couple, their combined power becomes more than twice what they each held separately. When two become one in marriage, that union can generate the power source for a life of love, nurturance, strength, and joy.

The opposite can happen, and, sadly often does. The immense energy unleashed when two join into a couple does not always go to create good. It can become the power to hurt. The energy of your interaction can constrict your life, demoralize you, or provoke frustration or resentment.¹

What can Rapha Christian Counseling do to help you and your spouse get to the point of 'profound friendship?' Let's look at brief answers to some of the questions people ask when they come in for marital counseling.

HOW CAN WE SHOW EACH OTHER MORE RESPECT?

You can begin treating your spouse with the same respect and consideration that you give to your best friend. Rarely do people scream at their best friend or bring up old disagreements. Instead, a best friend usually receives our undivided attention, grace for their lapses, and our blessing on their endeavors.

HOW CAN WE STOP FIGHTING?

There are secrets to talking! You can learn to say what you think instead of hinting at it or demanding your way with your spouse

When speaking to someone with a strong personality you may find yourself developing a pattern of indirectly making requests. How can your partner know what you really desire if you are not specific and direct? Learn to make requests with sweetness and confidence.

Most people have heard of using *I* statements instead of *you* statements. *You* statements are heard as accusing. *I* statements are received better because they are usually neutral in nature. There are many other strategies that can help you feel clearly understood.

There are secrets to listening! You can learn to diffuse an argument and not answer defensively if a sensitive subject comes up. Disagreement is more likely to happen when you are physically stressed by hunger, fatigue, illness, or too much to do. If you notice a pattern to spats, you can prevent many of them with simple agreements like these:
No tough topics before dinner.
No tough topics after ten o'clock in the evening
No difficult dialogues between parents when the children need attention.²

WHY DOES MY PARTNER EXPLODE?

An explosive personality may be a sign feelings have been suppressed over a long period of time. Suppressed feelings will eventually find a way out. People may suppress their feelings for a variety of reasons:

Mistakenly, they believe that it's braver to squelch their feelings.

They have difficulty believing their feelings, though feelings don't know how to lie.

They do not feel entitled to take their own feelings seriously.

They fear that if they say anything they will "say it wrong."

They lack confidence in their mate's ability to hear their concerns with empathy.³

Suppressed feelings can lead to angry explosions. Hostility can also be the result of the cumulative effects that anger can have. Having a bad day where one thing happens on top of another can lead to an explosion. Stress builds up when your body experiences one small irritation after another. Your body doesn't realize that the second incident is equally as small as the first and an overreaction can occur.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH ALL THIS ANGER?

You can turn this powerful emotion into an asset in your marriage. Anger is present to point out a problem that needs to be addressed, indicate the intensity of the problem, and motivate you to address the problem.⁴

First, be willing to remain calm. The old adage to count to ten has merit. You can use a prearranged timeout signal. Effective signals should be non-threatening, perhaps a timeout signal from a favorite sport can be used.

Next, look at the whole situation. Get all the facts. Listen to your mate's point of view.

Lastly, do not forget to hold tightly to your communication skills. When someone says something negative to us we all experience an impulse to hurt back. Sending a counter attack will only escalate the intensity and pain of the discussion. You can learn to override your impulse to strike back and move into a problem solving mode. Ask pointed questions designed to get at the root of the current problem such as:

What would you like?

What would help?⁵

The answers to these questions move you to the next step of negotiating a resolution.

WHERE CAN WE START?

Some basics that belong in every marriage are:

Show each other respect. Ask your mate what respect looks like to them.

Have a regular date night. Alternate who gets to arrange the activities. Be creative with your time of fun and use it to get to know each other again.

Stay current. Keep past disagreements in the past. Don't bring them up once things are settled. Don't let irritations pile up. Deal with life effectively day to day.

Do not try to control your partner. You did not marry someone just like you. Allow God to use your differences to complete each other. Learn to appreciate anew what brought you together in the first place.

Learn to apologize. Shakespeare tells us "the course of true love never did run smooth." After you have been through rough waters don't be afraid to say you're sorry for any angry words you spoke. Be the one to start the healing.

Rapha Christian Counseling can help you get over the rough spots and point you in the direction of peace. It can be very helpful to have someone experienced in marital therapy give you tips on diffusing your anger and getting over resentments. A counselor can help you visualize what it would be like to be best friends again and suggest proven steps to get there.

We are committed to healthy marriages and believe them to be the cornerstone of society. You can have a healthy, happy marriage where it is possible to laugh at mistakes, forgive and be forgiven, encourage and be encouraged, and love and be loved. Call today. We can help.

¹ Susan Heitler, PH.D., *The Power of Two, Secrets to a Strong and Loving Marriage* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publication, 1997), p.1,2

² p. 97, ³ p. 114, ⁴ p. 117, ⁵ p. 142