

How To Find the Best Marriage Counselor for Your Needs

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Everyone wants "the best". When you are looking for a marriage counselor it is important to find someone who is specifically trained in marriage counseling and has the credential of "licensed" or "certified" marriage counselor". This indicates that they demonstrated some level of competence necessary to have had to passed some test(s) or other criteria of competence.

The best marriage counselor/therapist would be one that understands system dynamics, stages that marriages go through, and problematic behavioral interactions and how to interrupt those patterns. The best marriage counselor would also have indepth knowledge and understanding of individual pathologies. However, when couples seek counseling with therapists who are trained in individual pathology and are not trained in systems dynamics, they may find a "helper" that reinforces who dysfunctional interactions, rather than assisting the couple to break out old ruts. They may find a helper that "identifies" more closely with one of the partners, and who will also focus on the "inappropriate" behavior of the other partner. The helper may not understand that each partner has his/her own version of their marriage. The helper may be so concerned about individual pathology of the couple, that they decide that the couple will never be able to work through their issues and may seek to spare the partners the pain by suggesting divorce. The decision on whether to divorce should always be the couples'.

The best marriage counselor for a particular couple, would also have indepth knowledge or experience in working with specific issues that the couple is dealing with (i.e., infidelity, addiction, death of a child, etc.). When dealing with addiction in the family, the best therapist would also be a licensed or certified alcoholism/drug addiction counselor. There are many things unique to family systems that has addiction, that are not necessarily understood by therapists without such a knowledge base. The best marriage and addictions counselor would also experience in working with individuals in addiction recovery and family members in recovery. They would have had experience working with addicted families at the onset of identification of the problem, to established long term sobriety, and dealing with addiction in the subsequent generation(s).

Similarly, if a huge part of your marital problems are centered around family business issues, your best marriage counselor would probably have an indepth knowledge about family businesses and years of experience in working with couples in family businesses. Or if you lost a child, a marriage counselor with a specialty in grief treatment may be your best therapist.

The number one predictor of treatment outcome is, as it has always been, the relationship with the therapist. If you start out your journey with the comfort that your therapist knows what you are talking about, what the real problems are, and how to help you solve them, you are already three steps into the solutions. The "best" marriage therapist for you is out there. Ask questions until you find him/her.

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