

**Benefits of Marriage Counseling:
Ten Relationship Skills You Can Gain From Marriage Counseling**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

We are not a high conflict couple but we are not really happy, either. How would we benefit from marital counseling? There are many benefits to marital counseling besides learning how to bring down the emotional level of arguments-although, this too, is a benefit.

Marital counseling with a licensed marriage and family therapist can help your marriage in many ways. It affords you a number of opportunities for change that you would not ordinarily know how to accomplish by yourself. With marriage counseling you will have an opportunity to identify the issues, feelings, and behaviors that are bothering you and to communicate them to your spouse in a safe and supportive environment.

One of the major benefits of marital counseling is the instruction, coaching, and feedback in developing new skills to make changes in your relationship. Skill development often focuses on the following skills areas:

- 1) Communication and problem solving
- 2) Appropriate expression, disclosure, and resolution of painful emotions
- 3) Effective negotiation for change within the relationship
- 4) Acquisition of the ability to work within a partnership to achieve goals
- 5) Development of the ability to engage in consultation and cooperation with family issues such as money management, parenting, lifestyle issues, and stage of life issues.
- 6) De-escalation of arguments before they get hurtful
- 7) Identification and elimination of dirty fight tactics.
- 8) Learning and practicing effective problem solving techniques
- 9) Learning and practicing effective ways to start a difficult conversation in a neutral manner.
10. Regaining the ability to perceive the positive characteristics in your partner and in your marriage.

When you participate in marriage counseling you have an opportunity to get to know your spouse again. Couples who have been together awhile have a tendency to talk superficially or about things and issues other than themselves. Partners often quit talking about the things they think and feel.

Couples counseling can guide you through your unresolved issues, including the emotional baggage from your family of origin that may be re-created and played out in your current relationship. You have an opportunity to identify how your prior experiences "color" how you experience your life now, and can learn how to neutralize the negative impact of your histories. In doing so, you can visualize the relationship that you want, discover how to accomplish it, and begin to work toward your relationship goals.

Your couples counseling should last long enough for you to accomplish major treatment plan goals. If you continue in counseling long enough to establish new behaviors to the point where it has become habit, you are most likely to sustain your relationship gains over a longer period of time.

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