

# Lakewood Counseling & Career Center

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## **OPTIMIZING YOUR COUPLE'S THERAPY**

You have likely come to therapy because your marriage feels stuck; locked into patterns that, despite your efforts, you cannot break. Often there is ambivalence about letting someone enter into your relationship (a therapist). Keep in mind, the process of *Couples Therapy* is not just about getting symptom relief, but understanding how WE got here and what WE are doing to perpetuate certain patterns. The fact that you feel you are too different from one another is statistically “normal”. What therapy will do is teach you how to maintain a loving connection in the context of those differences. Therapy will promote valuing the connection above personal agendas. Most couples truly do not fall out of love; rather, they fall out of equality, feel too diminished to carry on, or lose hope for a better future.

The following statements are meant to help you understand what it will take to be successful in this endeavor, motivate you to work hard, and inspire hope for restoring your relationship to a state that renews the love that brought you together. Hope for a future is what you started with, and it can still be a guiding beacon for you both.

- I will work to change me, not you. The best way to inhibit growth is through attacks or blame. Therapy needs to be safe because change occurs in the context of vulnerability. Intimacy is vulnerability rewarded.
- Change does not happen quickly. Turning your patterns around will be like setting a new course for a cruise ship versus a speed boat. At the end of therapy, you can more clearly see two things. First, you will create a better roadmap to making your partner feel understood and “known”. Secondly, you will better accept the limitations of your partner.
- The real work of therapy is what you do in-between sessions. There is a direct correlation to the “work” you do in-between sessions, and how quickly and successfully therapy ends.
- All couples struggle with the work of *differentiation*. Differentiation is the ability to lose enough of oneself for the needs of the relationship, while also holding onto the needs of

oneself. Love is the act of connecting to and caring about another; it's not about fusing together as one. The paradox of a relationship is that the more separateness is recognized and honored, the more connectedness can flourish.

- Love is the feeling I hold towards another. Attachment is how I “DO” the relationship. While love is important, the work of *re-attaching* is vital towards re-establishing the connection. Many attachment problems are the result of re-enacting some wounded aspect of yourself. While my problematic behavior hurts my partner, it is equally hurting me. It will be important to understand how my unresolved wounds are showing up in my relationship with my partner.
- Oftentimes, things can get worse before they get better. The more we tackle the hard issues and speak truth in the light of day, the more it stirs the waters and creates tensions that have been suppressed. Be patient, the wounds need to be cleaned out before they can begin to heal.
- Remember that when learning a new skill, we will make mistakes. Trying something different is an act of bravery and love. Sometimes change can create a feeling of awkwardness. It is okay to “fake it till’ you make it”.
- In the face of change, many couples want to cling to the narrative or story about who their partner is. If you stay stuck in your narrative, you are inviting your partner to lose hope that you are trying to change. You will both need to quiet your narrative and truly listen to the intentionality of your partner’s efforts.
- A good marital therapist should not get stuck in taking sides with one partner or become caught-up in a couple’s dysfunction. With that said, you might feel “picked-on” from time to time. Sometimes a therapist will need to challenge you enough to get you out of your comfort zone.
- Remember that all questions about the process of therapy are good. As your couple’s therapist, I am committed to working hard in this process and will give you all I can to help you become the couple you are striving to be.