

Lakewood Counseling and Career Center

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COUPLE'S THERAPY

By Jennifer Pearson

At Lakewood we believe that Couple's Therapy is not just about learning to resolve differences, it is about learning to maintain loving connection in the context of difference. When couples value their connection to each other more than their personal agendas, their differences serve as a natural impetus for their growth and healing and they are better able to solve their problems in mutually enhancing rather than compromising ways. Learning to experience and respond to each other from a more relationally oriented perspective is the goal and the promise of Couple's Therapy. We hope the following statements will assist you in getting the most out of your work here together and help you to begin thinking about your relationship in new ways.

- The real work of therapy takes place in between the sessions not during them. This process requires your conscious investment in the same way your relationship does. Couples who invest little thought and effort outside of their sessions, generally get little in return.
- When under perceived attack, the most natural thing for people to do is to hunker down and become even more entrenched in their defensive positions. Growth and change occur most readily in the context of acceptance. The more you can focus on exploring your own areas of growth the more your partner will be able to focus on theirs.
- Obviously, longstanding patterns don't change overnight, so please don't expect them to! Most couples who have felt "stuck" for a long time are surprised to find that the biggest source of their personal relief didn't come from their partner's sudden compliance with their demands or expectations, but rather from their own ability to experience their relational disappointments and conflicts in a less distressing way.
- As you begin to gain new understandings of yourself, your partner and the patterns of interaction between you it's important to remember that insights alone don't create change; you must also be willing to leave your comfort zone and do something different.
- Love is the act of connecting to and caring about another, it is not about fusing together as "one". When we are acting out of love we honor the "otherness" of our partner rather than feel threatened by it. The paradox of relationship is that the more separateness is recognized and honored, the more connectedness can flourish.
- "I can't because you won't ..."; "I could, if you would just ...". Most highly conflicted couples are caught up in some form of emotional gridlock or a power struggle of sorts, in which each person is holding the other accountable for their negative emotional experiences and their relationally destructive behaviors. Gridlock ends only when individuals are willing to invest in self-directed, differentiated change ... or personal growth that is not dependent on or in response to what their partner does.

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- As couples become more highly differentiated they are each better able to be more accountable for their own choices and emotional experiences, while simultaneously demonstrating more sensitivity and responsiveness towards each other.
- Most importantly, we believe Couples Therapy can and should be a hopeful and positive experience. Putting your focus on becoming the kind of partner you want to be and working with each other to envision the kind of life you'd like to build together is a more positive way of addressing your difficulties than just focusing on your problems. Working towards improving your relationship is important, but so is reconnecting to what you value most about each and celebrating your strengths.