

STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

Giving Couples Counseling a Try

Over 50 percent of marriages in this country end in divorce. Second marriages have a higher likelihood of failure. When the going gets tough, couples counseling, or marriage counseling, may help you beat the odds. Couples counseling can improve your relationship and communication, and perhaps get you back on the road to a happier future.



WHEN TO TRY COUPLES COUNSELING

If you are seriously concerned about your relationship and wonder if it needs help, chances are it does. Research shows couples often wait many years after problems first arise to seek couples counseling. This makes counseling less likely to be effective, and it can take longer. The desire to make your relationship work is a key to success and long-term resentment can sabotage these efforts. So the earlier you make a decision to seek couples counseling the better.

WHY TO TRY COUPLES COUNSELING

Although every couple is unique, few problems are new to couples counselors. Sexual issues, money problems, children and parenting issues, religious differences,

difficulties with in-laws, and communication issues are common struggles. Infidelity and cheating, jealousy, balancing work and home, differences in goals and values, and concerns about compatibility all bring couples into counseling.

WHAT HAPPENS IN COUNSELING?

You will share information, explore issues and clarify the difficulties you face. The counselor will encourage you to express yourself more fully and to listen more carefully than you may be accustomed to doing. Important questions will be asked about your communication, the time you spend with each other, and the pattern of closeness you experience — the moving toward and away from each other. All of this helps your counselor assess the duration and intensity of your

conflict so mutual goals can be established. Counselors often meet with clients individually to gather information about past relationships and life events. These experiences affect relationships and can give clues to strategies for change. Asking what will change or be different in your relationship if couples counseling is successful can help you know when your goal has been met or when couples counseling should end. You and your partner may participate in activities and communication exercises at home and in the sessions. The goal is to learn skills to enjoy the rewards of a warm, affectionate and supportive relationship. You will develop strategies to use in the future if difficulties return. Support from the couples counselor will help reinforce the changes you learn.



■ **WHAT IF MY SPOUSE WON'T GO?**

If your spouse or partner refuses to go to couples counseling, it does not mean your relationship can't be helped. Couples counseling often starts with one person, with the more reluctant partner joining later. Even if your partner never joins you, it is still possible to make some significant improvements in your relationship.

■ **WHO PROVIDES COUPLES COUNSELING?**

Couples counseling is usually provided by licensed mental health professionals who have experience and training in working with couples. Marriage and family therapists, clinical social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, pastoral counselors, and professional counselors may all offer services.

The UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center (EACC) offers confidential counseling services for individuals, couples and families, free to eligible employees and members of their immediate household. Visit the EACC online at uab.edu/eacc to learn more.

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal or medical condition.

— Adapted from *WorkExcel.com*