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WITH GHITA



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Is Couples Counselling Right for You?

“Couples counselling is not a place to avoid emotions. Couples Counselling is all about being brutally honest about feelings, expectations, and disappointments. To use an analogy, Couples Counselling is like sitting in a dirty diaper! After feelings are heard, it is all about negotiating terms. Marriage is a constant negotiation.” - Ghita Andersen

Here are some questions to consider before booking in a couples therapy session:

Is there physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or financial abuse in my relationship?

Important: Couples counselling is not appropriate where a relationship is abusive.

When there is abuse, especially violence (threatened or actual), in a relationship, most couples therapists will refer the partners to individual therapy, doctors or psychiatrists first before treating the couple together. This is so that partners can learn healthy tools to regulate emotions in ways that don't involve controlling behaviours such as physical or sexual violence, financial abuse, or emotional manipulation. The main reason for this is because couples therapy often requires tough conversations which can result in big emotions and uncomfortable self-disclosure. If your relationship is abusive, it is not suitable for the cooperation involved with joint-counselling.

If the couples' main way of coping with difficulty is through violence or abusive behaviours, couples therapy may place partners at greater risk for continued abuse if there are no other healthy coping strategies in place. We want you to be able to come to couples therapy equipped with some strategies to manage the challenges of therapy safely.

Consider that counsellors have to work in a safe, respectful environment and have their own emotional balance to consider.

If you're unsure whether you are experiencing abuse in your relationship, give Ghita a call for a quick consultation on 0439 888 070 or google an online quiz.

Do I expect therapy to “fix” my partner, and am I unwilling to see my contributions to our relationship dynamic?

Couples counselling is about treating the relationship. This means looking at both partners' behaviours and how issues result from your co-created dynamic. For the most part, couples



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therapists remain neutral, they don't align with one person or the other but instead are always looking at ways to support the relationship. Couples counsellors help each person to feel heard and try to understand each partner's perspective. But, if you expect that your couples therapist will not ask you to self-reflect about your actions in the relationship, you might be disappointed.

Is one of us unmotivated, only coming to therapy as a box-ticking exercise?

Therapy is most successful when people are willing to walk in the door on their own. This isn't to say that therapy is not daunting and you won't feel hesitant about the process. You may of course have doubts and fears about whether therapy will help or if it will feel awkward. But give it a try at least for a few sessions wholeheartedly.

What Couples Counselling Doesn't do

Couples counselling isn't a magic cure. It requires an investment of honesty, courage, and humility. Often, couples come into counselling blaming one another for their difficulties. (It's not unusual for couples to start arguing in front of the counsellor.)

Remember, couples counsellors are not passive. They will intervene to focus the session on insight and action. For you and your partner, this often involves letting go of fixed perspectives and stepping back to see the process of how you interact. Remember, couples counselling is not a place to avoid emotions. We help you to explore your feelings and to find different perspectives to make better decisions on what you are able and willing to change.

Couples counsellors may well provide you with coaching. For example, they may help you learn to communicate differently, but what they will not do is give advice about life issues, or solve your problems. They are also not there to take sides. Rather, they will help you both to be heard.

Examining Your Relationship

It may be useful to pay attention to different aspects of your relationship. For example, you can focus on:

- How you view the level of commitment to each other
- How you communicate



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- How you connect and play together
- How you compromise
- How you resolve disputes
- How you nurture and care for yourselves and each other
- How you grow together

The overall process of couples counselling can be described as one of expression, joint discovery, sense-making, and action-planning. The ideal outcome from counselling would be that you are equipped to do this together for yourselves in the future.

Sometimes, however, as a result of couples counselling, clients decide to end their relationship. Counselling can then fulfill a role in helping the couple to end well, and to take care of issues that are important to you (for example, caring for children) in a mutually respectful and beneficial way. (We can recommend mediation services.)

It's Not All About You

Sometimes we can pull the wool over our own eyes, not wanting to acknowledge what is happening. In couples counselling it's hard to deceive yourself or the counsellor because not only is the way you relate there in the room being observed, but your partner may also say what they think and feel, shining a light into areas you find uncomfortable.

Couples Counselling is uncomfortable. It is okay to be uncomfortable in couples counselling. It is normal. In order to progress, your relationship requires total honesty about who you are and what your needs are. You have to be willing to change though. A counsellor is there to assist with the change. We are used to people being uncomfortable and uneasy. The best work is often done just after hitting an uncomfortable spot. This sweet spot is where both parties drop their guards and fess up to feelings, disappointments and their own behaviour. Sometimes one party will walk out, cool off, and then come back. That is okay. Therapists understand that sometimes people haven't been this honest their whole lives.

Couples counselling tends to progress more quickly than one-to-one work. It also tends to be more dynamic and challenging. Ghita's advice is to begin with the end in mind. If you have a good, strong reason for being in counselling then you are more likely to be open to exploring.



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Successful Couples Counsellors Have to be Blunt

Counsellors try to be as neutral as much as possible, however sometimes it is their job to challenge people with story inconsistencies, contrary body language and to do a type of reality checking. Moreover, this can be hard for some people to accept if they are not in touch with their emotions, or they they have a habit blame others to avoid conflict. While counsellors try to appear unbiased and sensitive to both parties, in order to do their jobs properly and to keep therapy on track, counsellors do have to challenge and tell clients when their behaviour is counter-productive, alienating or abusive.

To get the most out of your money in session, their job is not to be your friend, but to show you the best methods for getting your relationship back on track, and sometimes this means asking you to take responsibility for past events so that you can move forward and focus on the future.

No Magic Wand at the 11th Hour

Things to consider: Counsellors can't be expected to 'fix' a relationship, which has taken decades to degrade and is now beyond repair. Counsellors can't make one person cooperate if they don't want to. If one party has already walked out of a relationship, there may be little that we can do if all trust has been lost.

You Can't Repair a Marriage in One Session

Clients should be aware that because there are two people sharing their stories, it is unlikely that one session will sort out a couples' issues. Please expect to invest in your healing for anywhere from 4 -12 sessions.

Call Ghita on 0439 888 070

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www.ghitaandersen.com/couples-counselling.html