

Working on Your Relationship Alone

As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. It also takes two to make a couple. It takes two to make a relationship and, it follows, two to work on that relationship. But what happens when one person in a relationship doesn't want to do the work—especially if that work means going to couples counselling?

First, it's important to make sure your mate really doesn't want to go.

Lorna Hecker, Clinic Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Center of Purdue University, lists these tips for asking your partner to join you in marital/relationship therapy:

- **Ask your partner to join you in therapy.**
Most people are just afraid to ask. Express your concern about your relationship in a non-blaming way. Don't let the myth that "he/she will never go to counselling" dissuade you. As a therapist, I hear this all the time, and 90 percent of the time, it just isn't true that someone will never go to therapy.
- **Don't let your partner pull you into an argument.**
Try a broken record technique such as: "We disagree; and we disagree a lot. That's why I would like for us to go to marital therapy." Say it over and over (like a broken record), rather than get pulled into an argument. Also, ask for what you do want from your partner, rather than what you don't want.
- **If you have previously asked your partner to go to therapy before and he/she refused, ask again, but ask differently.**
Most people have great difficulty asking their partner to counselling in a non-defensive, caring way because they are hurting. Try, "I love you, I care about us and I need some help in learning how to communicate to you better. I would like to try counselling." Select a time when there are no distractions and your partner is rested.

And if your partner absolutely refuses to try couples counselling? Go yourself. At the very least you can change how you are managing your relationship problems. Even if only one person in a relationship sees a counsellor or therapist, change can happen. "The overall relationship you have together may or may not improve, however your own attitude about it will," says Larry James, author of *How to Really Love the One You're With!* This alone is a positive step in the right direction."

In other words, how are you doing with your own relationship with the #1 person in your life — you? Although it's important to acknowledge your disappointment that your partner won't go to therapy or read about relationships with you, it's even more important to move on to the next step. "The most important relationship is the relationship you have with yourself," James says. If taking care of you means going to counselling, first make sure you are truly committed to changing. Counselling can be very emotionally challenging because you are forced to come face to face with some painful realities about the ways you interact with your mate. A "what can I do to be a happier person and maybe improve my relationship, too?" approach will probably be more effective than a "what do I do to get him/her to change so I can be happier?"

Alabama mediator and divorce lawyer Lee Borden urges his clients to seek counselling, even if it means going alone. He even urges couples who have decided to divorce to seek counselling to understand what went wrong and perhaps avoid certain behaviour patterns in the future. As he puts it, "As you work to know yourself, and particularly as you do it under the guidance of a caring professional, you may discover what makes you tick and find yourself on the road to healing and wholeness."