

4 Tips to Find a Competent Relationship Therapist

Here are some tips on finding and choosing a relationship therapist who can support you and your partner.

Step 1: Search for Therapists with Specialized Training in Couples Therapy

Make sure the type of therapist you see (psychologist, marriage and family therapists, professional counselor, social worker, or pastoral counselor) is licensed in your state and has specific training and *supervision* in couples therapy approaches. Not all therapists have this training. Furthermore, not all therapists who do get the couples therapy training receive supervision from certified therapists of that method to ensure they are applying the techniques and interventions in ways that can lead to changes for the client's relationship.

Some of the more popular approaches with professional training and supervision that I know include:*

- [The Gottman Method Couples Therapy](#)
- [Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy \(EFT\)](#)
- [The Psychobiological Approach of Couples Therapy \(PACT\)](#)
- [The Developmental Model of Couples Therapy](#)
- [Relational Life Therapy](#)
- [Discernment Counseling](#)
- [Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy \(IBCT\)](#)

*Note, to find a therapist with this approach, click the link on that approach above

Additional places to search for couples therapists include: [American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy](#), [Psychology Today](#), and [Marriage Friendly Therapists](#).

It's also important to seek out therapists who align with the way relationships work for you without you having to teach your therapist terminology. For inclusive therapists in the United States who have specific training on sexuality, nonmonogamy, and kink/BDSM, as well as gender identity/expression, look for therapists who are also certified sex therapists of the [American Association of Sexuality, Educators, Counselors, and Therapists](#) as those therapists undergo specialized training for working with erotically marginalized clients.

If you're comfortable with it, another way to find a good therapist is to ask friends or co-workers who have had a good couples therapists if they could make a recommendation.

During this step, you may also want to explore how to pay for therapy. It's worth noting that a more expensive therapist does not always mean you will receive better therapy or faster improvements.² While therapy is expensive, if it helps save and repair your marriage, it will be less expensive than a divorce in the long-run.

For additional cost-saving ideas, check your insurance or with your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Additionally, some therapists have sliding fees for lower income couples, and universities have couples therapy training programs that offer therapists-in-training with quality supervision at affordable rates.

Step 2: Interview Potential Therapists During the First Session or On The Phone

Now that you've found some possible therapists to work with, interview them to make sure they are a good fit for you and you are a good fit for them. Many couples therapists offer a free consultation session for this purpose. Here are some questions you can ask:

1. Did you receive formal education and supervised training in couples therapy?
2. What percentage of your work is with couples? *Note: Those who specialize in couples therapy may have greater experience working with couples.*
3. What is your opinion about divorce? Do you ever recommend divorce? What occurred with past clients that lead you to come to that recommendation? In the absence of abuse or danger, will you support the possibility that we can salvage our marriage/relationship? *Note: You want a therapist who is going to align with what you want as a client for your relationship with the exception of a partner who is unwilling to be remorseful and change when it comes to affairs, addictions, and abuse.*
4. What percentage of couples you've worked with have seen improvement as a result of therapy with you?
5. What do you believe makes a relationship successful? How do you know change has occurred for a relationship that was not doing so well before therapy? *Note: Your therapist's belief systems will influence therapy. Effective couples therapy helps both partners truly understand one another and offers a plan, as well as tools, the couple can use for fostering a stable connection between partners. If the therapist only focuses on changing what you should do such as date night, without also exploring what has got in the way from this occurring prior to therapy, the positive changes may not last.*
6. If you are seeking help with nonmonogamy, diverse expressions of sexuality, BDSM, and/or gender identity, it would be helpful to check your therapist's viewpoints on this topic as well as their level of experience. What are your views on [insert what applies to you]?
7. What does working with you look like? *Note: Ask about the structure of sessions, the length of sessions, how long the assessment process is, how the end of treatment is decided, and if there is follow-up. You want a therapist who has a clear plan of action and follows through on that plan.*

Step 3: Stick with Therapy - Improve

If the above steps are met with your therapist, avoid dropping out early. Research shows that couples who stick with therapy show the most improvements long-term.³

Experienced and effective couples therapists know that there is a difference between improvements from addressing surface issues and the lasting improvements that come

from addressing the root problems. It's possible that within the first handful of sessions, you may see significant improvements. With this in mind, consider committing to eight to ten sessions before evaluating whether therapy is working. This way you are ensuring both the surface issues and the deeper issues are being touched on.

Step 4: This is Your Therapy and Your Relationship – Be Assertive

It can be difficult as a client to be honest with your therapist about what's working and what isn't. Good relationship therapists understand that what works for one couple may not work for another. If you share with them what isn't working and what is working, they can then adjust how they work with you and your relationship.

Couples therapy can be effective with a qualified and well-trained professional.

(Adopted from *How to Find a Couples Therapist Who Can Actually Help*,
www.gottman.com/blog)