

A wooden ladder leans against a concrete wall. The ladder is made of light-colored wood and has several rungs. The concrete wall is light-colored and shows some texture and shadows. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and clear.

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Couples Therapy Training Resource

You have to participate in your own rescue.

Many couples get stuck trying to maintain a kind of closeness or connection which doesn't allow them to have different thoughts, different feelings or different desires. It is important in relationship that you can speak up and express your thoughts, feelings and desires and that you can learn to hear your partner's thoughts, feelings and desires even if they are different to yours. This may seem quite simple and it is, however it is not easy in face of strong emotional responses.

Connection, closeness and intimacy are important to sustain an ongoing positive relationship. These things can be eroded by how we work through our differences and thus create distance in the relationship.

By the time a couple arrives to couples therapy they will have a well know system of interactions which each partner hopes will solve the problem but which in fact continues to keep the problem going while accumulating more and more hurts along the way.

Because we are having arguments with our partner we believe that getting our partner to change will solve the problem. This is where couples therapy is counter intuitive.

In order for couples therapy to be effective the following is required:

1. Bring a curiosity to yourself. This will include your thoughts, feelings and desires. Focus more on yourself than on your partner.
2. Be open to being curious about how you have your arguments. If you push in couples therapy to continue arguing the same way you do outside of the therapy room then nothing will change. Be open to allowing me to coach you to do it differently. This will feel counterintuitive as it is not familiar. Give the process a chance to see if it changes the disagreements. You can always return to your old way of interacting if you want to! But at least be open to trying out a different way.
3. Work on being as grounded as you can be in the sessions. People can feel if they turn up and show me how upset they are then something will change. Part of this process is being able to ground yourself in the face of strong emotions. And if it is not possible to be grounded then to be able to identify that and know that no work in couples therapy can be done when someone is flooded. So part of the work of couples therapy is self-awareness around your own levels of dysregulation.

4. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of staying on your own side and working on what you can do differently. I will be focusing on this in the sessions. If you are only waiting for your partner to change then couples therapy will not help and will only frustrate you. If you are interested in learning something about yourself then this process can be transformative, if you only want to blame your partner then it will be useless. The solution is not going to be as simple as stop doing or start doing something (though that will be part of it) but getting to understand at a deeper level what is going for each of you and what patterns of interaction that leads to.

5. Not using what we talk about and explore in couples therapy as a weapon to use against your partner outside of the therapy room.