



# Deer Valley Counseling

"Skills for Better Living"

## Marriage Counseling versus Divorce Counseling

"I need an appointment for marriage counseling today! We sign the divorce papers tomorrow." Believe it or not, we receive this kind of phone call often. What are the options in this situation? Although there is a chance that marriage counseling at such a late date may work, it is a small chance. And all too often, once a relationship reaches this stage and a marriage counseling session or two fails to perform a miracle, the participants see no further point in counseling. Let's examine how the partners in this relationship could make better choices.

### Get Marriage Counseling Early

First off, let's back up a few years. Most troubled relationships don't get that way all at once. There are problems for months or years before the divorce lawyers get involved. Some relationships even start out chaotic. Marriage counseling shouldn't be considered a last resort. Marriage counseling can help solve small problems before they become large problems. If problems are allowed to go unaddressed, then each day that passes can bring new irritations. Each small or large incident brings new resentments. Eventually the resentment becomes overwhelming and the relationship is beyond repair. Marriage counseling is most effective early on. The key questions are "Does each partner still love the other

partner?" and "Is each partner willing to put effort into salvaging the relationship?" If the answers to both of these questions are "Yes," then the relationship has a good chance of succeeding.

### It Takes Two to Tango

It takes the effort of both partners to make a relationship succeed. And if the relationship is in trouble, you can be pretty sure that both partners have contributed to the dysfunction. If one partner brings the other partner to counseling and, in effect, tells the counselor "My partner is the problem. Here, fix them," then the relationship is probably doomed. The partner who thinks the other one is the problem will be unwilling to make changes. Why should they if they're not the problem? However, if both partners are willing to look at their contribution to the relationship problems and both are willing to make changes, then the relationship has a much better chance of succeeding.

### Think of the Children

Suppose after a few sessions it becomes obvious to one or both partners that the relationship is over. Perhaps one of the partners just came to counseling to be able to say they gave it one last try. Does this mean that further counseling is not important? If there are children



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involved, then just because the marriage is over does not mean that the relationship is over. Divorce is hard enough on children, without the added stress of warring parents who use the children as weapons to attack the other parent. This is unfair to the children and is not ending the relationship with dignity. There will be visits to arrange, parent-teacher conferences, doctor's visits, vacations, birthdays, etc. You may not want to live together anymore, but you must get along well enough to provide safe, healthy environments for the children. Counseling can help each parent learn to end the relationship with dignity and mutual respect so that the children can grow up with two loving parents who model responsible adult behavior.

## Life after Divorce

Relationships end but life goes on. If your relationship ended poorly, chances are you were not really right for each other. Without guidance, chances are excellent that, even with the best of

intentions, you will repeat the same mistakes that got you into this mess to begin with. You may even invent some new mistakes. Obviously there was something that attracted you to your former partner to begin with. To avoid making the same mistakes again, you must understand why you are attracted to someone who is really unsuitable for you and then learn to make better choices in the future. Often, this involves developing a deeper understanding of who you are and what you want from life. It helps to have a counselor who is skilled in relationships to guide you through this process and offer you unbiased advice and insight.

So the lessons are get marriage counseling early, both partners need to make changes to make the relationship work, if the relationship must end, end it with dignity for your sake and for the sake of any children involved and examine your preferences and dating practices so that the next relationship can be a lasting, loving one. Divorce represents both an end and a new beginning!

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