

## ***RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING - MAKE IT WORK!***

***By Charmaine Roth  
Couples Counsellor.***

The major aim of relationship counselling is to increase knowledge about yourself, your partner and how you interact. Therapy becomes effective if you recognize unhelpful patterns and develop new ones. Here are some things you can do to improve the chances that couples therapy is worth the cost and time you are willing to put in:



### ***1. HAVE MORE GOALS FOR YOURSELF THAN FOR YOUR PARTNER:***

Of course you want your partner to change to the way you would like them to be, otherwise you wouldn't be looking into couples therapy! Focusing on your partner and trying to change them doesn't work - you don't get what you want. Working on yourself in the presence of your partner can have a positive impact. A good counsellor will get each of you to focus on what it is you want. How do you behave as a partner? What are your behaviours? Do you nag and argue or do you withdraw? What is the impact of these behaviours on the other? The answers to these questions and others like them will help make up your personal therapeutic goals - don't worry, each of you will need to do the same work.

### ***2. TAKE A RISK AND PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE:***

Try to understand what's behind the feelings. Often in a relationship we feel anger, resentment, annoyance and judgement for the other. Counselling will help you dig deeper and find out your triggers. If you notice that your attitude is resistant, it might be because you are afraid to confront certain thoughts and feelings. Once you get the courage to allow yourself to understand what is "beneath" the feelings you will be more vulnerable and known to your partner. The obvious response to this will be compassion and understanding. A good counsellor will make sure that the session is a safe place for you.

### ***3. PUT IN THE TIME:***

Couples counselling is time intensive. The greater the conflict the more time it will take. What happens between sessions is crucial. You both will have to make time to be with each other without distraction, so as to create a reliable connection between each other. Your counsellor will coach you.

#### 4. BE CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR PARTNER:

We all tend to jump to conclusions, and there's a good chance that we have made assumptions that may not be true and vice-versa. Be willing to clarify and test these assumptions. Stay curious about what your partner thinks and feels.

#### 5. LEARN TO BE INDEPENDENT:

We can't get all our needs met by our partners. Even in the best of relationships there will be times when you are bored, lonely, feel depressed, are worried or feel embarrassed. Rather than being a "half" a person who is completed by your partner, strive to be a "complete" person. That means learning about things you can do outside of your relationship.

#### 6. TAKE DIVORCE OFF THE TABLE-FOR NOW:

You might be considering couples counselling as a final attempt to save your relationship. Don't worry that's very common. BUT consider this: It is very hard to instill hope for the relationship when the death of it is looming. The question is not whether you are committing for life, but if you can commit right now to working hard in therapy by taking separation off the table for an agreed upon amount of time. There is always time to divorce, but there is not always time to work on your relationship. Take the risk and see what happens.