

# Does Marriage Counseling Work?

## Help for Troubled Marriages

By [Sheri & Bob Stritof](#), About.com Guide

We believe that if your marriage is having problems, you shouldn't wait too long to seek professional help.

Here's help in finding a counselor or psychiatrist and deciding if counseling will work for your marriage.

Included is information on what type of couple gets the most from marriage counseling and what type of couple receives the least from marriage counseling.

### Answer These Questions:

- Did you marry at an early age?
- Did you not graduate from high school?
- Are you in a low-income bracket?
- Are you in an inter-faith marriage?
- Did your parents divorce?
- Do you criticize one another?
- Is there a lot of defensiveness in your marriage?
- Do you tend to withdraw from one another?
- Do you feel contempt for one another?

If you answered "yes" to most of these questions, then you are statistically a higher risk for divorce than couples who have realistic expectations of one another and their marriage, communicate well, use conflict resolution skills, and are compatible with one another.

### The Effectiveness of Marriage Counseling

The science of marriage counseling is being studied in great detail these days. Although some research studies have shown that marriage counseling is not as effective as people think, that women seem to get more from it than men, and that it might not have a lasting effect on the couple's marriage, we think that receiving professional help before problems reach critical stage is beneficial to a marriage.

In 1995, *Consumer Reports* did a study of the effectiveness of psychotherapy. It was a nonscientific reader survey that gave lower marks to marriage counselors than other types of therapists.

However, a study by [AAMFT](#) shows that families do want therapy and place a high value on the experience.

### What Type of Couple Gets the Most From Marriage Counseling?

- **Answer:**
- Young couples.

- Non-sexist couples.
- Couples who are still in love.
- Couples who are open to therapy and change.

### **What Type of Couple Receives the Least from Marriage Counseling?**

- **Answer:**
- Couples who wait too long before seeking help.
- Marriages with one or the other spouse set on getting a divorce.
- Married individuals who are closed to any suggestions that may save the marriage.

### **Solutions Learned From Happy Couples**

John Gottman's research looks at happy couples for solutions. He has discovered that even though all couples experience conflict in their marriages, happy couples apparently know how to handle their disagreements because of a foundation of affection and friendship.

Unhappy couples do not have this skill.

[Gottman](#) suggests that the goal of couple therapy needs to change. Rather than trying to change marriages, he thinks counselors should teach communication skills to couples.

### **Don't Wait**

If you think your marriage is in trouble, do not wait.