

Stonebriar Psychiatric Services News & Views

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Services We Offer

Individual Therapy
Marital / Couple's
Family Therapy
Personal Life Coaching
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Medication Management
Speaking
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The Couples Therapy Connection

By Wendy Copeland, MA, LPC, ITC

What is Couples Therapy?

Couples therapy is provided for couples seeking help and support in their unique, one-on-one relationship. One of the key differences between couples therapy and other forms of therapy, such as individual or family, is the specific treatment of the dyad (two people in connection). As such, the identified patient is the *relationship*. In couples therapy, specialized treatment addresses how the individual partners relate and experience their connection. Focus is given to healing, repair, nurturance, and growth.

One of the main goals of couples therapy is to improve and/or repair the connection between two partners. Partners identify internal (within themselves) and external (outside of themselves) forces affecting their specific relationship. Attention is given to how the couple create safety in the relationship to live together and thrive, or how toxic behaviors or stressful events disrupt safety leading to disconnection and leaving the connection.

When do Couples Seek Help and Support?

Preparation and Adjustment

Couples seek therapy for a myriad of reasons. Some couples are seeking guidance and support in the launching of their relationship, such as dating or premarital counseling. Many couples desire to nurture and strengthen their relationship as they adjust to changing life stages and transitions, such as preparing for children, adjusting to being parents, preparing for adoption, adjustment to foster or adoption family changes, caring for elderly parents in the home, empty-nest adjustment and reconnection, changes in employment or relocations, etc.

Severe Distress

Highly distressed couple relationships are exceedingly painful, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Couples experiencing severe distress often report loneliness, disconnection, painful exchanges and dynamics, lack of emotional (and sometimes physical) safety, communication problems, confusion of boundaries and responsibilities, defendness and emotional walls, numbing, and deterioration of the original romantic connection. They may have encountered a serious grief or loss, such as death of a child, serious

Treatment for

Depression
Anxiety / Panic Attacks
Eating Disorders
Bi-polar Disorder
Obsessive –
Compulsive
Disorder
Compulsive Behaviors
such as sexual
addiction
Post-traumatic Stress
Disorder from past
abuse
Ryritional issues
Adjustment to life
changes

Ages Served

Adult
Adolescent
Children ages 10 & up

health issues or terminal illness, substance abuse/dependency by a partner or family member, mental illness, unemployment, and extramarital affair(s).

Couples also seek help when one or both partners have experienced trauma and/or posttraumatic stress disorder. This would include situations such as physical assault, rape, traumatized military personnel returning to civilian life and relationship, and previous childhood abuse or neglect surfacing in the romantic relationship.

Repairing and Maintenance

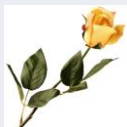
A common misperception is that couples mainly seek therapy when their relationship or marriage is on the brink of break-up or divorce. Although it is very true that many couples seek therapy because they have found themselves in a scary place of painful connection, this is not always when and why couples seek therapeutic support. Many times, couples will bring their relationship “into the shop” to provide some proactive care and maintenance.

Wise couples invest in their relationship for maintenance, not just repair!

Just as vehicles require basic oil and filter changes, checking of the tire pressure, and systems monitoring and checks, relationships require regular caregiving as well. When a car has been neglected and gone too long without regular scheduled maintenance, parts begin to break down . . . and repairs can be very expensive.



When neglect and avoidance has characterized the couple relationship, emotional pain and relationship deterioration is inevitable . . . and repair can be much more challenging. When couples utilize couples therapy for maintenance and care, they provide proactive care for that which is most precious and valuable to them, their intimate relationship.



Such couples may schedule “maintenance checks” every so often or when a particular life challenge has created extra stress and demands on their relationship. Many couples who have completed more intensive work in couples therapy and are now experiencing the benefits, continue annual, bi-annual, or quarterly visits across a year to support their ongoing growth. Couples workshops, retreats, and brief seminars can also be wonderful for revitalizing and re-energizing the couplehood relationship.



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