

5 Signs Your Relationship Needs Professional Help

A guide for couples considering therapy

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Every relationship has difficult periods. These five patterns indicate that what you're experiencing may require more than time and good intentions to resolve.

1. The same argument keeps repeating

You've had the same fight dozens of times. The topic changes (dishes, money, in-laws) but the underlying dynamic doesn't. One person pursues, the other withdraws. Or both escalate until someone shuts down. You know the script before it starts.

Gottman's research identifies this "gridlocked conflict" pattern in 69% of relationship disagreements. The content isn't the problem. The cycle is.

2. You feel more like roommates than partners

The logistics work fine. You split responsibilities, coordinate schedules, co-parent effectively. But the emotional connection has faded. You're efficient together but not close. Physical affection has dropped. You can't remember the last meaningful conversation that wasn't about tasks.

Emotional disconnection is the most common reason couples seek therapy, often years after the distance began. Sue Johnson's EFT research shows this isn't about lost feelings but about attachment needs going unmet.

3. Contempt has entered the conversation

Eye-rolling. Sarcasm meant to wound. Name-calling during fights. Mocking your partner's feelings or ideas. Contempt is different from anger. Anger says "I'm upset about this." Contempt says "You're beneath me."

Contempt is the single strongest predictor of divorce in Gottman's research, with over 90% accuracy. It erodes the foundation of respect that relationships require to function.

4. One or both of you have stopped trying

You don't bring up problems because it never leads anywhere. You've given up on being understood. You make decisions alone that used to be made together. You've mentally rehearsed the separation. You stay for the kids, the finances, or the fear of being alone, not because you believe things can change.

This "diffuse physiological arousal" and emotional flooding leads to stonewalling, the final of Gottman's "four horsemen." It looks like indifference but is often the last defense against overwhelming pain.

5. A rupture hasn't healed

An affair. A betrayal of trust. A moment when someone needed you and you weren't there. These events don't resolve on their own. Without structured repair, the wound becomes the defining feature of the relationship. Every subsequent conflict flows through it.

Attachment injuries require what Sue Johnson calls "Hold Me Tight" conversations: structured, emotionally engaged dialogues that aren't possible in the heat of everyday conflict. A therapist creates the conditions for this kind of repair.

What couples therapy actually involves

Couples therapy isn't about a referee deciding who's right. A skilled couples therapist helps you see the pattern you're both caught in, understand what each of you needs underneath the conflict, and build new ways of responding to each other.

The most effective approaches (EFT, Gottman Method) are structured and evidence-based. Most couples see meaningful shifts within 8-20 sessions.

If you recognize your relationship in three or more of these signs, consider reaching out to a therapist who specializes in couples work.

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