



HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIPS  
INITIATIVE

## **Toolkit for Couples**

### **Tip Sheet #9: Finding a Couples Counselor**

Counseling can be very helpful for couples at many different stages in their relationships. Counseling can help couples build upon their current strengths, resolve conflicts that have grown to unmanageable levels, identify solutions to challenging problems, and manage stressful life transitions, such as if they become parents or “empty nesters.”

In some ways, counseling with couples is very different from counseling individual clients in therapy. Counselors who work with couples should be skilled to understand the dynamics of couple relationships, be able to balance the unique needs and personality characteristics of both partners, and work with both partners to foster positive growth for each partner and the relationship.

To help you decide on a counselor for your relationship, ask the following questions of the professionals you are considering:

- 1. What training and experience do you have related to counseling couples?** The counselor should have specific training in theories and approaches for working with couples, since this is a unique specialty area in the counseling profession. Ideally, you can find a counselor who has worked extensively with couples, or a newer counselor who is being supervised by a more experienced couple counselor.
- 2. What is your approach to couples counseling?** There are several different approaches to couples counseling. Your counselor should be able to explain his or her theoretical approach to you in a language you can understand, without using complex, abstract theoretical terms.
- 3. How many sessions will there be?** Your counselor may have a time frame in which they like to work with couples. However, your needs and schedule may necessitate a shorter or longer program. It may not be possible to determine an exact time-line at the start of counseling, but once your counselor has a general sense of your goals for counseling, they should be able to offer a general time-line so you'll understand what time commitment will be involved.
- 4. What is the cost?** Costs of counseling for couples can vary widely, and unfortunately, many health insurance companies do not cover this service unless one partner has a diagnosable mental

health disorder. It is important to discuss costs with your counselor up front so you can make an informed decision about how much you are able to afford. If you can't afford a particular counselor's services, ask if they can provide you with referrals to more affordable services in the community.

**5. Do you have experience working with couples facing our unique situation?** If you are seeking counseling for a specific challenge in your relationship, it can be helpful to understand whether the counselor has experience specifically addressing that challenge. Certain relationship situations--such as infertility, infidelity, or substance abuse--can benefit from working with a professional who is specially trained to address those issues.

**6. Would you provide couples counseling to a couple in which abuse was occurring?** If you have experienced violence or abuse in your relationship, couples counseling is not appropriate and may not be safe. Therefore, if you've been abused by your partner, you should not seek counseling from a provider who says that they would provide couples counseling to address an abusive relationship. There are specific intervention programs for people who are abusive in relationships, and this issue is not safe to address in a couples counseling context.

**In addition to the questions above, it's also important to consider how well both of you "click" with the counselor. It's important to work with someone with whom you both feel comfortable. The more positive you both feel about the counselor, the safer you'll feel in exploring challenging issues in your relationship.**