

Questions to Ask a Marriage Therapist

Here are questions you can ask a marriage therapist on the telephone or email to learn about the therapist's practice and philosophy. Therapists on [The National Registry of Marriage Friendly Therapistssm](#) should be able and willing to answer these questions.

"Can you tell me about your background and training in marriage therapy?"

If the marriage counselor is self-taught or only workshop-trained, and can't point to significant education in this work, then consider going elsewhere.

Marriage therapy or counseling is one of the most challenging forms of therapy which means it can be risky for your marriage if you are not with someone experienced. [Marriage Friendly Therapists](#) exists because not only were couples coming to co-founders [Bill Doherty](#) and [Kathleen Wenger](#), but therapists themselves coming for their own therapy, complaining of their awful experiences. And when they were asked where they could go for marriage therapy, Bill and Kathleen did not have a good source to refer them. This is why the [Registry was created](#).

What many couples are not aware of is that you can practice marriage therapy without any experience, training, or coursework. Any counseling license (and there are many) allows anyone to see couples even if they have never seen a couple before or read anything about couples therapy. Your marriage needs an experienced therapist who also believes your marriage is worth saving.

"What percentage of your practice is marriage therapy?"

Avoid therapists who mostly do individual counseling, because they are not likely to be skilled in working with couples.

Marriage therapy is the most difficult form of therapy and you deserve someone who has the background, training, [values](#), and experience to assist your marriage.

"Of the couples you treat, what percentage would you say work out enough of their problems to stay married with a reasonable amount of satisfaction with the relationship?" "What percentage break up while they are seeing you?" "What percentage do not improve?"

If the therapist say "100%" stay together, this sounds unrealistic and dishonest. If the therapist reports that less than 70 percent of couples stay together and work out their problems, then this success rate is below average (based on studies of the effectiveness of marriage therapy). If the therapist won't answer the question or says that staying together is not a measure of success, then this therapist may not be supportive of marital commitment.

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"How do you see the importance of keeping a marriage together when there are problems?"

If the therapist responds only with the language of consumer self-interest ("I just try to help both parties decide what they need to do for themselves"), then follow up with a question about whether the therapist holds any

personal values about the importance of marital commitment. If the therapist just repeats the mantra of people doing what they have to do for themselves, then go elsewhere if your values differ.

"Are you part of a professional association that credentials marriage therapists?"

Although some psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers and mental health counselors are well-prepared in marital therapy, you can be more confident if the therapist holds a state license in marriage and family therapy and is a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

Marriage Friendly Therapists hold a variety of licenses but all have agreed to our values statement and have the experience, training and background to be part of us.

"What is your experience working with couples in my situation?"

Here you can describe your unique situation—premarital, cohabiting, remarried, same sex, dealing with chronic medical illness, etc. The therapist should be willing to be frank about his or her experience and willingness to work with couples in your situation.

Adapted from: Doherty, William J. (2001). Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart. New York: Guilford.

<http://www.marriagefriendlytherapists.com/questionstoaskatherapist.php>
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