



# Aims and Goals of Couples' Therapy

Often, couples get into a loop where they employ unhelpful behavioural patterns (or survival strategies) to mask their vulnerability. This triggers a similar response in their partner, who then becomes defensive and so on.

For example, one person may feel abandoned or rejected, becoming reactive and critical as a result. In response, their partner feels inadequate and withdraws, which makes the first person feel more alone. This makes them more critical, which results in their partner withdrawing from them further, and so the loop continues.

Therefore, one key aspect of couples' therapy is to help couples feel vulnerable with each other and learn to express that vulnerability to their partners, rather than being defensive or attacking.

## Empathy and empowerment

Empathy is a key component in couple relationships. When we feel stressed, sad, angry or upset, we need to be understood and soothed. If our partner holds us, emotionally or physically, it helps us feel better and it lowers our stress levels.

Another key part of couples' therapy is helping partners develop emotional intelligence and maturity by becoming more reflective and thoughtful, rather than reactive. It's interesting to observe that many of us will do this outside of the relationship. However, we might struggle to apply these same communication skills with our partners.

This enables couples to become sources of safety rather than danger to one another. It also involves moving from familiar and habitual patterns to a more conscious way of being with each other.

Therefore, much of the work helps people to move from disconnection to connection; disempowerment to empowerment. It is very empowering to be able to take better charge of your emotional states, to know how to communicate these with clarity and respect to your partner, and receive what they are saying to you with empathy.

To many, this may seem impossible, but these skills can be learned and developed with the help and support of a skilled therapist.

Finally, couples need to be willing to undertake this journey with each other with the understanding that sometimes it won't be perfect and that they will make mistakes along the way. Being committed and willing to work on your relationship and learn from one another is absolutely vital to successful therapy.

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