



## I THINK MY COUPLES THERAPY IS MAKING THINGS WORSE

To start, we want to say,

***We are so sorry you are having issues both in your marriage and in your couple's therapy.***

The first step we want you to take is to read the pages on Domestic Violence and Primary Abuse so that you can identify whether or not you are in an abusive relationship.

If you still aren't sure after reading those pages, it might help you to know that most victims would say that they are not experiencing abuse. The confusion in trying to name what is happening can be a significant clue that you may be in an abusive relationship.

If you determine that you may be in an abusive relationship, this page about why your couple's therapy may be making things worse will illuminate which additional problems the couple's therapy is adding to what is already a very challenging experience.

*Most therapists are not professionally trained to diagnose emotional and physical forms of domestic violence. We find it typical for therapeutic educators to believe that specialized training beyond the few hours therapists receive in school should only be required of those therapists who serve domestic violence victims and perpetrators. Numerous published experts and we at The MEND Project believe this to be a seriously flawed stance.*

### HOW CAN YOU DETERMINE IF COUPLE'S THERAPY IS MAKING THINGS WORSE?

If you are experiencing chaos or confusion in your couple's therapy your therapist is likely not trained to handle the problems you are presenting. If your couple's therapist is implying that you are in any way responsible for the bad behaviors of your partner you are likely with a therapist who does not have the expertise to diagnose your problems accurately.

Understanding that active abuse cannot be healed in therapy as a couple is of crucial importance for you understand. If there is abuse, then abuse is the ONLY key issue that needs to be addressed.



**Attempting to address abuse through couple's therapy is like wrenching a nut the wrong way; it just gets even harder to undo than it was before.** (Lundy Bancroft, Why Does He Do That)

You need to be aware that if you find yourself in an abusive intimate relationship (physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, sexual), and your Alleged Perpetrator suggests "couple's" or "partner's" therapy as a way to work things out, this prompt is a common trap used by Alleged Perpetrators to further crush your spirit.

An uninformed, untrained therapist focuses only on the feelings of their clients', rather than the reality of the situation. This approach will not only re-traumatize and damage you further, but reinforce the Alleged Perpetrator's feelings, embolden his behaviors, and support him in avoiding accountability, repentance, and, ultimately, the possibility of restoration.

If your therapist or counselor ever tells you to better meet your abusive partner's needs in order to stop the abuse, s/he is not equipped to handle such cases.

No amount of behavioral change on your side will change his false idea of your role in his life. You are not meant to live a silent, fearful life with your partner. And he is not meant to abuse. These are core, foundational problems that he (the Alleged Perpetrator)

must address within himself that have nothing to do with you or your behavior.

**If a therapist or pastor ever reinforces your abusive partner's behavior and actions through such tactics as mirroring, empathy, sympathy, instruction, behavioral interventions, s/he is not therapeutically trained or informed in treating domestic violence and emotional abuse.**

The abuse is *never* your fault, and no amount of poor communication or lack of intimacy will ever justify his harm, damage, or assault.

There should be no focus on the Alleged Perpetrator's feelings until the perpetrator has undergone a rigorous two-year program and deep individual therapy. There are fundamental issues that must be addressed. These areas of challenge are not about you. They are about the Alleged Perpetrator's attitudes and old belief systems, his hierarchical thinking, and his blaming you

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## ARE YOU EXPERIENCING POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

- **If you are noticing new and unexplained health issues, endocrine or autoimmune issues, you may be experiencing PTSD.**
- **If you notice yourself uncontrollably shaking, and your thoughts and feelings are more fragmented than normal, having startle responses or nightmares, have difficulty sleeping or eating you are likely experiencing PTSD.**
- **The more traumatized you become the more difficult it will be to express yourself.**

Guard yourself against your trauma escalating into Double Abuse™ by working with an ill-equipped therapist, counselor, or pastor. After the Alleged Perpetrator has been questioned about your grievances and the therapist/pastor/mentor is not able to recognize their own incapability in handling the matter well, you need to recognize through what you learn in these pages that incapability and find other care.

If your couple's therapist does not understand the dynamics of Domestic Violence and Primary Abuse, the therapeutic experience becomes both fraudulent and creates Double Abuse™ and CPTSD. Complex PTSD is a much more difficult form of trauma to heal. You may want to take a preliminary PTSD test. We recommend that you follow up with an individual therapist who specializes in PTSD and CPTSD.

for his behavior. These skewed perceptions are problems of the perpetrator's worldview. The therapist should focus on the Alleged Perpetrator's belief systems rather than his feelings. If these entrenched beliefs and behaviors are not addressed first, there will be no change in his behavior and couple's therapy will become chaotic and harmful. Your counselor or therapist should recognize and clearly state that the abuse is not about you, nor is it your fault in any way.

Victim blaming and false accusations have the potential to arise when the Alleged Perpetrator's feelings are validated and patterns are disguised or being manipulated. The issue of abuse needs to be uncovered and brought to light before any other relational problems can even begin to be addressed. Abuse is a one-way problem where there is one victim and one perpetrator. Ultimately, couple's therapy is designed to tackle interpersonal relational problems (like communication), which may be preventing you from connecting as a couple.

## Guidelines for Effective Couple's Therapy

*"The technical neutrality of the therapist is not the same as moral neutrality. **Working with victimized people requires a committed moral stance.** The therapist is called upon to bear witness to a crime. [He or] She must affirm a position of solidarity with the victim. This does not mean a simplistic notion that the victim can do no wrong; rather it involves an understanding of the fundamental injustice of the traumatic experience and the need for a resolution that restores some sense of justice. This affirmation expresses itself in the therapist's daily practice, in her language, and above all in her moral commitment to truth-telling without evasion or disguise"* (Herman, Trauma and Recovery, pg. 135).

Equality, respect, and reciprocity in communication should be the primary goals of couple's therapy, and these cannot happen if an individual does not believe in the equality and respect of their partner.

Understanding the elements of Double Abuse™, and that the abuse you experience is not your fault is essential for you to understand.

***What happened to you was a crime, and you deserve an advocate. If you have issues you would like to work on with a couple's counselor, wait until your partner has been completely abuse free for at least two years.***

There are very few therapists who are trained and capable in dealing with abuse in the context of couple's therapy. The Marriage Recovery Center is one such place. It is important that you find people who will support you because healing cannot occur in isolation. **You need supportive connections.**