



HOW TO FIND THE HELP YOU NEED

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If destructive patterns have become entrenched in your relationship, choose a more intensive intervention. While marital therapy is helpful, it is often difficult to find good therapists who will actually help (and many therapists will make things worse). I often recommend that couples consider a weekend experience first because (1) you will often see more improvement than you would in 20 sessions with a therapist, (2) it is cost-effective, and (3) a weekend away gives you the momentum for real change that runs deeper than what you can often get from weekly hour-long sessions.

1. Marriage Encounter (wwme.org, 810-795-0568) is an excellent, time-tested enrichment weekend for any couple. It is done from a Catholic Christian perspective, although non-Catholics would be very comfortable. These weekends use brief testimonials from other couples and letter-writing exercises to improve communication.

2. Retrouvaille (retrouvaille.org, 313-237-6052) is like Marriage Encounter, only this weekend is for couples who are in trouble. Often couples who are struggling with infidelity, longstanding conflict, and/or are actively considering divorce will participate. I have seen many couples who were close to divorce experience intense healing and go on to build very satisfying marriages through this program.

3. Imago Relationship weekend (imagorelationships.org, 800-729-1121). Based on the bestselling book by Harville Hendrix, Getting the Love You Want, this weekend will help you to understand how your unresolved emotional issues led you to choose your spouse, and how understanding these issues for both of you holds the key to your own transformation. This is a tremendous and powerful weekend of healing. If you have been in therapy and/or are aware of your childhood wounds, then this weekend will likely be very positive. If you are not sure, get a newer book by Hendrix and his wife, Helen Hunt, Making Marriage Simple, to see if this approach makes sense to you.

(Note: I am not a fan of many other marriage conferences and retreats often put on by churches because they typically do not teach and help you develop practical skills. Insight and motivation are great, but most of us need help practicing new behavior. So, before investing in any other program, first find out if it includes skill practice.)

Relationship Therapy: Relationship therapy is often not covered by insurance companies. Be sure to interview prospective therapists thoroughly, clarifying their assumptions about spirituality, marriage, and divorce, etc. See my book How to Find the Help You Need (ISBN: 0-310-20111-X) for tips to develop a strategy.

Recovery Groups: If you or your partner is in recovery (from alcohol, sexual issues, etc.), then I highly recommend looking into Recovering Couples Anonymous (recovering-couples.org). These 12-step groups do a tremendous job helping people to integrate their individual recovery with ongoing relationship building.