

Love Therapy for Married Couples

By Jill Peyton

“Love Therapy for Married Couples” is a 7 week group work course that helps couples find their way out of distress and conflict to the satisfying and fulfilling relationship they envisioned when they said “I do”.

The course is designed to compliment a workbook that presents six steps to developing a healthy marriage. Each week one of the six steps is studied and discussed. Issues such as how to stay in control of feelings and thoughts, in order not to get drawn into emotional reactivity with significant others are addressed. A seventh session is held approximately two months after the group ends to recapitulate the material, and to determine what improvements couples have made in their personal lives and marital relationships.

The foundational truth that this workbook and the course were developed out of, is unconditional love, or agape love, as the Bible terms it.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.”
(1 Cor. 13:4-8, Revised International Edition)

The challenge in marriage, as in all important relationships, is how to love unconditionally. How in the world can I love unreservedly, someone who is unresponsive to my needs, demanding, annoying, and self-centered? (If those adjectives don't fit, feel free to fill in the blanks for your own spouse!) Nevertheless, it can be done... my husband Tom and I are living proof. That is why I have written Love Therapy for Married Couples.

Six Steps to Having A Healthy Marriage; or Six “C’s” to Unconditional Love

- 1. Construct a separate identity; be your own person.**
- 2. Communicate respectfully; learn to listen.**
- 3. Control feelings, behaviors, and beliefs; don't let circumstances control you.**
- 4. Conflict resolution; learn to compromise.**
- 5. Communal spirituality; share beliefs and values.**
- 6. Cultivate intimacy; tend to the first five steps and like a well watered garden, intimacy will grow.**

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As mentioned before the information in the manual is designed to be studied chapter by chapter, week by week, as part of a seven-week group work course. Each chapter is only a few pages long, so as not to overwhelm the reader. They are packed with substance, however, and the workbook in the back of the book consists of exercises to be completed as homework each week. This way the material can be better assimilated and remembered.

As you can see the six steps begin with self. Before I can become a contributing, caring partner, I must become a whole, well developed self. You will also notice that I am writing in the first person. The reason for this is that I am speaking to myself as much as to you, the reader. Through my own trials I have learned much of what I am imparting here.

The second step is about communication. That is the number one issue that brings couples to therapy. Learning to listen carefully and reflect back what you have heard is probably the most effective communication tool couples can acquire. Another important part of good communication is learning how to be noncritical and nonjudgmental, and how to give corrective feedback in a constructive manner.

Number three is about getting in touch with feelings and beliefs. Expressing feelings and thoughts in appropriate and genuine ways is something that is increasingly difficult for many couples as they go on in their marriages. Understanding the belief systems and themes that control thought processes is key to controlling and changing inappropriate and undesirable behavior.

Practicing conflict resolution is step number four. Learning to compromise is how we accomplish it. Most of us do this fairly well in business and with friends and acquaintances. But at home we tend to want our own way. Because conflict can be about power and control, the one with the most power usually gets his/her way.

Step number five is sharing our spiritual lives with each other. This is a very delicate undertaking, but the rewards are enormous and can be soul satisfying and everlasting.

The last and probably the most difficult of all the steps to having a satisfying, committed marriage is about cultivating intimacy. True intimacy is a lengthy process made up of trust, vulnerability, and acceptance. It doesn't happen overnight. When the first five steps just described have been well practiced and learned, intimacy naturally begins to happen. Many people mistake sexual intimacy for real intimacy. Certainly sexual relations are part of intimate behaviors. But true intimacy covers much more.

In the workbook section in the back of the workbook, there are exercises that reflect each week's lesson to be completed. These are worksheets and questionnaires that will help persons retain the material.

Just as at the end of the Love Theory, Love Therapy course, there is a two month break for couples to assimilate the material studied. At the end of that time another session is scheduled. Partners come together in the group to discuss what they have learned and how they have benefited from the material and the group process.