
Selecting a Catholic Marriage Counselor



A guide for Catholics seeking to promote, build, heal, or rebuild their marriage with the help of a counselor.

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What is so important about finding a Catholic counselor?

The counselor is cultivating a field that God himself established. A counselor (aka therapist, psychologist, social worker, etc.) should have a firm understanding of the human person and the purpose of life that couples are called to engage. Counselors are trained to understand and help guide you to change patterns of thinking and behaving. They are trained to provide assessment and counseling to people experiencing emotional, behavioral, and/or interpersonal concerns. A good Catholic counselor should integrate this science with faith... where science does not try to replace faith nor does it try to ignore faith. If you cannot find a Catholic Counselor it would be our hope that you will at least find one that respects your faith.

Selecting a counselor...

Interview your counselor

Make sure that any counselor you select is committed to keeping marriages together. It is important to ask questions to learn about the counselor's training and value orientation. You can do this on the phone or during the first visit.

Sample phone conversation

Hello my name is _____. Thank you for taking my call. I am looking for help with _____. I am Catholic and it is very important to me to find someone who can support that spiritual component of my life as well as guide me with the issue(s) I am seeking help for. I was wondering if you could answer a few questions?
What are your beliefs about marriage and salvaging a troubled marriage?
What is your approach to marriage, family, and divorce?
Can you describe your background and training in marital therapy (self-taught is not an acceptable answer)?
What percentage of your practice is marital therapy (note that marital therapy is for couples not individuals and many counselors see only individuals)?
What is your stance on the Catholic view of marriage and how will your work support collateral growth and healing through the sacraments (e.g. Confession & the Eucharist)?

If the counselor is not direct or willing to engage your concern for having your Catholic faith be an integral part of the process, stay clear. If they claim to be neutral on the issues of marriage, divorce, or family emphasizing only individual fulfillment as the goal, this should be a flag suggesting they probably won't share your understanding or priorities as a Catholic.

What to expect from counseling in general...

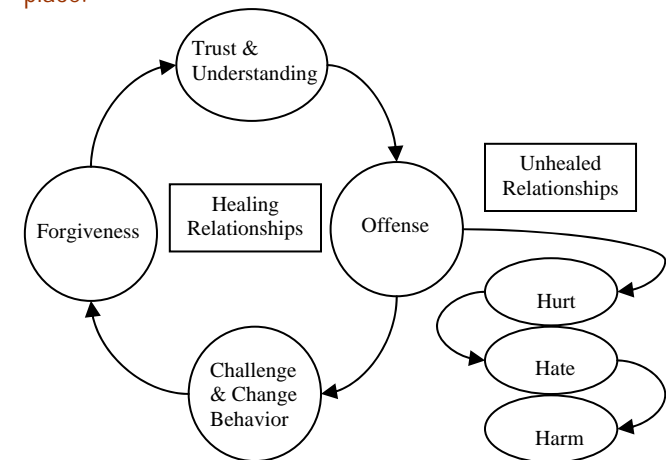
Initial Stages of Counseling

During the first few visits it is important that a good working relationship be established. Since most people have some nervousness about speaking with a counselor, it is recommended that at least three to four sessions be used as a timeframe for determining if continued work with this counselor will be productive.

To help clarify the issues for which you are seeking help, a history of you and your family's development, strengths, and past difficulties will be requested. Upon assessment of this history, you and the counselor will begin forming a plan to address the issues identified by you. Your involvement in this process is vital.

It is common for people to become discouraged or resistant to therapy during the course of treatment. Frequently, this is because one is getting close to the source of the problem and to making the necessary changes. Change of problematic behavior is the goal of most counseling, and change typically does not come without some discomfort and work.

The general concept is to assist you in healing your relationship. This means to confront the hurt, hate, or harm that has resulted from offenses to the marriage. Confronting is more than words; it is a change in behavior with the goal to forgive. The results should include greater trust and understanding. These two elements were probably present at the beginning of your relationship and led you to marriage in the first place.



Length of Treatment

This is a common question people have upon entering counseling and one that unfortunately cannot always be answered. Your counselor should work with you to establish a length of treatment at the onset, a workable period that can be re-evaluated as counseling proceeds. Flexibility and persistence will be of great

value since change and growth cannot always easily fit into a perfect time frame. As a general rule, at least eight to twelve sessions can be expected.

Combining counseling with the grace of the sacraments

Christ is the ultimate counselor and healer...allow yourself to draw deep in his love and embrace the sacraments that will heal and give you perseverance and strength.

Confession... We often find it easier to forgive others than actually forgive ourselves. Confession is a source of grace and healing that reconnects us with the Father. There is no sin too great, and God's mercy is endless. To not turn to such a gift from your loving creator as a Catholic is like being thirsty in the rain. His mercy is available and waiting for you.

Eucharist... This is the source and summit of the Christian life. Where confession washes us clean, the Eucharist, Christ himself, sustains us. It is the source of our intimate relationship with God. That intimacy, the sharing of one's body, soul, and divinity, is the perfect example of true love. It is the nourishment and foundation for intimacy and love in our own marriage. For in Catholic marriages three are united...husband, wife, and Christ.

Recommended Sites Supporting Catholic Marriage

Institute for Marital Healing
www.maritalhealing.com

Retrovaille
www.retrovaille.org

Willwoods Faith & Marriage Ministry
www.willwoods.org

Unity Restored (issues with Pornography)
www.unityrestored.com

Catholic Fatherhood
www.dads.org