


How Do I Get Him to Stay in Therapy?



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Dear Dr. Grantham:

*My husband had a very difficult childhood and his painful experience often causes problems in our relationship. He goes to a counselor off and on but always drops out after a few sessions. How do I get him to stay in therapy? **Janie L.***

Dear Janie L.:

Men sometimes have difficulty initiating and maintaining counseling. Dealing with emotional pain is particularly uncomfortable for men because they are often raised with the notion that they should be tough, not needing help for emotional matters. When counseling is needed for help with personal issues, they may consider themselves to have failed as a man. Men tend to feel discouraged when they are unable to “fix” problems. They want problems to be solved quickly and may feel a sense of failure if this is not accomplished easily.

When men go to counseling for help with a problem that affects their spouse as well, they may believe they have let down the person they love. The discomfort with talking about painful issues without a “quick fix” is often the reason men drop out too soon.

It has been my experience through the years that men do better with counseling if their spouse goes with them. The problem can then be reframed as a couples issue since childhood issues affect the marriage. The therapy focus shifts to the interaction of marital and family of origin issues—not just one person. This makes it safer for men to open up about their personal issues.

Couples counseling offers an environment where the problems, not the person, becomes the focus and the couple becomes the problem solving team. This decreases the fear of change and facing the unknowns of the counseling process. Seeing a therapist as a couple with childhood issues as the catalyst actually increases intimacy (bonding, closeness) in the marriage because both are working together to help the other through the rough spots, including how the problems affect each personally.

I suggest talking with your husband about couples counseling, using a team approach. In this setting, the counselor may see each of you in individual sessions as well as couples sessions.