

Couple Therapy for Depression

a guide for couples



An evidence-based treatment for couples where the relationship can be used as a resource for recovery.

What is Couple Therapy for Depression?

Couple Therapy for Depression helps people suffering from depression by using the relationship as a resource to help support the individual and their partner.

It is an 'evidence-based' therapy, as research has shown that this kind of couple therapy works. There are other types of talking therapies that can help individuals suffering from anxiety and depression; however, this focuses on the relationship in the context of depression.

Depression and its effect on relationships

People who are depressed often find their relationships suffer and sometimes problems in the relationship can lead to one or other partner becoming depressed or anxious. Couple Therapy for Depression deals with both the depression and the relationship distress.

Depression can affect people in lots of different ways. Typical symptoms are:

- loss of interest and enjoyment in ordinary things
- feeling tired, tearful and irritable
- wanting to be alone
- loss of interest in sex
- not being able to sleep
- loss of appetite
- not being able to concentrate
- not feeling worthy of love or of loving.

These symptoms often come with feelings of guilt, worthlessness and low self-esteem, along with loss of confidence and feelings of helplessness, all of which can have an effect on the quality of close relationships. Talking therapy is an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression.

Why consider couple therapy?

People might benefit from couple therapy for many different reasons. It may be that the relationship has broken down or that there is anxiety that it might. Sustaining a fulfilling and stable relationship is never easy. Pressures from work, money, children, family tensions and ill health can all contribute to creating problems and these problems can lead to depression and other difficulties for one or both partners. Sometimes couples can't talk to each other, and meeting with a couple therapist can open the way to better communication, which is a key part of improving relationships. Couple therapy aims to help you to achieve:

- recovery from depression
- better communication and ability to work together
- greater awareness of each of your needs
- greater understanding of your partner and yourself, and of the differences between you
- a better sense of closeness between the two of you

- being less stuck in repeating patterns in your relationships
- help with feelings of anxiety and stress in facing the challenges of your relationship and family life
- help with coming to terms with life changes such as the arrival of children, bereavement or separation
- a more stable family life
- greater confidence about the future
- an improved sexual relationship if this is needed.

How does it work?

Couple therapy helps those who are suffering from depression by reducing the kinds of things that make partners feel alone and distressed, or which push partners apart and make them feel angry with each other. It improves your relationship by helping you both to work together on the things that create unhappiness and to move on from stuck and sometimes hostile patterns of interaction. It helps you to understand each other at an emotional level as well as a practical one (how you feel and what you do). It gives you skills as well as understanding. This can lead to a happier and more fulfilling relationship in which differences between you are not so problematic. This relieves depression which in turn improves your relationship. This positive cycle improves mood and emotional wellbeing.

What does couple therapy involve?

Everyone's therapy will be a bit different but couple therapy aims to help you and your partner explore and understand more about your difficulties, and then find solutions to them. Working together with a couple therapist, you will talk about the issues that trouble you and your partner. Together, you will explore new ways to relate to each other, gaining a greater understanding of your own and your partner's feelings, and learning communication and problem-solving skills if needed. Couple therapists know that depression can affect how people behave as well as how they feel, and they help couples to regain previous strengths as well as develop new ones.

What can you expect of your couple therapist?

Your couple therapist is responsible for ensuring that your sessions take place at a regular time, in a setting where you can be sure of confidentiality. Your couple therapist will not take sides, though they may sometimes feel challenging to one or other of you. They will point out things that go on between you that you might not be very aware of, but which make your relationship less satisfying than it could be. They will help you understand the ways that depression affects both of you, and how it is connected to the distress in your relationship. They will make links between ways that you have been brought-up and what you expect from a relationship, and they will build on the strengths that you already have as a couple.



Length and frequency of therapy

There may be some variation in the number of sessions you are offered according to the way your local service is run. For Couple Therapy for Depression to be effective for most people you should have between 15-20 sessions of couple therapy over a period of six months or so. In most NHS services it is likely that you will be seen once a week for about 50-60 minutes. In some cases sessions may be offered on a less frequent basis, for example fortnightly rather than weekly. There should be a clear agreement between you and your couple therapist on these arrangements. Some couples will find they require fewer sessions and some will require more, but no therapy should just stop the moment you feel better; there has to be a process of ending.

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