



How to Work More Effectively with Couples Online: Unique Challenges and Creative Solutions

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Initial response to online couples therapy inquiry

Dear [name],

Welcome!

Thank you for your email.

If you and your [spouse/partner] would like to begin couples therapy with me please forward this email to your [spouse/partner] so we can all communicate directly with each other.

The first step is for you to complete the Couples Questionnaire. This will give me an understanding of the problems you are experiencing from each of your unique perspectives and it will save you time in couples therapy.

Here is a link to the Couples Questionnaire page of my website: [insert link].

Copy and paste these questions into a word document. When you have filled out your questionnaires return them directly to me. You do not need to share your responses with each other. As soon as I receive your completed questionnaires I will be in touch to schedule our first session.

For our first session I would like to meet you together for 2 hours. Then I will meet each of you individually for a 1-hour session. During these three initial sessions my focus will be on assessing your relationship, gaining a clear understanding of the problems you are experiencing, your main concerns, where each of you is getting stuck and what may be holding you back. After these three sessions the work of therapy will begin in earnest and all ongoing sessions will be 90-minutes long.

The HIPAA-compliant tele-platform I use is [Zoom/VSee/Doxy.me.] When we have scheduled our initial appointment, I will issue an invitation for you to join [Zoom/VSee/Doxy.me.]

Invoices are issued and payments can be made through [PayPal or other payment company.] Payment is required prior to the start of each session. If you don't have a [payment company name] account you can sign up for one at [www.paypal.com or correct payment company name.]

My fees are as follows:

- 2-hour initial relationship assessment session:
- 1-hour individual session with each partner:
- 90-minute ongoing couples session:

The best way to contact me is by email but please keep in mind that email communications over the internet may not be secure so do not include personal identifying information such as your birth date, or personal medical information in any emails you send to me.

I will not discuss ongoing couples issues with you by email but I will read anything you would like to write, and I encourage you to “cc” your [spouse/partner] so that both of you are aware of what you are sharing with me.

In seeking couples therapy, you have taken a positive step towards changing and improving your relationship. Effective couples therapy is a challenging and deeply rewarding process of personal and relational growth.

I feel privileged to say that I work exclusively as an online couples therapist and I am dedicated to bringing all my knowledge and skills to help you and your [spouse/partner] create the relationship you desire. The results you get will depend on your willingness to engage fully in this process.

If there is any further information you need please feel free to contact me.

I am excited to begin working with you!

With warm wishes,

Tips for making online couples therapy successful

You may already be familiar with tele-conferencing but from a therapeutic perspective here are guidelines to improve the effectiveness of our sessions.

I appreciate that this is a detailed list but be assured your online experience will become effortless after you go through the process a few times!



Make sure you are in a private room where you will not be overheard.



Have a strong Wi-Fi connection.



Plug in your device or have it fully charged.



Use a laptop, desktop or iPad (the screen size on a phone makes it less than ideal on an ongoing basis).



Turn off all other programs and notification alerts.



Mute/turn off phones or devices you are not using.



Position your device so I can hear and see both of you clearly.



Ideally you will be sitting next to each other for our sessions, but if this is not possible, couples therapy can still take place when you are in different locations using separate devices.



Make sure your main lighting is in front of you to illuminate your faces.



At times during our sessions it may seem like I am not looking directly at you. This is because I am looking at you through my screen! When I am looking down I am most likely taking notes. If any of this feels strange please let me know and we can make some adjustments for you to feel more at ease.



If you have young children try to schedule your sessions for when they are sleeping or being looked after by a trusted babysitter.



If your children are older let them know you wish to be undisturbed. You may decide to allow them a special treat such as a game, movie, or screen time to keep them occupied and content.



The use of earphones during individual sessions will enhance your privacy.



Let me know if you wish to have a quick online test run. I will happily arrange this. It should take no more than 10 minutes.

Sample email scheduling initial session

Dear [name],

Thank you for taking the time to complete your Couples Questionnaires which I have thoroughly read.

I would now like to schedule our initial 2-hour session. I am available on [date] at [time].

If this time is not suitable please send a few alternative dates and times that will work for you.

After we have confirmed our session you will receive an email with a Zoom invitation to my personal meeting room which is where we will have our couples therapy sessions.

I am looking forward to meeting you soon!

With warm wishes,

Couples Questionnaire

1. What is the problem that led you to decide to come to therapy?

2. How long have you and your partner been together? In what form (dating, living together, married)?

3. What initially attracted you to your partner and how did you decide to be partners?

4. What do you find most fulfilling about your relationship?

5. What was the very beginning of your relationship like? How long did this phase last?

6. What was your first disillusionment? What happened and how did you resolve it?

7. When do you feel least fulfilled in your relationship?

Couples Questionnaire continued...

8. In what significant ways are the two of you similar? Different? How do you resolve conflicts? What do you do when you are angry? What does your partner do when angry?

9. Do you spend time in activities away from your partner? If so, how often? Do you spend time alone with people who are not mutual friends? Does this create conflict in your relationship?

10. How comfortable are you doing activities away from your partner? How comfortable are you with your partner doing things away from you?

11. How safe do you feel expressing your innermost thoughts and feelings to your partner? How do you ask for emotional support from your partner when you are feeling vulnerable? Do you expect to get it?

12. Would your partner say that you are emotionally responsive to his/her vulnerability? Explain.

Couples Questionnaire continued...

13. Do you take an active, energetic role in nourishing the relationship? Does your partner do the same? How?

14. Do you support your partner's development as an individual? How (give example)?
Do you support his/her growth as an individual even when you don't agree? How (give example)?

15. Do you believe that your partner is giving at least 50% to the relationship?

16. Do the two of you have joint commitments to projects, work activities or social causes? If so, what?

17. Did you deliberately decide to create something together in one of these areas?

18. Does this project seem to add or detract from the bond between you?

19. If your relationship were a drama, movie, or book, what would it be titled? How would it end?

Resources for clients

Articles

- **Ten Questions You Should Ask Someone Before Marrying Them**
https://www.thisisinsider.com/questions-you-should-ask-your-someone-before-marrying-them-2018-11?inf_contact_key=7e89d7be2a86902920f57cc0d78ae79b680f8914173f9191b1c0223e68310bb1
- **What Is Your Love Language?** — <https://www.couplesinstitute.com/what-is-your-love-language/>

Books

- **Winifred M. Reilly: It Takes One To Tango**
https://www.amazon.com/Takes-One-Tango-Marriage-Spouse_and/dp/1501125869/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1526146272&sr=8-1&keywords=it+takes+one+to+tango
- **Katherine Woodward Thomas: Conscious Uncoupling: 5 Steps to Living Happily Even After**
https://www.amazon.com/Conscious-Uncoupling-Steps-Living-Happily-ebook/dp/B00RKWAGUU/ref=sr_1_2?crid=21HJXLX6A25XV&dchild=1&keywords=conscious+uncoupling&qid=1586968343&prefix=conscious+%2Caps%2C232&sr=8-2

Videos

- **3 Ways for Couples To Make Tough Decisions Together. Interview with Ellyn Bader.**
https://relationshipschool.net/podcast/3-ways-for-couples-to-make-tough-decisions-together-ellyn-bader-sc-194/?inf_contact_key=6b17dbc94daee8b54eeef3640e25356adcc31b62dff1276e8fb64dc377dd52a
- **The Couples Institute: Watch Pete and Ellyn Travel to Kenya** • <http://www.couplesinstitute.com/>
- **The Couples Institute: Chore Wars** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwDIgwr3QjQ>
- **The Sequence of Change** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxZDafUFWmk&t=48s>
- **Winifred Reilly Google Talk It Takes One To Tango** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuGun-lFt70>
- **Deepak Chopra on Managing Stress During Coronavirus**
<https://www.today.com/video/deepak-chopra-on-managing-stress-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-81928261538>
- **Stan Tatkin TED Talk: Relationships are Hard, But Why?**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xKXLPuju8U&t=16s>
- **Stan Tatkin's Welcome Home Exercise for Couples** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9FBdC2Kykg>
- **Esther Perel TED Talk: The Secret to Desire in a Long-term Relationship**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa0RUmGTCYY>
- **Esther Perel TED Talk: Rethinking Infidelity: a talk for anyone who has ever loved**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q&t=949s>

Resources continued...

- **Horse Therapy — Peyo the Love Stallion Visits Sick People**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4HEuLn6Bdg>
- **Lessons of the Geese** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hazitrzxhPk>
- **Al Pacino's "Inches" Speech** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ku3E7NPRuE>
- **Alain de Botton on: Love** • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ6K_f7oSdg&t=567s
- **What We Can Learn about Stress from Baboons: Robert Sapolsky**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4UMyTnlaMY>
- **The School of Life: The Sanity of 'Madness'**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=tYfQSyDuriA
- **Brené Brown Video: Empathy** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw&t=1s>
- **Brené Brown Video Boundaries**
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=brene+brown+boundaries
- **Michelle Weiner-Davis Divorce Busting & Strategies for Relationship Success**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiRwCv50HQ4>
- **How playing an instrument benefits your brain** — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0JKCYZ8hng>
- **Breathe, Push... Valerie Kaur** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7QIKG70LE>
- **The Backwards Brain Bicycle** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0>
- **Hedy Schleifer tells the story about Yumi's white torn jacket**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCDMzInhLy0&feature=youtu.be>
- **Jill Bolte Taylor — My Stroke of Insight** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyyjU8fzEYU>
- **Being CEO can kill a marriage. Here's how to prevent that.**
<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/30/success/ceo-marriage/index.html>
- **Be First and Last — Eric Thomas** • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw__KtCjCfU&t=108s
- **Brendon Burchard: Nurturing Great Relationships** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u99qmt0j5A4>
- **Lisa Lund Repair** • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1v6j_4_NtQ&t=1335s
- **Gottman — Four Negative Patterns That Predict Divorce**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=625t8Rr9o6o&feature=youtu.be>
- **How a Married Couple Rebuilt Their Lives after a Tragic Crime**
<https://www.today.com/video/how-a-married-couple-rebuilt-their-lives-after-a-tragic-crime-1455671875774>

Resources continued...

- **Dan Savage: The Price of Admission** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1tCAXVsClw>
- **Backward Bike Video** • <http://kottke.org/15/04/the-backwards-bike-will-break-your-brain>
- **Chinese Farmer Parable** • <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OX0OARBqBp0>

Websites

- **Deepak Chopra Free Meditations** • <https://chopracentermeditation.com/>
- **Tara Brach Free Meditations** • <https://www.tarabrach.com/>
- **Jack Kornfield Free Meditations** • <https://jackkornfield.com/meditations/>
- **Insight Timer Free Meditations** • <https://insighttimer.com/>
- **Love Languages** • <https://www.5lovelanguages.com/>

Substance Abuse

- **Substance Use/Abuse** • <https://addictionsandrecovery.org/alcohol-abuse-alcoholism.htm>
- **Alcohol and COVID-19: what you need to know**
http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/437608/Alcohol-and-COVID-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf