

Script for Phone Interview

I normally find I'm returning calls that have gone through to voicemail so when I ring back I say "Hello, this is [therapist's name] returning your call. Is now a good time for us to talk for a few minutes?"

Get basic information:

- *Can you give me a headline of why you are interested in couples therapy at this time?*
- *What is your partner's name?*
- *Are both of you wanting to work on an issue and deepen your relationship, or is one of you leaning out and thinking of ending the relationship?*
- *Have you been to couples before? Was this online?*

Assessing Motivation

- *Have you or your partner spent some time on my website?*
- *Was your partner receptive when you raised the idea of couples therapy?*
- *What do you think is their level of interest in participating?*
- *Tell your partner if s/he has any questions s/he can reach out to me.*

I find that people really appreciate online couples therapy because of the restrictions in travel right now, or they may already be in a long-distance relationship, or an international couple living in different parts of the world.

I love working with people who are highly motivated to create strong, healthy relationships because these are the couples who get the best results. If your partner is ambivalent, or you don't know where their heart is about this, ask them to give me a call and we can talk about their motivations.

Screening

There are 4 situations that I find do not respond well to couples therapy. These are called the pre-conditions to couples therapy. What I mean by this is a different intervention is necessary first. I want to be clear with you about what they are so we can make sure that no one is at risk by participating in couples therapy.

1. Violence

- *What happens when you and your partner get into an argument or fight?*
- *What is the worst thing that has happened during an argument?*

- *Are you feeling pressurised by your partner to stay in this relationship?*
- *Do you ever feel afraid?*
- *Are there or have there ever been any court orders/protection orders?*
- *Have you or your partner ever done harm to each other out of anger?*
- *Couples therapy doesn't work if there is violence or domestic abuse so if hitting or being hit is a regular feature in your relationship I will not work with you. I want to be emphatic on this point.*

2. Untreated severe addiction

Couples therapy doesn't work if there is a drug or alcohol problem that is so severe that someone belongs in rehab or needs to engage in stabilising treatment first.

3. Closure therapy/active infidelity

It doesn't work if either of you has decided with certainty to end the marriage and wants to inform your partner of this with a 3rd party present, then this is not a good fit for couples therapy. Couples therapy is also challenging when one partner is having an ongoing relationship with someone else at the same time. If this is your situation what I can offer is a different type of counselling called discernment counseling...

4. Depression

The 4th situation that is a problem is if there is an undiagnosed, an under-treated, or an untreated mental illness. When there is a problem because a person is bi-polar or has a mental condition that requires medication and they stop taking their meds without supervision, they need to go back to their doctor first and say I can't tolerate these meds or explain the problem with their treatment. Couples therapy does not fix a psychiatric problem.

But I want to be clear, if you or your partner require medication and you are being correctly treated then couples therapy is the same as it is for any couple.

Do any of those conditions apply to you at all?

Based on what you've said so far it seems like you will be a good fit for couples therapy so the next thing I want to ask you is if you have strong internet connectivity.

Yes!

Therapist's decision point:

1. Ask partner to call me
2. Ask caller to talk to partner about what they each want
3. Ask caller for their email address and send letter with next steps.

Courtesy of Nancy St. John