

Judith McFarland M.A.

LICENSED MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST

Successful therapy leads to change — in you and in your most important relationships.



Judith McFarland: Originally from Massachusetts, I moved to California as a young adult with a BA in Psychology. I worked in the insurance industry, specifically Workers' Compensation, for a number of years before returning to the University of San Francisco to earn an MA in Psychology. I have found that counseling in its many forms is my true vocation.

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More About Couple's Therapy With Me

From time to time I receive an email request for some specific information about how I work with couples. I have written this for you. Please call to discuss anything in more depth.

Marriage and Family Therapists are specifically trained to work within the realm of relationships of all kinds. In my Master's program I received specialized training in couple's therapy, family therapy, child therapy, and group therapy, to name just a few areas. Since graduate school I have participated in many kinds of continuing education, much of which has been directed at expanding my skills in the areas of couple's therapy. I have trained with the Gottman Relationship Institute, and for the past 5 years have been deeply involved in training at The Couple's Institute in Menlo Park. Most of the time my practice contains 50-60% couples.

Sometimes, client are interested in how I work with couples where one partner is ill, depressed, and/or has a substance abuse or addiction problem. These issues present fairly often in couple's therapy as such problems are troubling in an intimate relationship. I often refer one, or sometimes both, partners for individual treatment while we continue couple's work. That may mean medication and individual therapy, medical evaluation by a specialist, or even rehab of some kind. If a partner is already in treatment I will ask them to authorize me to contact their treating provider so that our work can be coordinated. Therapy can be useful in helping each partner gain a deeper understanding of the other's experience as well as setting realistic goals for change.

What about when partners have different goals? One wants to stay in the relationship and the other wants to break up. I work with my clients to have each establish both their individual goal(s) for our work together and goals for the relationship. When they are different or conflicting we work through that in session. Therapy can be a safe place to explore wants and needs that have been too painful to be discussed constructively.

What about outcomes? Early in our work I ask each member of the couple how they will know when we done. We return to those goals periodically during the therapy in order to assess whether the goals are being met, or possibly have even changed. Goals often have changed! When the decision is made to finish we explore what has transpired. I consider therapy successful when each partner can see that their functioning within the relationship has altered in ways that feel positive to them – whether or not they stay together. I have not had many couple's break up during our therapy unless that was the goal in the beginning.

I believe that many couples wait a long, long time before entering therapy. I have read articles where it is stated the average couple has been unhappy for 7 years before trying counseling. While there are many reasons for this, the end result is that good feelings are often eroded to the point that there isn't much left to work with. When people enter therapy early on, my experience is that outcomes tend to be much better, therapy goes more quickly and the end results are typically more positive.

Lastly, what is the best predictor of a successful therapy? In my practice it has been that couples attend regularly, do the homework assigned, and accept that individual change (not just your partner's change) will be required. I am very directive in therapy and can teach you many tools. But you have to use them! Thanks for reading this.

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