



Couple Therapy for Depression

What skills can service users expect their therapists to have?

What is Couple Therapy for Depression?

Couple Therapy for Depression is a type of talking therapy that can help people with their relationship and the emotional difficulties that sometimes arise when there are problems between partners. There are many different types of couple therapy but what is described here is a particular type of couple therapy that has been developed to help people suffering from depression. There are also other types of talking therapies that can help those suffering from anxiety and depression.

Depression

People who are depressed often find their relationships suffer and sometimes problems with our relationships can lead to one or other partner becoming depressed or anxious.

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

These symptoms often come with feelings of guilt, worthlessness and low self-esteem, along with loss of confidence and feelings of helplessness. It is estimated that about 2.6% of adults in the U.K. suffer from depression and 11.4% suffer from a mixture of anxiety and depression.

Couple Therapy for Depression

Couple therapy for depression aims to help couples understand the ways in which difficulties in their relationship can contribute to depression in one (or sometimes both) partners. Often couples find it hard to talk openly and honestly with each other. Meeting with a couple therapist can open the way to better communication, and this seems to be a key part of improving relationships.

People 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.

How does it work?

Couple Therapy has been shown to be of value for those who are suffering from depression and it has been used as a treatment for anxiety and depression for many years. It aims to improve relationships by helping couples to identify and then work together on the things that create unhappiness, helping both you and your partner move on from stuck and even hostile patterns of relating. This should lead to a

happier and more fulfilling relationship and relieve depression (which in itself often helps to improve the relationship). This positive cycle leads to improve mood and emotional well being.

Couple therapy for depression often focuses on helping couples to:

- communicate more openly and clearly
- be more aware of their partner's needs
- become less stuck – for example, repeating patterns in their relationships
- have a greater understanding of their partner and themselves
- manage feelings of anxiety and stress which arise from the challenges of their relationship and family life
- come to terms with life changes which might have triggered depression, such as becoming parents or losing a loved one.

Couple therapy can have benefits such as:

- a more stable family life
- self-discovery
- an improved sexual relationship
- reduced jealousy
- Increased confidence

What does Couple Therapy for Depression involve?

Everyone's therapy will be a bit different. But usually couple therapy will help you and your partner explore and understand more about your difficulties, working together with a therapist, you will open up the issues that seem to troubling you and your partner

Starting off

Couple therapists work hard to help you feel respected and to create a setting in which you feel comfortable to talk. Many people find it difficult to speak about their problems with someone they don't know, and it is important that your therapist can help you feel that the therapy is a safe and confidential place in which to discuss things that may have been bothering you for some time.

Talking openly with your partner about the problems for the first time can feel difficult and you may be worried about what your couple therapist thinks about you. Your therapist will help you to make sense of any worries you may have about starting the sessions. They should give you the feeling that they know that starting therapy can be difficult and give you a sense that they will try to understand what life is like for you and your partner and that they are not judging you or your partner in any way.

Your couple therapist will usually try to get a good a picture of what you and your partner are finding difficult in your relationship and how this is affecting you both.

Although your couple therapist will need to gather some basic information about you and your life, most of the time they will let you take the lead. Sometimes your couple therapist may suggest ways for your partner and you to improve your communication and this may occasionally involve some “homework”. Mostly, however they will be interested in helping the two of you have a conversation so that you can find your own ways to resolve the problems you are having.

Explaining how couple therapy might work for you

Early on your couple therapist should explain how the approach works, and help you to think about how it might help you and your partner. They will want to make sure that this is the right approach for you and that you and your partner are committed to undertaking the therapy.

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. Wherever possible they ought to let you know if they expect to be away or need to change the time of your sessions.

Length and frequency of therapy

There may be some variation in the number of sessions of you are offered according to the way your local service is run. However it is worth bearing in mind that if you are having some relationship problems and you are depressed, it is recommended that you have up to 20 sessions of couple therapy over a period of six months. 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.

Ending Couple Therapy

Your couple therapist should be clear about the number of sessions available and when the therapy will end. They will want to know how you feel about ending and give you and your partner time to talk about this. Your couple therapist will also help you both look to the future and think about the changes you have made. This could include thinking about how you will deal with any further problems and challenges once you have finished the therapy.

Finding out more

Some websites with helpful information about relationships, counselling and psychotherapy include:

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)	www.bacp.co.uk
Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships	www.tccr.org.uk
Relate	www.Relate.org.uk
One plus One	www.thecoupleconnection.net/