

Relationship therapy

Relationship therapy is a form of support where a therapist assists you and your partner(s) navigate specific issues in your relationship.

Common issues that are addressed in relationship therapy:

- **Communication difficulties** — when conversations often turn into an arguments, or when it feels like the other person never understands you, or when you have stopped talking at all
- **Trust issues** — including recovering from betrayal or infidelity
- **Life transitions** — new baby, job loss, moving, grief or other events that put relationships under strain
- **Growing apart** — when two people feel more like strangers or housemates than partners
- **Deciding whether to stay or leave** — clarify whether the relationship will continue and if so under what conditions
- **Sexual functioning or intimacy concerns** - differences in libido, sexual difficulties or sexual miscommunication

Why it can work

Your therapist will aim to help identify the underlying issues that might be contributing to your difficulties and then help you build the skills to manage or overcome it. Having a trained and unbiased third party in the room can help you understand and address problematic cycles that perpetuate relational distress, dysfunction and disconnection.

Ultimately we aim to provide a safe, structured space for you and your loved one(s) to work on one of the most important parts of life; how we connect with each other.

How does it work:

Relationship therapy has 3 phases: Assessment; Active Work; and Consolidation.

Phase One: Assessment

In the Assessment Phase your therapist will gather relevant information such as your relationship history and presenting problems. They will aim to identify the core issues of your relationship and may include exploring each person's attachment style and specific emotional needs.



The Assessment phase includes three components:

1. **Joint Initial:** This is the very first session you and your partner/s will attend. Your therapist will try to understand what has brought you to therapy and what you are hoping to achieve. You may provide some history about the relationship and the problems you are experiencing.

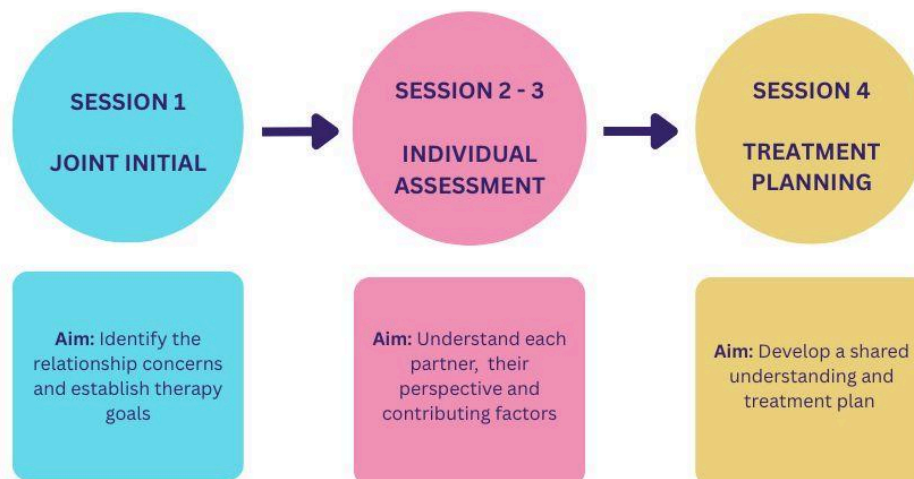
The overarching purpose of this session is to know *what are the problems in the relationship and how these can change with therapy.*

2. **Individual Assessment Sessions:** After the initial intake all partners will have their own individual session with the therapist. This is an important part of the assessment process as it gives you and the therapist a chance to talk openly about your history (and the way it may impact the relationship), as well as your perspective of the relationship.

This session can give you a chance to be “clumsy” with your language (i.e., talk plainly without worrying how your partner/s may (mis)interpret your words) as well as be open about how you contribute to the problem (without worrying how your partner/s will use that against you).

The overarching purpose of these sessions is to know *how each individual understands the problems in the relationship and how do they contribute to that problem.*

4 Session Assessment



3. **Treatment Planning Session:** The last component of the Assessment phase is the treatment planning session. This session is to discuss and agree to a shared conceptualisation / understanding of what is currently causing the difficulties in the relationship and what the therapist believes is the path to overcoming it (i.e., the treatment).

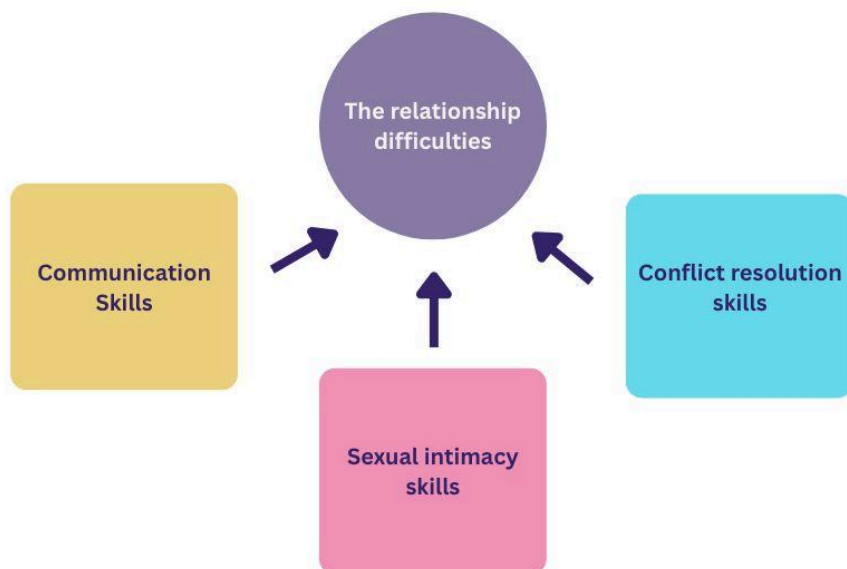
The overarching purpose of this session is to agree on *what is contributing to the problems and how we can change them in therapy*.

Phase Two: Active Treatment

This phase of relationship therapy is where the bulk of your time will be spent. This is where you and your partner/s learn and implement the necessary skills to overcome or manage your difficulties. This could include communication skills, practising conflict resolution techniques, or working through specific issues (intimacy, trust, finances, parenting) using frameworks such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), the Gottman Method and other relevant therapies.

In this phase of therapy it is expected that you attend appointments regularly and are consistently attempting to implement strategies between sessions.

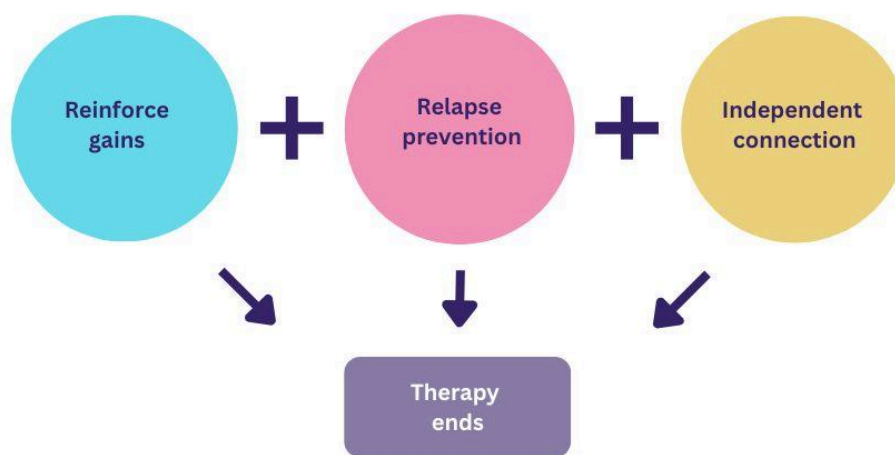
Phase Two: Active Treatment



Phase Three: Consolidation

In this last phase of relationship therapy, gains are reinforced, relapse prevention strategies are built, and couples develop tools to maintain connection independently. During this phase we would expect many of the issues that brought the relationship to treatment have been resolved or feel well managed. Sessions may be spread out slightly longer (e.g., monthly appointments) to give you a better chance to see how well you can continue to implement techniques without regular support and to independently problem solve and resolve issues.

Phase Three: Consolidation



Frequently asked questions

Do both partners have to want to come, or can one person initiate?

Yes, both partners need to be willing to attend. That said, it's very common for one person to feel more ready than the other, and that's okay. You don't both need to arrive feeling equally confident or certain.

During the assessment phase, your therapist will take time to make sure the process feels fair, safe, and worthwhile for both of you before moving forward. If at any point a partner doesn't wish to continue, therapy will stop; no one is ever pressured to stay in the process.

How frequently should we schedule sessions to see meaningful change in our relationship?

We recommend starting with at least fortnightly sessions. Meeting regularly in the early stages helps keep things moving. The more time between sessions, the easier

it is to slip back into old coping styles before new ones have had a chance to take hold.

As you and your partner begin to feel the benefits of therapy and find yourselves using new skills naturally in day-to-day life, we'll gradually move to monthly sessions to support maintaining positive changes (i.e., Phase Three: Consolidation).

How long are sessions?

Sessions are 50 minutes long. In some cases, a longer session may be a better fit for example, if more than two people are attending, if English is not everyone's first language, or if you or your partner are neurodivergent. Your therapist may also suggest a longer session depending on the complexity of what you're working through.

If you think an extended session might suit you, just let us know when booking. Availability varies by counsellor, so we recommend requesting this in advance.

How long can I expect to be in relationship therapy?

Every couple is different, so there's no one-size-fits-all answer. How long therapy takes depends on what you're working through and how you engage with the process.

What we do know is that couples who come in with a shared commitment to change, attend sessions consistently, and are open with their therapist about what is and isn't working tend to see results sooner. Typically, the more active you are, the quicker you will see results.

Can I see my relationship therapist for individual therapy?

Not directly, no. Once relationship therapy begins, your therapist's role is to support the relationship as a whole which means staying neutral and not taking sides. Seeing the same therapist individually could make that balance difficult to maintain.

That said, if your relationship therapy comes to an end and you'd like to continue seeing your therapist one-on-one, this may be possible (though will need to be discussed with your therapist directly). The one thing to be aware of is that if you choose this path, you wouldn't be able to return to that therapist for couples counselling in the future, even with a different partner.

If you're looking for individual support alongside your relationship therapy, we're happy to help connect you with another therapist.



Can I attend relationship therapy if I am going to individual therapy?

Yes, absolutely. Attending individual therapy at the same time as relationship therapy is completely fine and can often be a great combination.

In some cases, it can be helpful for your two therapists to connect and coordinate your care. This can make sure everything is working together and you're getting the most out of both. If that's something that might apply to you, we can help facilitate that conversation.

What happens in the first session

The first session is really about getting comfortable. Your therapist will walk you through what relationship therapy involves, how they work, and what you can expect going forward. You'll also cover the practical information, like limits to confidentiality and consent, so you know exactly what stays in the room.

From there, your therapist will start to explore what brought you in and what you're hoping to get out of the process. There's no pressure to have everything figured out before you arrive as your therapist knows that taking this first step can feel daunting, and will work at a pace that feels right for both of you.

What does a no secrets policy mean?

It is standard practice in relationship therapy to have a 'no secrets policy', this is important to maintain trust and neutrality. Therefore, information shared individually that is relevant to the relationship or the therapy process cannot be withheld from the other partner (e.g. breaches of relationship boundaries, ongoing affair, hidden drug/alcohol use etc). Your therapist will support you to share this information in a safe and constructive way.

However, it's important to note that disclosures regarding concerns of harm or intimate partner violence will not be considered a secret and we will support you in accessing relevant services. Intimate partner violence or family violence are often contraindications for relationship therapy and can sometimes increase risk which is explained further below.

A note on suitability

Please be aware that for safety and ethical reasons, we do not provide relationship therapy where there is ongoing domestic or intimate partner violence, child protection involvement, or court-mandated treatment requirements.



In relationships characterised by intimate partner violence, couple therapy is contraindicated, as it can be ineffective and, in some circumstances, increase risk. Individual safety and specialised intervention should be prioritised before relationship therapy is considered. If, at any stage during therapy, your therapist determines that the relationship is characterised by intimate partner violence, relationship therapy may cease and we will discuss appropriate referrals and next steps with you.

