
MARITAL HELP

WHAT TO DO WHEN A COUPLE NEEDS HELP

During the course of most Married Small Groups, there will be couples that experience tension in their marriage. Tensions are normal in marriage—all marriages. In fact, they're opportunities for God to strengthen the relationship. However, some couples experience unresolved conflict, which is different from the normal tensions of marriage. This kind of conflict doesn't lead to growth and a stronger marriage without outside help, because unresolved conflict leads to unhealthy patterns of communication that, once established, are difficult to break.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that God designed marriage, and He wants our marriages to be a picture of the kind of intimate, loving relationship that he has with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Couples who experience marital tension did not end up in your group by accident. God has placed them under your leadership. He doesn't expect you to solve their problems, but he is giving you the opportunity to point them toward the restoration only He can provide.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A COUPLE IN MY GROUP NEEDS HELP?

Here are some warning signs that a couple in your group may be struggling with unresolved conflict.

- Criticism and harsh words are directed toward a spouse during group discussion
- Unhealthy conflict arises during group discussion
- You hear talk of feeling "trapped" in the marriage
- Differing levels of commitment to group meetings
- Assigning of blame to the spouse
- Mention of arguments that remain unresolved
- Apparent emotional withdrawal from the marriage

HOW DO I LEAD A COUPLE IN MY GROUP TO SEEK HELP?

The toughest part of encouraging a couple to seek help is usually starting the conversation. Here are tips for navigating that discussion:

- **PRAY** – Praying for a healthy marriage for each of the couples in your group, especially a couple that's struggling, may be the most important thing you can do. Having a marriage that reflects the type of relationship Jesus wants to have with each one of us requires daily reliance on the Holy Spirit. Here are a few things to specifically pray for:
 - » God is the center of their marriage
 - » The Holy Spirit will show them obstacles that may be in the way of God moving in their marriage
 - » Their hearts and minds are open to hear what God has placed on your heart to say
 - » The Holy Spirit guides you in the conversations you have with them
- **AFFIRM THE COUPLE** - It's always good to start with the positive. Let them know that you know they want to have a great marriage. After all, being part of a Married Community Group is a clear sign they want to grow spiritually as a couple.

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- **DISCUSS YOUR CAPABILITIES AS A LEADER** - Tell them that you want them to continue to grow in their marriage, but you think they'd benefit from working with someone who has more expertise than you can provide.
 - **SHARE WHAT YOU'VE SEEN** - Be specific. Tell the couple that you've observed unresolved conflict or unhealthy communication. They may try to explain away what you've seen. Let them know you aren't there to condemn or assign blame, but to ask them to consider taking a next step.
 - **ENCOURAGEMENT TO PURSUE CHRISTIAN COUNSELING** - Tell them that you think they would benefit from meeting with a Christian counselor. Let them know that you're willing to contact the church on their behalf in order to get the name of a counselor in their area. The church may even be able to provide some financial assistance. It's important to note that we want couples to find a recommended Christian counselor.
 - **MAKE IT PERSONAL** - If you've benefited from the wisdom of a counselor, share your experiences. Some people have preconceived notions about counseling. Demystify false beliefs by talking about your own experiences. We prioritize the health of our bodies by having yearly physicals. Counseling is just a way to prioritize the health of our marriages.
 - **DETERMINE NEXT STEPS** - If the couple is open to seeing a counselor, help them to decide on their next step. Commit to following up with them to ensure they take this step.
 - **PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP** - These conversations can be awkward, but they're one of the best ways you can care for your group members. Some couples think that one trip to a counselor will fix their marriage. That's not the case. Usually, couples should plan for at least six meetings with a Christian counselor. If they don't feel a connection with a specific counselor, encourage them to try a different one. Make sure to follow up with them about their visits. Encourage them to prioritize those meetings.

CONSULT YOUR GROUPS DIRECTOR

When working with a couple needing help in their marriage, keep your Groups Director in the loop. They can help connect that couple with the right kind of counseling provided through Emmanuel's care ministry. Your Groups Director is here to support you as you support your group members.