

# Discernment Counseling

An Option for More Confidence & Clarity About Your Next Steps

Discernment counseling is for couples where one or both parties have some doubts or concerns about moving forward with the divorce, or are wanting to explore and understand their options which may include the possibility of a reconciliation effort before making a final decision.

It's not marriage counseling intended to solve your marriage problems. Instead it helps you look at your relationship and come to a decision with clarity and confidence about whether to move ahead with the divorce, or to make a final effort -- with help -- to restore your marriage to good health.

It's especially designed for couples where one party may want to keep trying to work on the marriage, and the other person is leaning strongly towards divorce, but is not 100% sure.

It's brief -- from 1 to 5 sessions (you decide each time whether to go back). [Alternative formats, such as daylong intensives and private retreats are offered by a limited number of practitioners.] Most of the time is one-on-one with the discernment counselor, but each session starts and ends together.

It's designed to help couples come to a clearer place about where to go with the divorce process.

The goal here is not to solve your marital problems but to see if they might be solvable, and to help you move forward -- in whatever direction -- with more confidence in your decision. You will each be treated with compassion and respect no matter how you are feeling about your marriage at the moment and no matter what you are bringing to the table.



# Discernment Counseling Frequently Asked Questions

## Who's It For?

Discernment counseling is for couples where divorce/separation feels like a real possibility or is already in process, but they're not totally sure it's the best or only choice, or the right call to make just yet. Discernment counseling is not appropriate when one person has already made a final decision to leave, nor in situations where someone feels pressured into participating or unsafe.

## What Should We Expect?

The counselor respects your reasons for divorce while trying to open up the possibility of restoring the marriage to health. The counselor emphasizes the importance of each of you seeing your own contributions to the problems and the possible solutions. This will be useful in future relationships even if this one ends. And if you choose to take divorce off the table for a while and work on the relationship, you'll have a head start for the work ahead.

## What Are the Logistics?

Standard format: Discernment sessions are generally around 2 hours (varies by practitioner). At the end of each session, the couple decides if they'd like to have another, with a limit of 5 sessions. Each in-person session starts and ends with both partners together, and includes significant one-on-one time for each person with the counselor.

Alternative formats: Daylong mini-intensives and 3-5 day private retreats are offered through Relationship Crossroads as an alternative format for couples who prefer something more focused in nature, away from the distractions of daily life, or whose lifestyle or location make this a more appealing option.

## Is This Different from Couples Therapy?

Since the goal is clarity, not relationship repair, discernment counseling emphasizes self-reflection and exploration of options in one-on-one meetings with the counselor, rather than inviting emotional risktaking in the room together, as is typical for couples therapy. This format allows each person to be really honest with themselves as they consider the situation, and to address their very different perspectives and concerns uniquely.

Also unlike couples therapy, discernment counseling is time-limited (5 sessions maximum). It is a unique process with specialized skills and training. Some couples may choose to try couples therapy after completing brief discernment counseling, and some move forward towards divorce. Discernment counseling is a unique service offered by a select group of specially trained couples therapists.

## How Do We Get More Information or Get Started?

If your mediator/attorney has not provided you with a direct referral, you can find a national list of trained discernment counselors listed at [moderncommitment.com](http://moderncommitment.com). That website also has some articles and additional information that may be helpful during this time.

For information about discernment 1-day mini-intensives and private discernment retreats (available in southern Vermont and at destinations of a couple's choosing), visit [relationshipcrossroads.com](http://relationshipcrossroads.com).

