



Minnesota Couples on the Brink

Department of Family Social Science

College of Education + Human Development

Discernment Counseling

What is discernment counseling?

Nearly everyone enters marriage with the dream of a lifelong union. But many couples reach a crisis point where divorce is on the table. Usually there is one “leaning-out” spouse who thinks that divorce might be the best way to move forward, and one “leaning-in” spouse who wants to preserve the marriage and make things better.

If this is your situation—one of you leaning out and the other leaning in—it’s a tough place to be. Traditional marriage counseling may not be helpful if one of you is not sure you want to work on the marriage at this point.

Fortunately, there is a new way of helping you, called **Discernment Counseling**. The goals are clarity and confidence about next steps for your relationship, based on a deeper understanding of what’s happened to your marriage and each person’s contributions to the problems. It’s not marriage counseling aiming to solve your problems or bring you closer, but a way to help you figure out whether your problems can be solved and whether you both want to try.

Discernment counseling focuses on three paths: staying married as you have been, separation or divorce, or a six-month all-out effort in couples therapy to see if you can make your marriage healthy and good for both of you. As you consider these paths in discernment counseling, you will learn more about your relationship and about yourselves as individuals—

learnings that will help you make a good decision about the future.

Discernment counseling sessions mostly involve individual conversations with the discernment counselor, along with some time as a couple. The counselor respects each person's perspective—reasons to end the marriage and reasons to preserve it.

Discernment counseling is short term work, as brief as one session and as long as five sessions. You are only committing yourselves to one session at the outset, and then decide each time whether to return, up to a maximum of five sessions. The first session is two hours long and any subsequent sessions 1.5 hours.

[Learn more discernment counseling.](#)

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