

When The Man You Love Needs Help: Getting Him Into Therapy

By Ronald G. Nathan, Ph.D.

Your husband drinks more, laughs less and has lost interest in hobbies and sports. On edge and irritable, he yells at you and the kids. Or maybe your boyfriend constantly checks up on you and his jealousy frightens you. He needs professional help. What can you do?

The Marlboro Man In Therapy?

Your husband or boyfriend may not be the Marlboro man or come from Mars, but he may believe that therapy is for wusses. After all, men are taught to be tough, self-reliant and never ask for help. This may explain why only one of three outpatient visits to therapists are made by men.

So what's a loving woman to do? There are no easy answers or one liners you can use. But as a psychologist who has limited his practice to men for the last ten years, I have learned how many women succeed and I think I can guess why others fail.

Ultimatums and Other Strategies

Some men call me in response to an ultimatum: "You get six sessions of therapy or I'm getting a divorce." Other women have made appointments with marriage counselors that their husbands canceled in favor of a lesser evil. Maybe you've tried these approaches. Are you starting to feel that you can lead a horse to water, but you'd better be ready to drown him?

There are probably fifty ways to lead your lover into therapy. You know your man best. Think about what has worked most successfully in the past when you wanted him to do something he didn't want to do. How do you influence him?

Watch Your Language

You may be comfortable with the terms "therapy," "psychotherapy," and "personal growth," but most men aren't. Going for "a consultation," "counseling" or "coaching" to "get back on track," "find a way to control anger" or "learn some new skills" often work well.

Plant the seed and nurture it. This is not a sprint; it's more like a marathon. Even when physicians refer a man to me, it takes an average of about three months before I get a call.

You Are Not Alone

Many men have come to me on referral from their primary care physician. Internists, family doctors and even urologists are now trained to assess emotional disorders and to make referrals to therapists.

So when other approaches fail and the problem is a serious one, I recommend that a woman encourage her man to see his doctor or make the medical appointment for him and then share her concerns with the physician before the visit. What about confidentiality? It's not a problem because she is not asking for confidential information, only offering her observations.

Choosing a Therapist

Psychotherapy with men is becoming a recognizable field in terms of practice. Most therapists are becoming more sensitive to the needs of men, but you may want to find or help your man find a therapist who specializes in men.

Search on line and/or ask if the therapist has a gender preference and what percentage of his or her patients are men. Also find out if the therapist has a private entrance and night or weekend hours. Many men anchor their self-esteem in their work and it is difficult for them to explain a weekly doctor's appointment to their boss or co-workers.

Find a Bridge to Therapy

Sometimes anonymous, self-help groups or materials for solo use are more acceptable to a man. In addition, these approaches can often serve as a bridge to therapy.

Books can be intimidating for some, require too much concentration for others, and are frustratingly slow for still others. In addition, the overwhelming majority of self-help materials are purchased by women, so the editing and marketing reflect the needs of women.

Over the past decade, working exclusively with men, I developed an audio self-help program called *The FAST Technique for Stress Relief*. To listen to a free six minute sample, see use the link below.

If your man is depressed but likes to read, the best book for depression I know is *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* by David Burns, M.D.

The Power of Prayer

Not everyone is religious, but for those who are, I would say this: Whether the current goal is getting your man into therapy or self-help, prayer is often helpful. The biblical definition of love (1 Corinthians 13:4) starts with "Love is patient, love is kind..." To be loving on route to these kinds of goals, you need to take good care of yourself and you may need the strength that comes from prayer or spiritual practice.

Please Share

Before I close, I would like to ask you to share your questions, comments and experiences, so we can all learn how to better meet the needs of men. Feel free to leave a voice mail message and your phone number or e-mail address at (518) 422-1850.

About the Author:

Ronald G. Nathan, Ph.D. is a practicing psychologist and award-winning, former Professor at Albany Medical College. Dr. Nathan co-authored *Stress Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Wellness* which was both a Book-of-the-Month Club and a Prevention Book Club selection. Dr. Nathan's work has been featured in *Men's Health*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Men's Journal*. Earlier this year, Dr. Nathan's new relaxation program, *The FAST Technique for Stress Relief* was published (visit www.relaxfastforfree.com for a free six-minute sample). Tina B. Tessina, Ph.D., L.M.F.T., Expert for *Redbook Magazine* wrote, "Thoroughly relaxing. My husband especially liked the background seaside sounds and plans to use it regularly. I'll definitely be recommending it to my clients."

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