***Relationship Work—What it takes & my part***

Relationship work is challenging. It takes risk. It takes openness. It takes looking at uncomfortable and ineffective parts of ourselves.

Some couples come in saying they want to change, but they are not ready for it. They then feel bad when the work does not meet their hopes or expectations.

Basically, couples therapy works best when each partner creates targeted growth goals and then holds themselves individually accountable for reaching those goals.

The most effective goals target changes in areas of repeating pain or stuckness.

This may not be easy. It requires each of you to put forth sustained effort with focus. It means moving past layers of self-protection and taking emotional risks. It means risking saying something like, “Today I feel so desperate that I just want to clobber you. I don’t know how to tell you how much pain I am experiencing right now. But, I’m telling you instead of clobbering you.”

The more emotionally armored or self-protective you are at any given moment, the more you will want the other to change without considering the changes you could make yourself. That is a normal way to feel but doesn’t help the relationship usually.

Showing up to couples counseling does not always mean you or your partner are ready for growth.. It’s like buying a membership to a gym and standing in the doorway – observing, listening and then feeling disappointed because you are not getting in better shape.

So here are some questions for you:

* Are you ready to take on the emotional challenges ahead?
* To put forth the effort to improve your reactions when you are triggered instead of just focusing on what your partner is or isn’t doing?
* To look for ways to notice progress instead of waiting for perfection?
* To be coached and guided even when it is uncomfortable?
* To work on yourself and work all together to reach your goals?

Finally, it’s ok to feel hesitant about getting curious and consider making changes without knowing whether your partner will do the same. But most likely if there are to be any shifts in the dynamic between the two of you, you’ll be the only one capable of altering your part of the relationship. *Adapted from the couplesinstitute.com*