

# *The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter*

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## **“What is Your Success Rate?”**

Those of us who practice marriage counseling are very familiar with the following question: “What is your success rate?” Quite often when folks call to schedule an initial appointment for marriage counseling, they will ask this question. Honestly, I am never quite sure how to answer them. What do folks want to hear? One-hundred percent of my clients stay married, or 75%, or 50%? What number would make them feel more comfortable? I usually tell potential clients that “success” is hard to quantify. You can be sure they don’t like to hear that, but it is the truth. A successful outcome for one couple may be staying together, but for another couple a successful outcome may be divorce. This is also tough for clients to hear. The problem for marriage counselors is that, inherently, when folks come to us they have usually hit rock bottom and they are in crisis. Recently, I had a new client call who was most certainly in a marriage crisis. She said, “Do you think you can handle this (their case)?” To bring normalcy and humor to her situation I responded by saying, “Ma’am, most people don’t call me and say ‘Wow, John, our marriage is going great. We would love to come in, pay you and tell you in person how great our marriage is.’” We are marriage counselors, we deal with crises every day.

In some crisis situations, so much damage has been inflicted within the marriage relationship there is little left that can be done other than damage control (managing a separation or divorce). Marriage counselors are good at damage control and can be very helpful in these situations. On the other hand, some couples come to us while in crisis but are able to gain insight about themselves, make changes in their relationship, and ultimately repair things. Remember, when a crisis occurs, there is always the opportunity for change and consequently a positive outcome. As a marriage counselor, I usually tell clients that if you stay together “good,” if you divorce “fine,” but either way I want you to use this as an opportunity to learn something about yourself and make changes to improve the quality of your life. Conversely, if you stay together but don’t learn anything, “not good,” if you divorce and don’t learn anything, “not fine.” I am saddened when I see folks divorce and not learn one single thing about themselves or their contribution to the failure of the relationship. People who don’t learn from their mistakes are very likely to carry their emotional baggage to their next relationship and make the same mistakes all over again. This brings us to the point of personal responsibility and how it impacts the marriage counseling “success rate.” Those who approach marriage counseling with a willingness to learn something about themselves are much more likely to gain something from the process than are those who enter marriage counseling blaming their spouse for the current crisis. To increase the probability that marriage counseling will be a “successful” process for you, ask yourself the following prior to your first appointment:

- How am I contributing to our current marriage crisis? Be specific.
- Am I willing to learn some things about myself that I might not like?
- Am I willing to take responsibility for my own behavior?
- What are my goals for counseling, and how will I define success?

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