

# Couples Therapy Moving Too Slowly?

## Accelerate Your Progress by Following These 10 Tips

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**Tip #1:** It sounds so basic, but couples who go home from therapy and don't talk about things (or put talk into action) until the next week's session, are bound to feel like not much is changing. Want to propel things in a forward motion? Here are some ways to integrate your weekly sessions into your daily interactions:

- **Sharing aha moments can be very connecting!** "I had this moment in yesterday's session where I realized that when you are complaining about my anger, it's not that you want to nag me, but that you are really longing for the 'nicer, more loving' me."
- **Take action – start having some fun together!** "I'm realizing that we've been copping-out by saying we're too busy to make time for each other. How about taking a walk with me tonight after work?"
- **Let your partner know about a moment in session where you felt more empathy than normal!** "When you were telling the therapist about how I make you my last priority, I started to really get it for the first time."
- **Let your partner know where you felt stuck!** "I noticed that every time you talked about my ex, I started feeling defensive. I'm not sure what that's about, but I recognized that it was getting in the way of me wanting to be close to you."



**Tip #2:** Create your own homework assignment. Don't wait for your therapist to assign you something to do this week. Instead, make it more meaningful by coming up with something on your own. Think about the things that resonated with you in session, and then plan to build on those during the week. You don't need to share your homework plan with your spouse/partner. *Just start doing things differently, and observe the impact.*

**Tip #3:** Express more empathy in session. Even if you don't agree with all of what your partner is saying, there surely must be SOMETHING you can validate. The more things you can find to genuinely empathize with, the faster you will start rebuilding the trust and positive feelings. The key here is to be genuine – your partner will know the difference if you're expressing empathy simply to please your therapist.

**Tip #4:** Journal. Go home and write about some of the things you're reflecting on during the week. Bring some of your notes to next week's session and share the parts that feel relevant to the work you're doing with your therapist.

**Tip #5:** Don't waste your therapy sessions dealing with the "argument of the week." Coming in each week, recounting the details of your latest disagreement (hoping that the therapist can help sort it out) often hinders the progress of therapy. It shifts the focus away from the deeper work in favor of useless debate. Here's a better approach: before session, try to figure out what it is about this week's argument that has a similar thread to the other arguments you've had. What common cycle or pattern is at play again? The answer to that question will be fertile ground for discussion, and will be much more likely to move things in a forward direction.

**Tip #6:** Start treating your partner the way you would if you were happy and fulfilled, if you were feeling all of those wonderful emotions you experienced at the beginning of the relationship. Sometimes simply "acting as if" things are great, can generate the kinds of close and connected feelings you're longing for.

**Tip #7:** Read Sue Johnson's book: "*Hold Me Tight*". This is a fabulous read for couples. It focuses on how to build trust, safety, and connectedness back into your relationship.

**Tip #8:** Talk about the things you're noticing in yourself, rather than what you do not like about your partner. Experiment with what it's like to come in to session talking about things you're noticing that you do, things you wish you could change, ways that you've caught yourself being a difficult or stubborn partner. This shift alone is likely to accelerate the therapy enormously.

**Tip #9:** Let your therapist know whether he or she is hitting the mark (or not). After all, this is YOUR therapy, and YOUR life. The therapist is there to guide you, but does not have all of the answers, and is most certainly not always right. Practice good communication with your therapist to ensure better, more productive sessions.

**Tip #10:** Work on changing the negative tapes running in your head. If you find yourself frequently thinking "this will never get better," "I'll never get the feelings back again," "my partner just can't change," you're going to sabotage the therapy. People generally live up to your expectations – so if you expect your partner to fail you, that's exactly what's likely to happen. Instead, have a little faith. See what happens when you allow yourself to dream, hope, expect, and look forward to. Be present to the possibility of change. And remember that sometimes the obstacle is the path.

**Linda Engelman, MFT, has a private practice with offices in Lafayette and San Ramon, California. She works with individuals, couples, and families, using Emotionally Focused Therapy, based in Attachment Theory, to help her clients deepen and enrich their relationships.**

**Confidential appointments may be made by calling: 925-295-1036.**