Adelphos
HEALTHCARE

A GUIDE FOR COUPLES

Building *Soulmates*

Your guide to starting couples counseling

Soulmates aren't found. They're built.

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WELCOME

Soulmates are built, not found.

Couples counseling at Adelphos Healthcare is where you build yours, one skill and one conversation at a time.

Our work together follows the Gottman Method, a research-based approach to couples therapy developed by Drs. John and Julie Gottman over decades of studying real couples. We pair it with attachment-focused work, because how each of you learned to love and be loved shapes how you fight, withdraw, and reconnect today.

1

The road ahead

The phases of counseling and what happens in each.

2

The Four Horsemen

The four patterns that predict relationship breakdown, how to spot yours, and what to do instead.

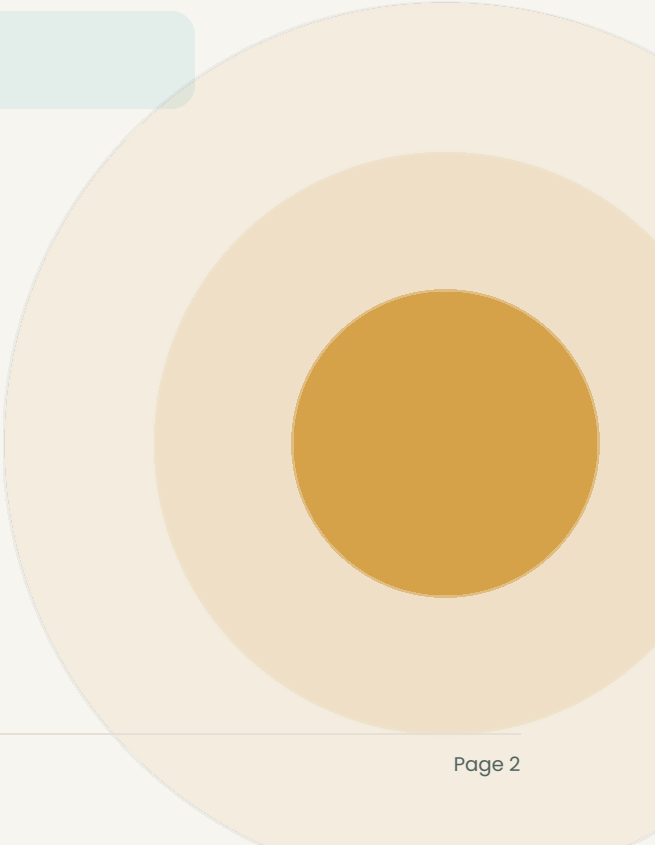
3

Your toolkit

The Gottman handouts we will use in and between sessions.

> *Soulmates aren't found. They're built.*

Keep this guide handy. We will come back to it often.



YOUR SESSION ROADMAP

Begin, assess, then heal and grow.

Counseling moves through three stages: we begin together, assess your relationship in depth, then do the healing and growth work your assessment points to.

STAGE 1 Begin together

1 Intake
History, goals, safety

→

2 Communication
Evaluation and tool building

↓

STAGE 2 Assess

3 Relationship Checkup
At home, each partner alone

→

4 Individual sessions
One with each partner

→

5 Assessment review
Results and your plan

↓

STAGE 3 Heal and grow

6 Repairing wounds

→

7 Building trust

→

8 Attachment and childhood

→

9 Learning to connect

↻ Revisit or reorder any phase as needed

Your path is your own. Stages 1 and 2 usually happen in this order. Stage 3 is tailored to your results, so phases may be reordered, combined, shortened, lengthened, or revisited. Some couples need more time repairing wounds; others are ready to focus on connection sooner. We will decide together, and adjust as you grow.

THE ROAD AHEAD

What happens in each phase

	PHASE	WHAT HAPPENS	YOUR PART
STAGE 1 · BEGIN TOGETHER			
1	**Intake** Together	We hear your story as a couple: how you met, what brought you in, what you want to change, and what is already working.	Complete your paperwork in the client portal before the first session. Come ready to share your hopes, not just your problems.
2	**Communication evaluation and tool building** Together	You talk through a real disagreement while I observe. We name your patterns, including any of the Four Horsemen, and learn your first tools.	Practice gentle start-ups, taking breaks when flooded, and repair attempts. Repair Checklist · Gottman-Rapoport · Art of Compromise
STAGE 2 · ASSESS			
3	**Gottman Relationship Checkup** At home, individually	Each of you completes the Gottman Institute's online relationship assessment. It covers friendship, conflict, trust, commitment, shared meaning, and individual well-being.	Watch for a separate email invitation. Answer alone and honestly. Do not compare or discuss answers. You can pause and pick up where you left off.
4	**Individual sessions** One each	I meet with each of you alone to learn your personal history, family background, and view of the relationship, and to check on safety.	Be candid. This is your space to share what is hard to say in the room together.
5	**Assessment review** Together	We go over your Checkup results: your strengths, your growth areas, and a treatment plan built for you.	Ask questions. Tell me what fits and what doesn't. Together we set the goals for Stage 3.
STAGE 3 · HEAL AND GROW			
6	**Repairing wounds**	We process past fights, regrettable incidents, and deeper injuries so they stop driving today's conflict.	Talk about the past from "the balcony," not back in the fight. Aftermath of a Fight
7	**Building trust**	We strengthen the two walls of your relationship: trust ("you are there for me") and commitment ("we are in this together").	Follow through on small promises. Turn toward each other's bids for attention.
8	**Understanding attachment and childhood impacts**	We explore how early experiences shaped the way each of you seeks closeness, handles fear, and reacts under stress.	Get curious about your triggers and your partner's. Their reactions often make sense once you know their story.
9	**Learning to connect**	We build friendship, fondness, rituals of connection, and a shared sense of meaning and purpose.	Ask open-ended questions, express appreciation daily, and make time for each other on purpose. Sound Relationship House

KNOW THE PATTERNS

The Four Horsemen

Four communication patterns that Dr. Gottman's research found to be among the strongest predictors of a relationship ending. Every couple uses them sometimes. The danger comes when they become the usual way you talk to each other.

HORSEMAN 1

Criticism

Attacking your partner's character instead of naming a specific behavior.

SOUNDS LIKE

"You never think about anyone but yourself." "You always forget."

HORSEMAN 2

Contempt

Speaking from superiority: mocking, sarcasm, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering. It tells your partner they are beneath you.

SOUNDS LIKE

"Oh, you're tired? Must be exhausting doing nothing all day."

HORSEMAN 3

Defensiveness

Protecting yourself with excuses, counter-attacks, or playing the innocent victim. It quietly says, "The problem is you, not me."

SOUNDS LIKE

"It's not my fault we're late. You never told me what time."

HORSEMAN 4

Stonewalling

Shutting down and withdrawing: going silent, looking away, leaving, or tuning out. It usually happens when you feel emotionally flooded.

SOUNDS LIKE

Silence. A blank stare. "Whatever." Walking out mid-conversation.

Contempt is the most damaging of the four. Gottman's research identified it as the single strongest predictor of divorce. It often grows from negative thoughts about your partner that have been simmering for a long time.

> *The Horsemen feed each other.*

Criticism invites defensiveness, unresolved frustration can harden into contempt, and a partner who feels attacked often shuts down and stonewalls.

SPOT YOURS

Recognizing your Four Horsemen

Most people have one or two "go-to" Horsemen, and couples often fall into a matching pair. A common one: one partner criticizes to get through, the other stonewalls to get away, and each move makes the other one worse.

Warning signs to watch for

CRITICISM

Your words

"Always," "never," "you" statements, or labels like lazy, selfish, or crazy.

CONTEMPT

Your face and tone

Eye-rolling, smirking, a sarcastic edge, a heavy sigh.

DEFENSIVENESS

Your first reaction

A quick "But..." or "Well, you..." before your partner has finished.

FLOODING, WHICH LEADS TO STONEWALLING

Your body

Racing heart, hot face, tight chest, shallow breathing, trouble hearing what's said, an urge to escape.

Self-check

Think about your last two or three disagreements. Tick each statement that was true for **you**, not your partner.

- [ ] I described my partner's personality instead of a specific situation.
- [ ] I used "you always" or "you never."
- [ ] I used sarcasm, mockery, or name-calling, or rolled my eyes.
- [ ] I felt superior to my partner or disgusted by them.
- [ ] I made excuses or explained why it wasn't my fault.
- [ ] I answered a complaint with a complaint of my own.
- [ ] I went quiet, stopped responding, or left the room.
- [ ] My heart was pounding and I couldn't think straight.

Reflect and bring to session

My go-to Horseman is:

The Horseman I notice most in my partner is:

When we fight, our pattern usually looks like:

> Naming your own Horseman matters more than naming your partner's. **You can only change your half of the dance.**

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Avoiding the Four Horsemen

Each Horseman has an antidote: a specific skill you can practice in its place.

	INSTEAD OF	TRY
CRITICISM **Gentle start-up**	*"You never help. You're so lazy."*	*"I'm feeling overwhelmed by the dishes tonight. Would you wash while I dry?"*
	Talk about your feelings and a positive need, using "I" statements about one specific situation.	
CONTEMPT **A culture of appreciation**	*"Wow, you actually remembered something for once."*	*"Thank you for picking up the kids. That really helped my day."*
	Look for what your partner does right and say it out loud, often.	
DEFENSIVENESS **Take responsibility**	*"It's not my fault, you didn't remind me."*	*"You're right, I forgot. My part in this is that I didn't write it down."*
	Own even a small part of the problem.	
STONEWALLING **Self-soothing**	Going silent, or walking out without a word.	*"I'm getting flooded. I need 20 minutes, and then I want to finish this."*
	Notice you are flooded, call a break, calm your body, and come back.	

Gentle start-up: fill in the blanks

I feel _____ A FEELING _____ about ONE SPECIFIC SITUATION .

I need _____ A POSITIVE NEED _____ .

Within every complaint is a longing. Say the longing, and your partner knows how to help.

How to take a flooding break

1. Agree on a signal or phrase ahead of time, such as "I need a break."
2. Say when you'll come back. Take at least 20 minutes; your body needs that long to settle.
3. Do something truly calming: walk, breathe slowly, read, listen to music.
4. Don't spend the break rehearsing your argument or replaying the hurt.
5. Come back when you said you would and pick up the conversation.

5 : 1

Keep the ratio high

Stable couples have roughly five positive moments for every negative one during conflict. A touch, a smile, a moment of humor, or "I see your point" all count.

YOUR TOOLKIT

Five Gottman handouts

These are your practice tools between sessions. **Each handout is given to you in session**, and we learn it together before you use it at home.

Gottman Repair Checklist

A list of short phrases for slowing a conflict down before it escalates. Keep it on the fridge. When things heat up, either partner can point to a phrase and read it aloud.

USE IT WHEN

A conversation is starting to go sideways and you need to slow it down or reset.

Given in session

Phase 2 and ongoing

Gottman-Rapoport Intervention

A speaker and listener exercise. One partner speaks and the other listens; then you switch. The listener's only job is to understand and summarize the speaker's view to the speaker's satisfaction. No persuading until both of you feel understood.

USE IT WHEN

You need to talk through a topic and both feel understood before problem-solving.

Given in session

Phase 2 and ongoing

The Art of Compromise

Each of you draws two circles: an inner circle for your core needs on the issue and an outer circle for where you can be flexible. Then you work through a set of questions together to find common ground.

USE IT WHEN

You are stuck on a decision and need to find common ground.

Given in session

Phase 2 and ongoing

Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident

A five-step guide for talking about a past fight once you are both calm: feelings, realities, triggers, responsibility, and constructive plans. The goal is understanding, not deciding who was right.

USE IT WHEN

You want to process a past fight or hurt without getting back into it.

Given in session

Phase 6

The Sound Relationship House

The map for our work. The lower floors build friendship and connection, the middle floors manage conflict, and the top floors build shared dreams and meaning. Trust and commitment are the walls that hold it all up.

USE IT WHEN

You want the big picture of what makes a relationship last.

Given in session

Phases 5 and 9

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GETTING STARTED

Before your first session

- [ ] Each partner completes intake paperwork in the client portal.
- [ ] Read this guide, especially the Four Horsemen sections.
- [ ] Each of you writes down one or two things you hope will be different after counseling.
- [ ] Watch your email for your Gottman Relationship Checkup invitation after your first sessions.

About the Gottman Relationship Checkup. The assessment is $99 per couple and is not covered by insurance. It is the foundation of your treatment plan, so both partners need to finish it before the assessment review.

Your safety comes first. If you ever feel unsafe in your relationship, tell me privately, in your individual session or by secure message. In an emergency, call 911. For a mental health crisis, call or text 988.

What I hope will be different after counseling

PARTNER 1

PARTNER 2

QUESTIONS?

I'm glad you're here.

Send a secure message through the client portal, email **appointments@adelphoshealthcare.com**, or call or text **(816) 226-8042**. Please keep health details out of email and text.

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This guide is for educational purposes and does not replace counseling or medical care.