

Session One

I. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF COUPLES THERAPY

Lots of couples begin a communication class with both people secretly (or not so secretly) believing that their problems are caused in large part by their partners. Each person sees himself or herself as the mostly innocent victim of the other person's bad behavior, and each person hopes that this class will finally get the partner to change—to listen, to express feelings, or to stop nagging and criticizing.

Because this is such a common expectation, we want to emphasize from the start what a communication class can and can't provide. Neither we nor you can change your partner. What you *can* change is *you*: how you behave, how you communicate, and how you solve problems. This is your "ace in the hole." As you wonder how to get your relationship to change, you may not realize that you hold one of the most important keys: your own behavior. *You* are an incredibly powerful influence on your relationship.

"But," you may protest, "I've *tried* to change myself. And it didn't work. It's about time for my partner to do some changing."

That may well be true. But the fact remains that the most effective way to bring about change in a relationship is to change yourself. We want *both* of you to swallow your pride, to take the first step, to take the attitude that "*I'm* going to learn these skills; *I'm* going to respond differently." Even if it occasionally feels like giving in to the other person, both the formal research and our experiences with couples have shown that it is in your personal self interest, not just for the good of the relationship, to learn these skills for yourself.