

PATI, PATNI AUR SHRINK

You need to be very generous and mature to not resent the place a therapist has in the life of your partner

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There is no place in an intimate relationship for a third person. And if the third wheel is someone who has an insight into the deepest and darkest thoughts of your partner, it can certainly lead to some uncomfortable moments.

Getting into a therapy can invite two types of responses from a spouse or partner. It can be a mature 'Good, I am happy you are getting help' or a prickly 'Why do you need outside help when I am there?' If it is the latter, it is important to get the therapist to help you cope.

When Sanjay Kapur, 26, told his brand-new fiancée about a date he never likes to miss, Shaila was a bit astounded. Till he clarified that he was talking about his psychoanalyst. "Going by the conventional mindset about those who visit therapists, I wondered what was wrong with him since he never looked depressed," she says. While she accepted his need to seek a psychological crutch, the sessions with the shrink soon led to friction. "One had heard of mom-in-law being the other woman in your man's life — but a psychoanalyst as a *wah?*" she asks.

There was a time when going for therapy was not quite done unless you were seriously scarred. But now, as clinical psychiatrist Dr Avdesh Sharma says, "Getting yourself analysed through therapy, not necessarily for mental problems, is no longer taboo. In fact, in the last ten years, the numbers coming to us have increased manifold." He says shrinks have filled the space left vacant by crumbling family structures and urban loneliness. "There is often just a need to talk to someone who is non-judgmental and will keep what you say confidential."

He likens the human mind to an iPhone: you may use it as a regular phone but once you catch on to its other uses, you open up to new experiences. Post-therapy, he says, you can be a new person. Many in fact start out on therapy when they're single and continue when into a relationship, often bringing their partners in too. It takes time and patience for two people to deal with the role of a counsellor in their lives.

Sunita Raghupathy is a 32-year-old assistant

executive whose obnoxious boss was making her miserable. It took a lot of persuasion to get her to see a therapist, says her husband. "Right after the first session, the sense of relief on her face was palpable. This was six months ago, now even our kid's exams don't keep her away from the shrink." Raghupathy may sound nonchalant but confesses reluctantly to "getting

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irritated by her absences and phone switched off during therapy". This irritability tends to be much more if the shrink is of the opposite sex, says psychiatrist Dr Sanjay Chugh who specialises in sexual problems.

Kavi Aneja, who is particular about not missing his counselling sessions, is beginning to irritate his wife Anju. "Analysis may be helping him but it's intruding too much into our personal space. Imagine, we had to reschedule our vacation (and I had to take additional leave) because he refused to miss any of his sessions," she says.

It's to avoid situations like these that Sharma

sometimes prefers the presence of both partners. "It can often work better for both and keep resentment at bay." He gives the example of Sukhmeet Singh, 39, who hated the idea of his marriage being closely dissected by his wife's shrink. "Where's the privacy? I feel totally misrepresented, but don't like the idea of going to see the lady. It's like baring yourself in public," he asserts and adds with a laugh, "In case we end up in a divorce, it would be this shrink's fault. You know, there are times when we're having an argument and Preeti will quickly find fault with me, pointing out that even the psychiatrist feels that way about you. I find all this very intrusive."

However, he does concede that the analysis seems to have worked for Preeti; her difficult relationship with his mother and sister seems to have untangled somewhat.

Dr Samir Parikh, a psychiatrist at Max Healthcare, stresses that partners must never resent the therapist. "It defeats the very purpose of therapy. The idea is to understand that your partner is benefiting from his/her visits to the psychiatrist. And ultimately, you will benefit from it too."

However, things may not necessarily be that simple, says Dr Chugh. Sexual jealousy is a very potent force and no matter how sensible we all try to be, it can disturb us deeply. It is a fact Arun Nair has been grappling with. When he met Nalini for the first time, he didn't know she'd been seeing a shrink. "In subsequent meetings, I'd often find her raving about her doctor who she thought was the perfect guy — sensitive, caring and always having a ready shoulder for her to cry on," says Nair. "Initially, I hated the idea of this cuckoo in our nest — this guy whose opinion mattered so much to her. Finally, I decided to visit this guy and then everything fell into place. But her admiration of the guy still rankles." ■

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