



IMAGO Relationship Therapy

Mary Kay Cocharo, LMFT

IMAGO Relationship Therapy

Relationships Don't Just Happen, Good Relationships Take Work

Are you sick of having the same old argument with your partner over and over again? Are you longing for deeper intimacy and passion in your



relationship? Or are you simply wondering why you keep making the same mistakes with different partners? Well, if so, you are not alone: good relationships take work.

IMAGO Relationship Therapy has been considered one of the most effective forms of couple's counseling for over 30 years. Its enduring appeal springs from its uniquely practical approach to relationship education and therapy.

Using simple tools, the IMAGO process strengthens your existing relationship and provides you and your partner with the ability to heal your childhood wounds to build joyful, healthful lives together.

Another benefit is that IMAGO helps parents raise their children in the safe context of a stable relationship; children who grow up to contribute to a better and safer world.

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As a couple in IMAGO Relationship Therapy you learn to:

- Create passion and safety in your relationship
- Rediscover your intimate connection
- Communicate to ensure you'll be heard and understood
- Understand yourself and your partner better
- Create a conscious relationship
- Resolve conflict
- Parent your children with love and empathy

As an individual, IMAGO Relationship Therapy provides you the opportunity to:

- Examine and change recurring relationship patterns
- Explore how your past memories and experiences are affecting you now
- Examine and change recurring relationship patterns
- Get ready to choose the perfect mate

IMAGO was co-founded by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. and his professional and romantic partner, Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph.D. Their bestselling books on building loving relationships have sold millions of copies worldwide.

Getting the Love You Want was released in January 2019 with a new chapter and new graphics. IMAGO therapists are trained and certified in countries around the world. I was Certified in Imago Relationship Therapy over 20 years ago and have helped thousands of couples to get the love and deep connection they want and deserve.

IMAGO Relationship Therapy

More about Imago

Let us begin by looking at the ways Imago is related to and shares many of the same concerns as other therapies.

The family is the nest in which human beings are nurtured. Therefore, the relationship between mothers and fathers is the crucible through which we all must pass. I like to say that the space between two spouses is the playground of their children.

If this relationship is healthy and sound, and provides a good enough foundation for a fragile child to stand, meaning that s/he learns about the basics of human relationships and how to live in them—how to be supported and safe at the same time feeling recognized and loved—then the world becomes a better place to live.

If this relationship is not sound, and is characterized by conflict, tension, “power struggles,” feelings of contempt, hostility, and constant questioning, then the child must develop a unique set of adaptations in order to survive. I call this the individual’s “survival suit” or what s/he needs to put on as a defense against the dysfunction of the family.



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Later as adults, each individual will attract and fall in love with a partner who initially exhibits all of the positive aspects of childhood and eventually exhibits many of the negative, painful ones, as well! When you stop wondering whether your partner is the “right one,” or if marrying this partner was the “right decision”, then the real work of relationship begins.

In order for this work to begin, both members of the couple need to recognize that neither one is solely responsible for the troubles, but it takes two to dance: the old stances in the old dances no longer work and are producing more pain than pleasure.

Each person is 100% responsible for nourishing the relationship space between them. Some couples like to argue that they're only 50% responsible for the relationship.

I tell them that 50-50 is some kind of divorce formula. Healthy relationship is 100-100!



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The key to transforming the relationship is awareness and increasing consciousness.

Coming to awareness means that each member of the relationship recognizes his or her role in the dramas that have taken place, and that criticizing and judging the partner can never repair the relationship.

Part of this new awareness is that the couple has gotten into trouble by both participating in the power struggle; hence they can get out of trouble by co-creating a positive, healthy, and loving relationship.

Committing to work on their relationship means they are willing to look deeply within and not only the sources of their power struggle, but also to and resources of love, compassion and understanding upon which intimacy can be constructed.

The greatest challenge any couple faces is living with the seeming contradiction of the relationship paradigm—namely that there is no such thing as an individual, that no one is an island, completely independent and self-sufficient, since we are all connected within a universe of interrelationships.



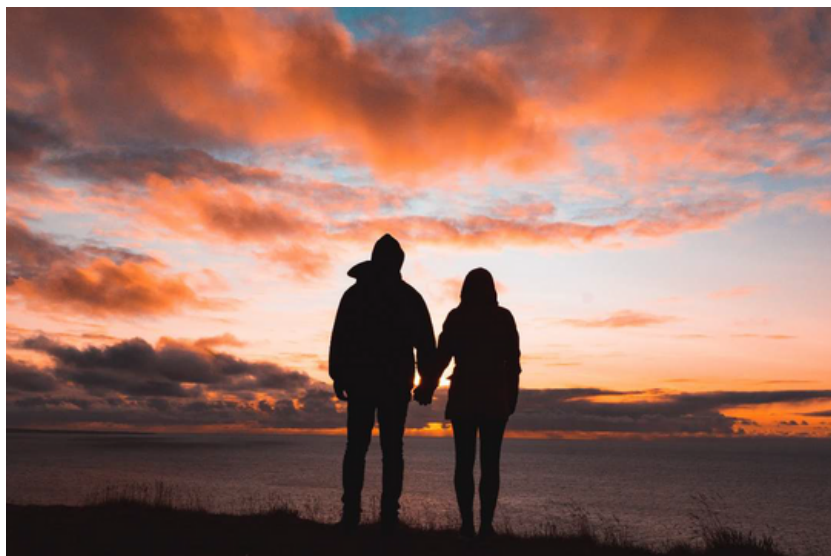
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So, how do we live in relationship, at the same time not losing our own uniqueness and individuality or our capacity to stay connected?

Conflict and tension in a relationship are not incompatible with love. To the contrary, conflict faced and worked through is the basis of a great relationship. So, conflict does not signal the end of relationship, but rather can offer the beginnings of a good one. In Imago, we like to say that “conflict is your growth trying to happen”.

Any marriage/relationship therapy worth its salt will have derived some kind of structure through which the relationship can be transformed into the one of the couple’s dreams rather than their nightmares, and this will appear somewhat “artificial” to the non-initiated. Some call it “dialogue,” others call it “encounter.”

Whatever the specific differences, the purpose of the structure is to bring the couple back to their love and compassion.



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So now let us consider how Imago Relationship Therapy distinguishes itself from all the others:

- Although Imago was created for married couples, any couple in a committed relationship, whether married or not, is welcomed and can derive great benefit from the process. This includes relationships such as friends, adult siblings, adult children and parents, men and women living together, engaged couples etc.
- Imago Relationship Therapy is designed to be therapeutic—to empower couples to do the work of mutual healing. While communicating and dialoguing are essential components of the process, they are not the only part of the work.
- Imago Relationship Therapy is based on the tenet of developmental psychology that tells us that the past weighs heavily on the present; that means that any sharp conflict in the couple is intense to the degree that it is evoking deep emotional experiences from the past. This can be the recent past, that is, unresolved issues in this relationship, or possibly hurt that occurred in other intimate relationships before this one.

Most importantly, the roots of that pain can go back into each individual's childhood development. Like this iceberg, the present conflict is just the tip. The deeper, underlying issues make up the bulk of ice beneath the surface and must be addressed in order to heal.

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- In Imago Therapy, couples learn that the behavior that contributes to the distress is primarily reactive, a way of protecting themselves from earlier pain and fear, and tends to be outside their conscious awareness. Becoming aware of their reactivity helps them learn how to become more conscious and intentional in the relationship.
- Awareness includes discovering the wounding in oneself and one's partner that leads to reactive behavior. Couples re-image themselves, their partner, and the behavior, in light of what they learn about each other. They begin to see the distress in their relationship as a path to healing and wholeness for both.



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- Changes in behavior are made as partners learn to create a corrective experience for their partner's past wounding. And, paradoxically, the very thing the partner needs for healing brings forth the denied or disowned part of one's self that needs to be reclaimed. This is the concept of the "double gift". When I give to you what you need to heal, I grow an atrophied part of myself!
- Imago Relationship Therapy emphasizes the need to create emotional "safety" for each partner. Couples tend to be completely unaware of how their speech and behavior trigger the childhood pain and fear of their partner, and make them "unsafe" for their partner.
- Imago Relationship Therapy is a two-pronged approach: First, through becoming conscious and intentional in the relationship, couples do the work of healing their childhood wounds by reclaiming the denied parts of the self. Second, the couple consciously brings caring behaviors back into the relationship.
- The Dialogue process in Imago is designed not only for improving communication about volatile issues, but also for creating emotional "safety" and assisting the healing process. The basic tool is used in a variety of communication skills and processes to access the roots of pain and fear in the relationship and to facilitate changes in behavior.

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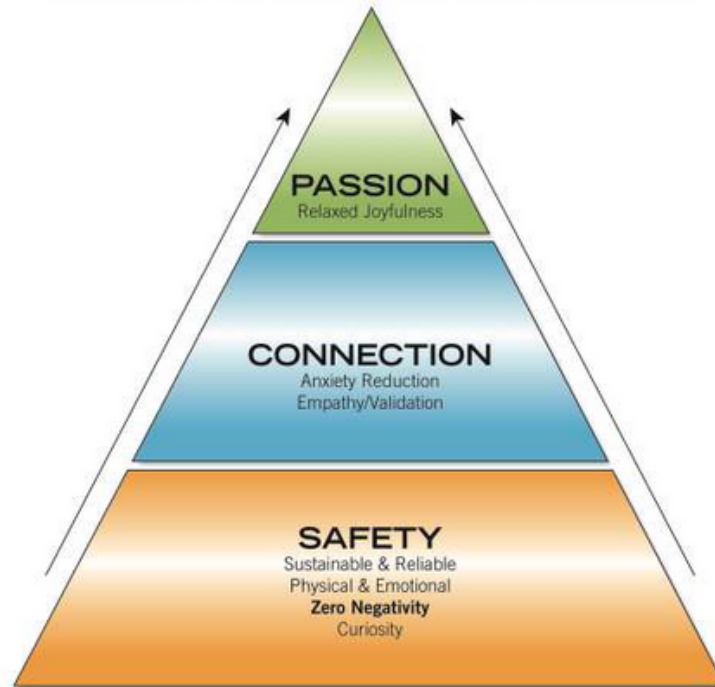


- By learning to “come over the bridge” of the space between, couples learn to visit their partner’s world and develop understanding and empathy of what it means to be “the other”. This is a sacred process and leads individuals and couples alike to experience “communion” with all that is healthy and beautiful in their lives.
- Most couples want to experience passion, relaxation and joy together. To achieve that, we must start with making the relationship physically and emotionally safe. This is a result of the communication process where each party is asked to listen deeply and stay present with the other, thus discovering each other at a deeper level. Safety requires the elimination of negativity in the form of criticism, judgement, contempt or defensiveness.
- Once a couple feels safe, the energy they were using to protect themselves is freed into the service of connection. The by-product of this deep emotional connection is relaxed joyfulness and passion.

That’s what we’re all hoping for, isn’t it?

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Qualities of a Healthy Relationship



- We are wired for connection
- Make a commitment to healing each other.
- It is the quality of presence you have with your partner that heals.
- Presence is the capacity to be engaged with one another WITHOUT judgment.

* Sourced from Mary Kay Cocharo, LMFT

In my work with couples, I incorporate Imago Theory with Imago Relationship Therapy and Encounter-centered Couples Therapy.

Both therapies are based on the ideas above and are powerful in helping couples to find the peace, joy and passion they are looking for and deserve.

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There is research showing that couples wait an average of six years before seeking help for problems in their relationship.

This is not necessary, as the therapy is readily available. Couples can come in for week to week sessions, one- or two-day Private Intensives or participate in a Workshop or Weekend Couples Retreat.

For those seeking a deeper, quicker resolution to conflict and healing, the Intensives and Retreats are ideal. Or perhaps you'd prefer a longer approach with time between appointments to practice and slowly absorb new tools.



Either way, this work is transformational.

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We know that about 50% of all married couples give up in despair and separate or divorce. Of the 50% who stay together, half say that they are resigned to a life and relationship that is not fulfilling. That leaves about 25% of all couples who are doing the work to create a deeply satisfying, loving and mature relationship.

You can choose from a variety of counseling formats: Weekly Sessions, Couples Sessions, Private Intensives, Workshops or Weekend Couples Retreats.

As I said at the beginning, good relationships don't just happen—they take work. I can help you make your relationship a healing context...one in which each of you can be all that you can be.



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A Note about Love in the Time of COVID-19:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that we were in a Global Pandemic. Quickly, to mitigate the spread of the deadly Coronavirus, our lives ground to a halt. How did the stay-at-home orders impact our intimate relationships?

For many couples, the intensity and pressure of daily life wore mightily on their connection. As work and school moved to the kitchen table, stress and irritability increased. We were suddenly faced with trying to stay healthy, take precautions, care for and educate our children, and maintain our own work lives, often without help or support. In more normal times, people balance their lives with “exits”—friends, travel, offices, extended family, outings etc. Without these options, many came to feel “stuck” in a never-ending monotony which caused them to lose interest in one another. If it’s true that the human brain needs novelty to produce the hormones which bring erotic interest and desire, being together 24/7 was no blessing!

On the other hand, I’ve worked with couples who feel closer than ever after this past year at home. These couples typically suffered from a lack of connection due to the over prominence of these “exits” in their lives. The Pandemic has afforded a sort of “time out” for spending time together, connecting on a deeper level and nurturing their bond.

Whether the Pandemic has left you needing repair or solid with a desire to go even deeper, I can help.