



From Rocky Shores to Smooth Sailing:

Hannah and Joe's Story in Marriage Counseling

Dr. Laura Dabney MD

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By: Dr Laura Dabney

A few months ago, "Joe" and "Hannah" knew their marriage was in serious trouble. *"We were at the end of our rope,"* Joe said. *"It was either go to counseling or separate."* Hannah agreed. *"Neither one of us wanted to give up. So we decided that if we weren't going to give up, we needed to find someone to help us fix whatever we could."*

Marriage counseling wasn't a choice that came easily for either one of them.

Joe had an open aversion to therapy and believed it carried a stigma — asking for help wasn't a good thing.

As for Hannah, she'd been to therapy when she was younger, and it hadn't proven to be a positive experience. *"It made me feel singled out, like the only one with problems,"* she said.

And yet, they knew neither one of them was happy with the state of the relationship. They described their marriage as disconnected and confusing. *"We didn't know what to do,"* said Hannah. *"We just weren't happy with each other."*

What they did know was they'd committed themselves to find expert help. So Joe went online — and that's how he found Dr. Dabney. They both agreed she fit the idea of what they were looking for in a therapist, plus, added Joe, *"I liked that she had so many testimonials and so much information available on her website."*

Their experiences in Dr. Dabney's office was almost entirely different than what they expected.

"For starters," said Joe, "you do almost all the talking." Hannah agreed and added, "It's great that she's able to listen to you and pinpoint the things you need to learn about yourself. She asks the right questions and gets right to the heart of the issue." Said Joe, "She's not going to ask you to change. She may ask you to adopt a different perspective, but not change who you are ... We never walked out of there confused or feeling like one of us was at fault."

Dr. Dabney was so effective, in fact, Hannah and Joe estimated that their counseling lasted only about three months, start to finish.

One of the best takeaways for both of them is that they aren't responsible for each other's happiness. And they learned to adjust their communication accordingly. As Hannah put it, *"We used to feel guilty if we made each other feel bad, so we'd withhold, and eventually, it would blow up."* They knew they it was good to share their feelings with each other, but they didn't know how to do that without ending up in a fight. Echoing his wife, Joe said, *"I used to need to rationalize what Hannah was feeling. I'd say, But why do you feel like that? Now I know that feelings are feelings. There is no right or wrong."*

Today, Hannah and Joe both agree their marriage has undergone a fundamental change. *"We don't argue about things anymore,"* said Joe. *"We have disagreements, but that's what they are. They don't escalate."* Hannah agreed. *"If we have a disagreement, it's a disagreement. It's not a screaming match. It doesn't last for hours. We're not trying to one-up each other or find blame."*

The secret to their Success:

For Hannah, **her perspective on the marriage started to shift as soon as her husband agreed to go to therapy** — it told her Joe he was committed to making their marriage work. As for Joe, **he believes their success is due to attitude.** *“Walk in with an open mind or [marriage counseling] isn’t going to work for you.”* Hannah agreed. *“Dr. Dabney sees things in you and calls them out. It can be really uncomfortable, but it’s exactly what you need.”*

Where Joe once described his marriage as **“disconnected,”** he now calls it **“connected.”** Hannah said it went from **“confusing”** to **“healthy.”** Even more, they both agree on the bottom line.

“The reason we’re still together today is because of Dr. Dabney. It’s terrific!”



Learn more about how Dr. Dabney can help you
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