

LIVE

Walk beside partners in therapy

health notes

From page 13

Your support will help them stand on their own

QUESTION:

My wife started seeing a therapist about six months ago because she was feeling really depressed and overwhelmed by everything in her life. To me it seemed like the therapy was helping, but she then told me that she was going to stop because it was too expensive. I think her therapist probably confronted her on her lack of motivation in her life and she couldn't take it. Now what am I supposed to do? Can I make her go see her therapist?

Answer:

The short answer is no, you can't make her go to therapy.

The longer answer is more complicated. You haven't given me a lot of information so I will need to make some assumptions. My first assumption is that you have, as you say her therapist likely has, "confronted her on her lack of motivation." This implies that you and perhaps her therapist feel that she is avoiding emotional things in her life. Your



use of the word motivation tells me that you are imagining her problems have something to do with will power. Basically, that her depression is something she can overcome if she works harder at it and she is not working hard enough in your eyes. The following are some of my thoughts on that.

If your wife is clinically depressed and exhibiting symptoms that go along with that (sleeping a lot or not enough, loss of appetite, feelings of worthlessness, difficulty concentrating and other significant symptoms), then will power has little to do with it. People who express what depression feels like tend to describe something resembling a black

hole where no light can get in, everything is swirling around them, and there is no way out. Trying to persuade a person who is depressed to see the bright side of life never works because all they see is darkness. And for very depressed people, often who think of suicide, they are just not able to comprehend that they could get out of the black hole. If you have never experienced a level of depression before, it can be hard to imagine what I am describing. The readers who have been depressed will be able to relate to what I'm saying. It is truly an awful experience.

My first advice to you is to think about this differently. Your job is not to motivate, force, or rationally convince her to see the light. These common partner (or parent or sibling) tactics are rarely successful because they actually just make people feel worse about themselves, deepening a depression. What you can do is reflect back to your wife how concerned you are for her, how much her depression is impacting your relationship and your helplessness at wanting to help her but acknowledging that she is the one who needs to make decisions about

what help she needs. The ability to meet our partners where they are at, instead of forcing them to go where they are not, can be a powerful expression of concern and love. It also puts the responsibility for getting help back in their lap.

I do want to say that your observation that your wife wants to stop for some other reason than money is an astute one. Many people who are going to therapy and who want to stop give money as the reason.

Now sometimes money is actually the reason; but most times, particularly at six months, which is where therapy can begin to deepen and vulnerabilities can show up, money is not the actual reason. Most therapists will explore the need to stop coming to therapy with a client, looking for deeper meaning.

For instance, a depressed client who is beginning to move out of a depression (lack of feelings) into a more emotional experience (lots of feelings), may find this uncomfortable and unconsciously bail out of therapy before anything else gets brought up. Your role with this can be to simply encourage your wife to talk to her therapist about these concerns rather than simply

stop therapy abruptly. I would hope that her therapist would then be able to explore the deeper meaning of her wanting to end their sessions and get to some of her possible avoidance issues.

Another reason that people say therapy is too expensive is because the therapy they are in is not actually meeting their needs or the therapist is not really doing a great job with them. If this is the case, I would still encourage supporting your wife in telling her therapist how she is feeling and see how the therapist responds. If nothing gets resolved, then encouraging your wife to find a new therapist would be the best course of action.

I think the image of walking beside your wife in therapy, and not pushing her from behind or pulling her from in front, is a good one. You will be a steady arm to grab and a calming hand to hold. She will know you are there for her when she needs you but she will also feel her ability to walk on her own.

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days, June 2, 16, July 7, 21, Aug. 4 and 18. Meet at the covered area of John Lawson Park, West Vancouver. Hosted by the North Shore Caregiver Support Program.

Osteoarthritis Early Intervention Program: Learn how to take charge of osteoarthritis in order to slow the disease process, protect joints and understand and manage chronic pain, Thursdays, June 3, 10, 17 and 24 at Silver Harbour Centre, 144 East 22nd St., North Vancouver. Fee: \$40 (comprehensive manual included). Registration: 604-714-5550.

Heart Health Clinic: Presented by London Drugs, in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and the Yukon, Friday, June 4 at the store's North Vancouver location, 2032 Lonsdale Ave. (604-980-3661), and Monday, June 7 at Park Royal, North Vancouver. Fee: \$40 (comprehensive manual included). Registration: 604-714-5550.

Old Parents — Busy Daugh-

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