



Query

We're in counselling. It was my suggestion, actually; I booked the appointment, and after a few discussions my wife agreed to go. She didn't agree immediately, I think, because she isn't sure our relationship is worth the effort. Of course, I can't read her mind, but that's what I intuit.

We sat in a room with neutral tones. Grey-blue carpet, soft leather chairs, a counsellor in his fifties who asked us standard questions, like "What do you want to get out of counselling" and "Why are you here?"

My answer was simple: "To save my marriage." My wife's response was "I don't know."

The counsellor teased out the particulars: I was looking for greater emotional commitment from my wife, who over the past year has pulled back to the point where she is becoming a stranger. A fact that led into my wife's point of view. She feels she can't make a greater emotional investment in our marriage because I am not engaged enough with her concerns, or with our family life.

In short, we are mutually and progressively alienating one another.

Another of the counsellor's simple diagnoses was that my wife and I don't spend enough time together. My work schedule was criticized; it is a major culprit — a fact I already knew, but hearing someone impartial say so made me accept more that I'm not "probably" working too hard, I *am* working too hard.

For her part, my wife's ennui was scrutinized. It came out that she has been feeling ambivalent about our relationship

for over a year but hasn't decided whether to go or stay, and that this ambivalence is hard for both of us to live with.

We were cautioned against imprecision. When asked what we wanted from one another, answers like "Be more involved" or "Do more" were characterized as vague and inconcrete. "You have to know what you want in your relationship before you can know whether you're getting it."

The most powerful statement came from my wife, who when pressed as to why she is staying in the relationship, said "I know he loves me; that's what's making this so hard. If the love wasn't there, I'd be able to leave."

That floored me. I am glad she knows I love her, devastated that this isn't necessarily enough. Even though I knew she was thinking about leaving, hearing her say so to a stranger made it seem more real.

We were given a few practical tips, including taking time out of each day just to be with one another, sans child, sans work, sans everything. We were told to have a dinner-date once a week. But, most importantly, we were exhorted to talk about our feelings. In short, we got counsellified, and we have another appointment booked in two weeks' time. Until then, two dinner dates. Fourteen stolen moments spent together after our daughter has gone to bed. And an unscheduled number of arguments.

I'd like to say I'm hopeful. But things have been so fraught for so long that it's hard not to think, What's the point? Or, Is this worth it? But now we're going for counselling — which must mean we both have some hope. I hope.

—Dr. Ursus