

The Important Truths About Reconciliation

Acronyms used: WS - Wayward Spouse; BS - Betrayed Spouse; A - Affair; OP - Other Person; R - Reconciliation; M - Marriage; False R - False Reconciliation

After almost a year of reconciliation (R) , I began reflecting on the experience itself and all the ups and downs it brought into our life. It truly is amazing how much can change in such a short time.

I have learned many things about marriage, relationships, communication, feelings, co-dependency, and love. If someone had told me a year ago that in as much time, I'd feel differently about all of the above than I did at that moment, I would have told them they were nuts.

But alas, here I am, an infidelity SURVIVOR. Yes, a SURVIVOR. I made it through the dark woods and am on the other side. I have survived the most horrible cancer a marriage can tolerate. And I'm still standing with H right beside me, stronger and happier than ever, and completely confident in the decision I've made to stay with him. If anyone had also told me that a year ago, I would have just as easily told them they were insane.

I would not say we are 100% healed because I'm not sure anyone is ever 100% healed after such a horrific event strikes you. But we are as healed as we possibly could be at this point. There are very specific reasons why, and I believe that unless you and your WS come together and are on the same page throughout this process, R is not possible.

I believe the pain and healing from an affair is very much like the pain and healing from a surgical procedure. Over time, the pain from your surgery lessens, but the scar remains. Eventually, you won't think about the surgical pain as much, but you'll remember it each time you look at your scar. It's there, but it doesn't interfere in your life like it once did. Getting through an affair is very much the same.

Nothing I'm going to say means that R is impossible. There is always hope with two people willing to work very hard for something they both want. Instead of saying R is impossible, I use the term "no-go" because R is not fully established

and working until these things are firmly in place. It just basically means that until your WS owns his/her shit, acknowledges how much it stinks, and is ready to clean it up, R is not going to happen.

Here are the brutal truths I've learned through the R process:

1. **Vulnerability on BOTH sides.** R is not possible without an extremely remorseful spouse that is willing to bend over backwards, forwards, sideways, and upside down for you. If they don't take 500% responsibility for their actions, they are not ready to R. Period. If they, in any way put any of the blame for their cheating on YOU, R is not possible. Period. The end. Not gonna happen. Why? Because like Dr. Phil says, "You can't change what you don't acknowledge". If they don't show remorse and a willingness to do and be whatever you want/need for as long as it takes, R should be postponed until they do, if they ever do. Likewise, you, as the BS, cannot take any of the blame for your WS's actions. Many a BS tries desperately to make some sense of an A, so they begin to go back in time and think up every wrong thing they've ever done, and many times will say that is why their WS had an A. Nothing is further from the truth. The A wasn't about you. Not one bit of it. It was all about your WS and them putting their own needs and desires ahead of you and your life together.

It doesn't matter if you would not have sex with your WS for however long of a period of time, you were moody, gained weight, lost weight, weren't a good housekeeper, nagged him/her to spend more time at home instead of work, etc., etc. The list can go on and on.

Hear me clearly: Nothing, NOTHING you did justifies or makes it the slightest bit okay for your S to have had an A. NOTHING. Do not, I repeat, DO NOT look back on YOUR mistakes and place blame on yourself for someone else's actions. This makes the A about you, and it wasn't about you. None of this was about you. But R, however, is about you. R is about what you, the BS, need from your WS in order to heal properly from this hell.

R is NOT about the WS and focusing it on them is a huge mistake. What I mean by that is allowing them to wallow in their own pity over missing the OP and/or having YOU put up with THEIR withdrawal from him/her. And it's

not about them missing the “fun” and “excitement” they thought they had with their OP. That was all a delusional fantasy land anyway. It wasn't real. My H and I luckily did not have to go through this stage, but many BS's here do and it is just wrong. A WS has done enough to the BS. He/she (BS) does NOT need to have to sit there and watch their OWN spouse "miss" the OP.

All this does is further feed the selfishness they are already saturated with which lead them to the A in the first place. R is about YOU, the BS, and YOUR pain--for a long time, especially in the beginning. Anything less is not enough. After both of you are getting comfortable in R, then you, the BS, will be ready to talk to your WS about his/her pain brought on by the guilt he/she has carried for so long. And a genuinely remorseful WS will feel guilt. It will be evident in their face, words, actions, etc., without a shadow of a doubt. If you have to question whether or not your WS is feeling guilt and/or is truly remorseful, let me go ahead and answer that for you: They're not.

On the other hand, as far as the WS carrying the guilt forever, they just can't. They've gotta let that go. Yes, they deserve to feel it, but when R is established and the true healing begins, they have to be able to let that go and come to a point of acceptance. When you're ready, you can help your WS do this. I never thought I would, but it actually helped ME so much to talk with my H about his guilt. It literally ate him alive for months. When we talked and worked through that, it brought so many walls down and strengthened our bond 10 fold. He was so amazed and moved that I'd even WANT to try and help HIM at all. He was genuinely humbled.

By the same token, you as the BS have also GOT to be open to the possibility that your WS really IS changing and being what you need. I spent months convinced he was just doing what he had to do to make me comfortable, and then would just go back to who he was. That was really sad and wasted a hell of a lot of time. He was real. He is real. He has changed completely. Total 180. For me and for him.

Here's the point: Don't go into this blindly and take your WS's word for it, but if you are SEEING the actions consistently then you have to take that leap of vulnerability. If you don't, your R will be strained because you will

always sit there and play Devil's Advocate and say, "what if?", and that's no way to R, much less, live.

2. **Details of the A.** You must demand all details that you can handle. Some BS's (me included) want every minute detail. Some don't. It really doesn't matter which you prefer, so long as you are getting what you want/need from your spouse. No secrets. He/she should be more than forthcoming with any and all info you need. There should be zero protection for the OP. If there is, then the WS is once again putting the OP ahead of you, and thus, R is a no-go.

Also, do not fall for the, "Let's not tell the OP's spouse. We don't need to get in their business. We'll just fix our M. We don't need to bring them into this", line...blah, blah, blah. Bullshit. You most certainly need to let an unknowing BS know all that you do no matter what your spouse is telling you. Don't you wish someone would have told you?

Yes, even if they say that the poor OP is abused and if you tell, then they will get abused even more. Waaa. Cry me a river. So what? Did the OP ask YOUR permission before having an A with YOUR spouse? Didn't think so. Your WS's commitment is to YOU now. What happens to the OP should cease to be a concern of your WS. If your WS is trying to protect him/her, this is a huge red flag, and R will be a no-go.

3. **Open book policy.** Your WS needs to be completely open about everything. He/she should provide all account info, passwords, etc. Anything YOU need to feel comfortable. No secrets. No secret ACCOUNTS. No looking for OP or trying to conveniently run into them. And do not tolerate an angry WS lashing out at you because you are questioning his/her actions. If the WS gets angry, there's a reason, and it ain't a good one.

Is it wise to check up on them forever? No. Hopefully they are able to PROVE their trustworthiness over time. But in the beginning? Hell no. Trust is earned back, and it doesn't happen over night. A WS should EXPECT to be checked up on and questioned. If they haven't done anything, then why get angry? People who have nothing to hide, hide nothing. If your WS can't say something to another person of the opposite sex that they wouldn't say in front of you, then they shouldn't be saying it.

Also, any contact whatsoever with the OP should be told to you immediately. The "protection" line they will give you is complete bullshit... "Oh, honey, I didn't tell you that OP emailed me today because I knew that would hurt you and I didn't want to see you hurt again." Yeah, whatever. They are covering their asses and this should be seen as a HUGE, SCREAMING red flag. Any information/contact regarding the OP that is withheld from you is a huge red flag, and makes R a no-go.

4. **Lifestyle changes.** Anyone who commits adultery most always has a lifestyle that condones it. You could be someone who over-indulges in food, alcohol, drugs, work, sleep, is exceptionally lazy, etc. These behaviors can be an open pathway to crossing the line into infidelity. Not always, but much of the time.

If your WS has a lifestyle of working late, spending little time with you when they ARE home, not having his/her family as the #1 priority in their life (this is a BIG one), then they are very vulnerable to an affair.

Remember this: Time + Opportunity = Trouble

5. **Control.** You cannot control your WS. You can be the best detective in town and keep tabs on him/her, check email accounts, check cell phone records, etc., and you know what? None of it will change a thing. Why? Because if he/she is going to cheat again, then they're going to cheat again and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. The small sense of control that you think you have is an illusion. We cannot control other people. We can play our part in R. We can do our work. We can communicate better, yadda, yadda, yadda, but the bottom line is this: If a person is going to do this again, then they're going to do it. What you need to do is have your plan set (and make sure WS knows) for what happens, God forbid you face this hell again. You cannot control WS, but you can control what YOU do if he/she pulls this shit again.

Being prepared doesn't mean you are expecting failure. It means you are looking out for yourself, something you must do now, especially if you have children.

6. **Communication.** I cannot stress this enough. NEVER assume you know what someone is thinking and don't assume the WS can read your mind

either. They can't. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Especially in the beginning. You must be able to talk to your WS at anytime, anywhere you need to. Your WS does not have the right to limit you to how much they will talk about the A or what they will tell you. You hold the cards here, especially in the beginning.

A WS that is not willing to talk and help you is not doing his/her part and is not truly dedicated to R. And they will try and put it off on you, so be ready - i.e., "I just don't want to talk so much about my A, honey, because it upsets YOU so much, and that hurts me. Let's just leave it in the past and move forward. Let's not dwell on it." Ummmm, nope. Doesn't work that way. A WS does not call the shots on communication. And letting them do so is a huge mistake, and sets the stage for a "False R".

7. **Hysterical Bonding.** This is when sex is often and amazing after d-day. Sort of a "reclaiming" of what's yours. It happens, it's completely normal. Enjoy it. It's also normal for it to not happen. There is no cookie-cutter R process. Whatever your needs are, refer to #6 and COMMUNICATE them to your WS.
8. **Setbacks.** There will almost always be setbacks, so when you establish your boundaries, think carefully. Even the most sincere, and most remorseful WS's will have setbacks.

My H was/is the poster child for remorseful WS's busting their asses to make R work with a BS. And you know what? We had a setback. No, he didn't cheat again, but it was a setback nonetheless. It was really difficult and threw me for a loop because I wasn't prepared for it. Someone who's led a life that took them to infidelity isn't going to change overnight in every way. Why? Because they are human.

You have to think carefully about what you can and cannot live with. What's important is that you do not give empty threats that you do not intend to follow through on. For example, you told your WS that any contact with OP was grounds for divorce. WS runs into OP, says hi, and even though he shouldn't have(should have ignored him/her), are you really going to D over "hi"?

This doesn't mean the WS gets a million free chances, but you have to be reasonable, too. Don't set high standards that are impossible to meet. It doesn't work, and here's why: Your WS will begin to hold back and not feel safe telling you ANYTHING, much less something that will upset you.

This is a tough spot to be in, so avoid it by preparing yourself and setting clear, thought-out boundaries. Do some thinking on what your boundaries are, and be careful when you establish them. Also, make them very clear to your WS. Leave no room for misinterpretation.

9. Unwanted Interference. Be careful who you tell about the A. Most people, even family and your closest friends will most likely tell you to NOT stay with your S after an A. They say this not because they hate him/her, but because they love you. They are angry that you've been hurt. But they aren't YOU, and they can't make your decisions for you. Only you know if your WS and your M are worth another shot. Don't let outside influences sway your mind.

This was a HUGE obstacle for me to overcome. It took me months to shake the "disapproving opinions" (and holy moly were there a lot!!!) on my choice to R. This is why it is strongly advised to choose very carefully who you confide in about the A. Almost always, family and close friends are not the wisest choice in which to confide. That's the LAST thing a suffering BS needs to deal with. However, you know your family and friends better than anyone else, and if you truly feel they can be objective and helpful, then by all means, confide in them. But if you feel even the SLIGHTEST bit that they may not be, then be very careful about telling them anything.

My hope is that you will read this and get something useful out of all I've learned from this process. I am a success story. I am proof that life can and does go on after infidelity. But it's not easy. I never imagined how hard I'd have to dig in and get dirty with this process. I expected H to do it all because HE is the one that made the mess. But it doesn't work that way. I came through it. WE came through it, as a team, truly together for the first time in our M. And I thank God every day that we have, because what we have now is so worth it, it's almost unbelievable.

I want BS's to see that it CAN get better, but not without a heck of a lot of work from both of you.