

12 Unattractive, Ugly, Typical Tactics Most People Use to Prolong the Affair and Guarantee Their Own Misery

By Dr. Robert Huizenga in [“Break Free From the Affair”](#)

1) Say “I love you”

Saying “I love you,” especially repeatedly, often pushes your spouse away and in essence, probably does not reflect the truth of what you really want to say.

What does it mean to say, “I love you?” especially at this juncture in your relationship? Do you know? Does he/she?

The words “I love you” are powerful in the beginning stages of a relationship where they match the underlying powerful feelings of attraction. “I love you” then means: I’m attracted to you. I want to be with you. I experience good feelings when I am with you or think about you.

Or, the words are powerful later in the relationship when special occasions recall the feelings that brought you together or when the stability of the relationship is temporarily threatened and you express your commitment to your spouse.

But, when in the midst of dealing with an affair, using the words “I love you” are inadequate and in reality, poor communication. They do not express what you really want to say. Nor does your spouse, who is allegedly “in love” with another person, know what to do with that statement.

Here are ways your spouse might respond internally when he hears those words from you:

- Yeah right! What does she want now? She’s just saying that so I won’t leave. Or, she’s just saying that so I will leave the other woman. She’s using that to manipulate me. So, I will walk away or not say anything.
- He loves ME? Yeah right! How can he love me when I do something like this? It doesn’t make sense.

- Who would love someone who fools around on them? If he fooled around on me, I know I wouldn't love him.
- Hey, this is cool! I got two of them wanting me. Man, it feels great to be pursued by two people. It is great to be loved by two people. (This may not be acknowledged but it might lie behind a need to continue the soap opera drama.)
- She loves me? What is the world does that mean? What is she trying to say when she says that? I don't understand. Is that all she can say? Isn't there more she needs to say to me? How am I to respond? Say, "I love you too?" Geezzz Louise, it's not that simple.
- I hate it when he says, "I love you." That really makes him unattractive. He seems so sickeningly needy when he says that. And, that really turns me off. When he says it, I think of a whining lost little boy who needs reassurance. Sorry, but I'm not there. I don't want to be a mother.

What are you really saying? Here are some possibilities. Do any fit?

- "I love you," means I need you. My life is incomplete or insufficient without you. I have little clue of who I am outside of you and I need you to define who I am. I cannot think of having a life of my own.
- "I love you" means don't leave me. I'm afraid of life on my own. I am terrified of what might happen. Tell me you love me, and that you will be there for me so I don't have to think of making my own way. Calm my fears, because I'm not sure I can.
- "I love you," means I'm a wimp. I don't want to rock the boat. I don't really want to confront you with what I'm really thinking and feeling. I
- Don't want to take a stand and say ENOUGH. I will tolerate almost anything.
- "I love you," means I'm sad. It feels sad to see the relationship and dreams crumble. It's sad to feel the distance, mistrust, pain and agony. It's sad to

think of that which might never happen. It's sad to think of maybe not growing old with you.

- "I love you" means I remember with loving feelings who you were and who I was. I remember who we were. I remember the good times. I remember the way it used to be. I remember what it was like to love and be there for each other. I miss that. I love those memories and maybe, that's all they are.

2) Criticize, complain, whine, nag

This should be fairly obvious. Criticizing, complaining, whining and nagging are not attractive! Who wants to be around such a person? When I criticize or complain I have a hard time being around myself. This behavior is usually an attempt to deal with the internal tension you feel. You don't know where to go with the tension, so it seeps out around the edges.

Something your spouse says or does, and it doesn't have to be major, will trigger the tension and you spit out the negativity. You may be unaware that it is happening, since it probably is a fairly long-standing habit.

And, of course, your spouse will respond in his/her typical fashion, probably by moving away or countering you with his/her negativity. Ever feel like you hit a brick wall, time and time again? It hurts, doesn't it? And, you go nowhere.

What would happen if you stopped using criticism, complaining or whining? What could you do instead? What does your criticizing, complaining and nagging supposedly get for you? Give it some thought.

(Here's what you might find: You are trying to get something, or you want something to happen or you have some expectation and it's not there. Can you find a different way to let this person know what you want, what you need or how you would like your life to be, without resorting to something that is absolutely guaranteed to give you the opposite of what you truly desire?)

3) Say "I've changed"

In an attempt to persuade a spouse to stop an affair or restore a relationship you may use the ploy, "But I've changed I'm a different person." And your behavior

may truly be different – most of the time. You try to accommodate in ways you haven't tried before or you alter your behavior to fit your perception of what he/she wants you to do. Here are some problems with this strategy:

- Is it true? Have you really changed or are you in a reactive mode? You are reacting to a painful situation by trying on different behaviors. There is nothing wrong with this. Actually you are to be commended. It probably takes a great deal of energy and conscious thought to alter, especially in a drastic manner, some of your habits.
- If you continue the new behaviors they may gradually sink in and truly become a part of you. However, these changes usually lack staying power because they are born out of reactivity.
- You will return to the old patterns, especially when the heat is off. And, your spouse intuitively knows this. He/she thinks, "This will never last" and is highly suspicious.
- Your change will probably be viewed by your spouse as an attempt to manipulate. He/she will perceive your change as a strategy on your part to get him/her to change. If your spouse felt "cornered" before, the feelings will be greater now. Your spouse will most likely resent these changes, even though these very behaviors are what he/she has been asking for all the previous years. More distance will emerge.
- You will lose credibility. Your spouse will not believe you or will not know what to believe about you. In 80% of the affairs, my experience and analysis tells me that confusion reigns.
- Your spouse is very confused about what he/she wants. By faking or trying on changed behaviors, you are only adding to the confusion. The message you are sending is NOT CLEAR.
- You will lose respect. Bottom line: people don't want other people to try to please or placate them. They just don't respect that kind of strategy. There is no backbone. There is no core self from which you express yourself and take a firm stand. That is not very attractive.

Here's a common response I encounter: If you can change so easily now, why didn't you change when I wanted you to change back then? It's too late now. Some sadness or resentment may emerge as he/she encounters the new behavior, thinking about what could have been, but is no longer seen as possible.

4) Argue, Reason, Plead

You may believe that the more persistent you are in trying to get your spouse to "understand," the better off you may be. Not always true. Usually, the harder you try to get your point across, the deeper you drive the wedge into the relationship.

An affair is not based on logic. One's quest to "find him/herself" through an affair has little to do with reason. The allure of the other person, whatever that allure might be, has little respect for reason, logic and thinking and talking something through together.

So you may attempt to reason with your partner about seeing the other person, where your partner goes, how he/she spends time, spending more time with the children, how to handle finances and pay the bills and other issues related to your life together, or your lack of life together.

The two of you swirl. It's as if you have been there, done that countless times before. You can predict what he/she will say, can predict your response to his/her response can, in turn, predict how he/she will respond to your response of his/her response. Sound familiar?

You bang into a communication wall filled with the same old nasty feelings and thoughts you've encountered before. And you end in the same fashion; He/she walks away (which gives an "excuse" to run to the arms of someone else.)

Arguing, reasoning and pleading keep the focal point on each other. It keeps the relationship bound together (we call it enmeshment) in a powerfully negative and destructive way. You merely continue to rehash the old stuff with the same fruitless outcome.

5) Get friends and family involved

It is not uncommon to look for an ally. But, more than an ally, you may look for someone who will be your eyes and ears, and perhaps mouthpiece.

You may seek out an informant. You quiz others about what your spouse is saying and doing. You pump for information. You may look for signs of hope and hang intently on every word of your ally.

Or, you might enlist a friend or family member to be your mouthpiece. You encourage them to talk to your spouse and hammer some “sense” into this wayward creature. You give them all the information they need to be persuasive.

Unfortunately, many people seem to get off on this. There is an element of drama, suspense and mystery that hooks people into being what they think is helpful. They may be all too willing to join you in your drama.

Getting friends and family involved only worsens your situation. Three people emotionally involved and invested in a relationship form a triangle. Ever watch soap operas? A soap opera is inherently two people talking about a third or two aligned and plotting against the third. There is a lot of juice stirred up, but the relationships are not healthy (unless the triangle is broken).

With such a triangle, you only perpetuate a bad situation. What is an affair?

Basically, it’s a triangle: two aligned against the outsider. Adding more triangles to the mix only increases the possibility for a more powerful explosion. (There are some pretty complicated systems or family therapy concepts involved which I won’t get into. Only to let you know that they exist, and that the triangle serves as a basis for some of these concepts.)

To break free from the affair, it is crucial that you and your spouse face one another and begin stating your positions, your needs, your desires, your beliefs, the feelings you. With this process you begin unraveling the story of your respective lives.

6) Act helpless, depressed

Talk about unattractive. It takes a tremendous amount of energy for someone to be in relationship with a person who consistently acts helpless and depressed. People, over time, become weary of being around such a person. Do you like being around a depressed person?

Here's the kicker though: Acting helpless and depressed can get mileage. Some people seek out depressing people because it gives them good feelings to take care of someone, or they get a feeling of being a little superior. In the meantime the depressed and helpless person gets a lot of attention and care.

The helpless or poor me syndrome is also a tool to control the other person. After all, you don't want to get too upset with a depressed person. They can't handle that, right? Or, worst case scenario, might they harm themselves, because they are so fragile?

At some point the caretaker begins to pull away from the relationship and resolves not to be a part of that cycle. An affair might be the unconscious strategy (albeit, a not very bright strategy) to cope with one's inability to confront the depressed person with his/her true self.

Acting depressed or helpless in the aftermath of an affair may be a longstanding pattern, only intensified at this point, in your relationship with your partner. It no longer works effectively, but you might turn up the volume a little louder, acting more helpless and depressed, to make your point and get him/her back.

Question: If it does work and your partner comes back, is that the kind of relationship you want? Do you relish the idea of playing the victim/helpless role the rest of your life to control and maintain a relationship? Probably not. At least, I wouldn't want that for you.

So you say you really are depressed? OK, fair enough. Some people do suffer from the clinical definition of depression. If you do, don't wait one more minute. Call your family doctor and ask for a referral to get some help. Assume responsibility for your illness.

Discover who you really are beneath the depression so you have a true self to offer to your spouse or someone else. Doesn't that sound much better? I would think your partner would think so.

7) Give up opposite sex relationships

If your partner is involved in an affair, you most likely have the tendency to shun people of the opposite sex. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, you probably do not feel very attractive or desirable. As I've noted in other writings, being on the receiving end of an affair dumps self-esteem down the toilet. Even if you had an interest in pursuing a relationship, this would get in the way.

An interesting phenomenon I observe very frequently is that the spouse having the affair sends a subtle or not so subtle message that only he/she is allowed to have an extramarital relationship. It is his/her domain.

If the offended partner begins a relationship with a person of the opposite sex, the person having the affair may become jealous and disturbed, sometimes extremely so. Make sense? No, but then again, not much about affairs makes sense.

You may hold back from having an opposite sex relationship because you believe it will only give permission to your partner to continue the affair and provide further ammunition for him/her to actually leave. This does occur, but only in particular kinds of affairs and, I believe, only in a minority of situations. It will NOT be a major factor in his/her decision to truly end the marriage.

Holding back from developing an opposite sex relationship typically indicates you are doggedly determined to focus on what your partner and what he/she is doing or not doing. You are riveted on this painful elusive relationship. It occupies your every moment and breath. To think of having a life of your own seems terribly foreign.

When I talk about having a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, I'm NOT talking about dating or sleeping around. Don't jump off the bridge. But, there is such a thing as a healthy relationship with those of different gender. Actually,

it's fairly important to have those relationships without sexualizing them, or at least trusting yourself and the other person well enough to have a friendship that energizes.

You can learn a great deal. Your life will be enriched. You will have a life. And, it will be important to have this life in the future, with or without your partner present.

8) Get reassurance from your children

Please don't intentionally involve your children.

Here's what I mean.

- Don't share information with them about their other parent.
- Don't try to pry information from them about your spouse.
- Don't ask (in any way) for them to agree with you, side with you, or comfort you.
- Don't talk about your spouse to them in any way shape or manner.
- You can say directly: I'm having a difficult time right now, but I'm doing everything to take care of it and this too shall pass. I will always be here for you.

Why? This is a difficult time emotionally for your children. They know what is going on, even if they don't know the details. They need a PARENT(S). Don't you become the child.

Remember my talk about triangles? What you have with your children is the potential for more triangles. Someone talking to someone about someone else only perpetuates your pain, creates pain for them, and lowers the possibility of effectively resolving your relationship with your spouse.

As long as you are mired in triangles, you offer the opportunity for your spouse to perceive you as undesirable and therefore he/she continues the affair. As well, you remain locked in your pain and merely lengthen the time and intensity of your misery.

Go to other people (adults) for reassurance, comfort, guidance and a listening ear. My site has a rather extensive section that walks you through ways to elicit from your adult friends and family what you need from them. (I have a letter you can send to them on “10 Things I Want From You During Difficult Times”).

The ideal way to beat a triangle is to confront your spouse with your thoughts, your needs, set boundaries, declare yourself, take a stand and in essence, look at him/her eyeball-to-eyeball and say, I won't live like this. I'm making some shifts and changes. I will make it, either with or without you. But, I guarantee, I will make it.

9) Use the Bible or Dr. Laura

It is a natural impulse to want to beat your wandering spouse over the head, not literally, of course. Well, maybe... (Just kidding. Don't do it!)

But, on a number of occasions I've run across those who throw Bible verses, selected passages from books or talk show hosts' comments about the immorality and path of perdition he/she is following by engaging in an affair.

Now, granted, engaging in an affair is sin because it certainly does miss the mark in terms of having an authentic and truth-filled relationship and it certainly has dire consequences in which the other does walk down a difficult path. However, using this as a weapon to stop the affair brings dubious results at best.

Think about it. Would you really want him/her to come back to the relationship because of coercion? What would that be like? He/she would be there because of moral compunction, not because they really wanted to be with you. Could you live in a relationship of emotional investment where someone was forced to be with you – out of guilt or trying to abide by some law? Don't you really want to be wanted?

Have you ever heard the phrase, “that which you resist, persists?” This concept implies that the more you try to avoid something or work hard to change something, the more power you give it and the possibility for true change diminishes.

Beating him/her over the head with moral persuasion most likely will increase his/her resolve, if not openly at least internally, to oppose you. Poor strategy!

Again, we return to a common theme: gathering moral ammunition and blasting away at the other person means you are focusing your energy on him/her.

Your best bet is to turn that finger around and be kind, gentle, encouraging, supportive, directive, and caring to yourself. Get your emotions and thoughts under control. Plan your strategy for your survival, growth and moving ahead – with or without him/her.

One more thing: Do you really want to be known as a morally superior person? Most of us do not. I'm not talking about becoming a morally inferior person, i.e. lowering your standards, by any means. I'm suggesting, don't go into the arena of morality or take a morally righteous position. It's booby-trapped. You prolong your misery. You lessen hope for a reconciled marriage or workable future relationship with your spouse.

10) Suggest counseling

OK, what's the deal? A therapist who is recommending that you NOT pursue counseling with your spouse? Yes, exactly. Believe me, I've seen hundreds of couples, and counseling when an affair is involved seldom, and I mean real seldom, works.

In most communities, getting counseling is the thing to do when there are marital problems. Family, friends, clergy and others say, "Have you gotten counseling?" Many spouses agree to attend. It usually lasts for a few sessions, if that.

He/she often enters counseling guardedly and with little intent to self disclose. He/she usually in some fashion sabotages counseling. It doesn't work. Here's the kicker: the person is then able to say, "Well, we got counseling, and it just didn't work out!" Counseling becomes a rationalization to pull further away.

Suggesting counseling, because it is socially sanctioned by your community, is perceived by your spouse as coercion. Again, persuasion or coercion usually gets the results you don't intend and shifts the focus away from where it needs to be –

your self care and your ability to take a firm, non-reactive stand and move ahead with your life, with or without him/her.

So you want to get your spouse into counseling? Here's your strategy: Say, "I want you to know that I'm getting counseling. There are some changes I want to make for myself. You are basically right, our relationship hasn't been that cool for me either. I want to learn why I attract the kind of people I do. I want to prepare for my future. I'm going to make it!"

Depending on the kind of affair that confronts you, this is your best chance for the two of you to resolve the relationship, with counseling being a helpful tool.

11) Tell him/her we need to work on the relationship

This usually means you want to go back to the way the marriage used to be. You remember the good times and your intent is to recapture them. Or, you believe that the two of you, focusing on each other with more purpose, can change the flow of the relationship.

To do that, you believe you need to try. This often means spending more time together, dating, being more attentive to each other, reading self help books together, buying each other gifts and in general, revisiting the courting stage of the relationship.

This usually is very uncomfortable. One is the pursuer and the other hedges, forgets or distances. There are constant thoughts of the other person by both parties.

The comparison game is played internally, but never talked about openly. The stress and strain oozes beneath the surface.

The spouse involved with the other person may concede to trying, since it serves basically the same purpose as counseling. He/she can at some point say, "See, we tried and it just didn't work." It may ease the guilt or give internal permission to pursue with more vigor, the other person.

Trying does not get at the truth. Trying is a band-aid that fails to alter the underlying dynamics of the marriage or the individuals. Trying to change the relationship is again, other focused, and this only leads to a deeper sense of being stuck.

Don't work on the relationship. Here's my mantra again: Work on you. No, you don't even have to work on you. Be you! If you don't know who you are, find out and then be you. It really is OK. And, it really isn't that difficult. At least it's much easier than trying to change another person or a relationship.

Oh yeah, one more thing. When you are you, stop trying to change someone, especially that which someone in an emotionally invested relationship cannot not change. Think about it!

12) Let yourself go to pot

It is very easy when confronted with a trauma that rocks us to our soul to go back to that, which is ugly, negative, and ultimately self-defeating. We revert to the negative thoughts about our self. We revert to those old negative feelings that rip at our emotions and sometimes tear at our body. We revert to those old ways of behaving that get us where we don't want to go. We go back to what I call our "familiar position."

Allowing yourself to go to pot (and I know some who literally go there or find some other substance to ingest that numbs) takes a tremendous amount of energy. It takes more than facing head-on what you need to face.

You continue on a downward spiral whereby each negative thought, word and action builds on the other and accumulates. A cloud of negativity hinders you from taking the action you need to take to see your way through. You become stuck.

Of course, you understand, that when you go down that road, you become exceedingly unattractive. You are exceedingly unattractive. This only reinforces the negative self-thoughts swirling in your mind. To think of you as desirable and wantable seems a long way off.

When in your “familiar position” you will resort to typical behaviors you use to get what you think you want. Basically, you will either withdraw or attack. Neither will serve you well.

OK, so what do you do? Well, it is impossible to totally avoid your negative feelings and thoughts, so don’t try. It is also impossible to force yourself onto a different path. (That might last for a while, but the negativity will catch up to you.) There are a couple powerful strategies. First, just notice when you go where you typically go. Don’t judge. Just notice. Allow the negativity to be there for a while.

Observe it. Learn from it. Be aware of how you are trying to protect yourself or how you actually are trying to get what is important for you.

Be gracious to yourself. Accept the fact that you are sometimes where you don’t want to be. Be kind to yourself. Look beneath. Look deeper. Look within. It will be well worth it.

And, others will notice. They will see the change, and it will be attractive.

Remember these powerful words, “You will be all right!”

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