Characteristics of Couples Especially Vulnerable to Infidelity

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Below is a list of characteristics and features of relationships and of marital partners that seem to create conditions in a marriage that make it more vulnerable to infidelity. Some of characteristics listed below involve ongoing relationship issues and situations. Others describe personality traits and behavioral patterns of the marital partners. Still others involve patterns of interactions that have developed within the relationship over time.

Relationship Characteristics

- Trust issues prior to the marriage
- Child-centered marriages, where family activities revolve around the activities of the children
- Disagreement about whether to have kids (before child rearing)
- Frequently spending extended time apart from each other
- Discomfort with emotional intimacy and vulnerability
- Avoidance of conflicts or distancing in the face of conflict
- Unequal emotional investment in the relationship
- Avoidance of problems or hoping problems with go away
- Poor communication and problem solving skills.
- Conflicts are personalized to the point that positive regard for each other is damaged
- Negative feelings about the relationship overshadow positive feelings.
- Lack of physical/sexual intimacy.
- Pursuing/distancing or Demand/withdraw interaction pattern.

Individual perceptions or feelings about partner or relationship

- Partners’ perceptions of the other partner’s inability/unwillingness to be supportive
- Partners’ perceptions of the other partner’s loyalty.
- Partners’ perceptions of emotional distance or “having grown apart”
- Feelings of loneliness while with partner
- Unilateral problem solving
- Inequity in power
- Partners’ perception of the other partner’s disregard for requests for change
- Lack of common interests
- Lack of enjoyment/fun in the relationship.

Individual characteristics and attitudes/beliefs about infidelity

- Partners’ belief that affairs can be justified under the “right” circumstances

When you need a little help…..
• Absence of values that inhibit having an affair
• Partner history of impulsive, risky, or acting out behavior
• Partner self-centered, self-absorbed reference in relationship to others.
• Partner difficulties with intimacy
• Family history of affairs or accepting attitudes toward affairs
• Partner history of casual sex or affairs
• Partner tendency to externalize responsibility for his/her own behavior and decisions.
• Lack of insight into the link between one’s behavior and their outcomes.
• History of withholding of pertinent personal information.

Environmental Factors

• Opportunities for sexual acting out (e.g. travel with work, flirting, willing co-workers, frequent socializing with others perceived as attractive, drinking with friends).
• Positive attitudes toward affairs of friends and family
• Friends and family members currently or recently having affairs
• Rekindling of old romantic relationships or starting new "friendships" on social media like Facebook.
• Partners individually and independently managing elevated stress.

Copyright 2010, Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D., http://peggyferguson.marriage-family.com
Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK.