

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE UNFAITHFUL



This guide is a compilation of 10 posts from our site that every unfaithful spouse should read. There is also a separate guide entitled *The Most Common Mistakes Made by the Unfaithful after Infidelity*.

These two documents are meant to help the unfaithful gain a better understanding of the betrayal and lead them towards better decision making and providing greater assistance in the healing process.

We sincerely hope these materials are helpful!

Linda & Doug

[Emotional Affair Journey](#)



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Understanding the Pain of an Affair



by Doug

Most cheaters (or ex-cheaters), have no clue how much pain we are causing, especially when we're in our affairs and immediately after our affairs are discovered. We are too wrapped up in the affair or in our own issues to notice.

Many victims have said that the pain is worse than losing a loved one.

I think the main reason this is so is because the pain from infidelity is a pain that keeps on giving and it lingers in the victim's mind for a long time.

Each time they [experience a trigger](#), the pain is there again as if the affair just occurred. They have many questions, emotions, images and feelings that constantly stir up more pain. The affair remains in the mind of the betrayed through every waking moment.

We've caused a severe trauma to our spouses, and it's a trauma that they never deserved. So we have to do our best and work our hardest to help them past this.

If for some reason you cannot comprehend the pain that you've caused or are choosing instead to disregard it, I highly suggest that you educate yourself and/or change your way of thinking right now.

Ask your wife about her pain after your affair if she hasn't already told you. If you're afraid to do that at this point, do some surfing online and check out almost any infidelity forum or blog and read some of the entries from those who have suffered as a result of an affair. I promise you it will be a real eye opener.

Unless you don't have a sympathetic bone in your body, I think that the statements from your wife or those online will touch you to a point that you can really start to comprehend the pain of an affair. Understanding that pain alone can help to change your way of thinking almost immediately.

And if you haven't figured out by now, this pain isn't something that goes away easily nor quickly. This pain can last for a long time. Experts say it takes anywhere from 2 to 4 years for a person to recover from infidelity. We are aware of some situations where the trauma has been an issue for 20 years or more. So this isn't something that we should take lightly, but instead we really need to understand exactly what we've done and just how hard the road to recovery is and how much work it will take to help our spouses.

In case you still can't relate, let me continue on so as to really drive the point home.

Your spouse feels shock, both emotionally and physically. She's exhausted, [feels worthless](#) and probably has lost a lot of weight from the crushing stress. She has felt anger, sadness and despair and since she never saw your affair coming, it has crushed the hell out of her. She may suffer from panic attacks and has totally lost her confidence, her self-esteem and cannot trust herself to make good decisions any longer.

There is a feeling like a knife has been stabbed in her back from your betrayal. There will be times when she feels as if her life is over. In fact, she may have even thought of suicide. She feels disrespected and wonders how you could have done this to her. She trusted you and now everything she believed in as far as your relationship, your marriage and you as a person has been flushed down the toilet.

One of our blog readers writes:

"One story I read to my husband made him weep and I can't remember what book it was in but it went like this... There was this wonderful, vibrant woman, mother of three, busy in her community, loving mother and wife.

One night she discovered her husband of 30 years was having an affair (I believe an emotional affair). She went in the garage and hung herself. To the victim, an affair is like being raped. Cheaters need to know the depth of their decisions. They need to understand that this affair will change another human being forever. Even though we recover we will be FOREVER damaged and changed. While we will learn to live with the change it is immensely unfair especially considering who you have hurt.”

Are you catching on yet?

Elements of a Heartfelt Apology after the Affair



by Doug

It seems that most betrayed spouses never really get a true heartfelt, genuine apology after the affair from the unfaithful spouse.

Sure, they may get the standard “I’m sorry” but it seems as though they usually hear those two words much too often as the cheater continues their lies and poor behavior.

This post is meant to be a guide of sorts to help this whole apology process along. We know that a true heartfelt apology can start to break down some of the barriers to healing.

Cindy Taylor with [AffairCare](#) says that a proper apology from the wrong doer contains:

- a detailed account of the situation—not hiding details or covering up what happened; be specific.
- acknowledgement of the hurt or damage done—name what you’ve done; say it out loud and call it by name.
- taking responsibility for the situation—no blame-shifting here; take personal responsibility for your part.
- a statement of regret—indicate that you are upset over your past actions.
- asking for forgiveness—come right out and make the request.
- a promise that it won’t happen again—indicate what your plan is so that the person is not hurt again.
- a form of restitution whenever possible—some actions result in damage, so replace the damaged item; however, some damage cannot be “undone” in which case you might give them what they need in order to feel safe.

I think this is a really good model to follow so let's break it down even further, point-by-point.

Provide a detailed account of the situation—not hiding details or covering up what happened; be specific. Well, good luck with this one. Obviously this is very important. In fact it's mandatory for the unfaithful person to accomplish. The truly remorseful spouse will certainly try his or her best to do this, but unfortunately it seems this is where most CS fail miserably. I certainly did. Instead of lying, stonewalling, deflecting, getting angry, etc., just tell the truth in its entirety as calmly as possible.

Acknowledgement of the hurt or damage done—name what you've done; say it out loud and call it by name. The cheater must understand as fully and completely as possible all the pain they inflicted on their partner. This means coming to terms with the pain they caused them both directly and indirectly, as well as the pain they caused by what they did and the pain they caused by what they failed to do. Here again is where a little empathy comes into play. The CS needs to walk in the BS' shoes here as much as possible.

Additionally, the BS may need to take some time to really accept the premise that the CS truly understands what they did, so it's important that the CS doesn't try to rush the BS along.

Taking responsibility for the situation—no blame shifting here; take personal responsibility for your part. Once the cheater has a complete understanding of all the pain they have caused, they need to express that understanding fully and completely to their partner in a way that shows that they accept full responsibility for having caused so much pain. This has to be done without justifications, excuses, rationalizations or being defensive. Man (or woman) up and take responsibility for what you've done and the pain you've caused.

No pussy-footing around here either. If you really want to save your relationship and make a step toward healing, give it your all and really mean it and show that you're sincere in your desire to fix your screw up.

Provide a statement of regret – indicate that you are upset over your past actions. This is good but I think where many CS fail here is that they don't do this with any real genuineness. Basically, they say they're sorry and that's about it. Sorry for what? Getting caught? Or for destroying the foundation of the relationship? Get specific about what actions you are upset about and what you regret most.

Asking for forgiveness—come right out and make the request. Another mandatory point for sure, but the betrayed spouse cannot make the mistake of forgiving before he or she is really ready. Likewise, the unfaithful spouse cannot expect the BS to forgive immediately and must be patient and persistent in their efforts to earn that forgiveness.

Promise that it won't happen again—indicate what your plan is so that the person is not hurt again. This may or may not be effective, depending on where you are at in the recovery process. For instance, if you are just after the discovery of the affair, promises made by the cheater will not mean a helluva lot to the betrayed spouse. At this point, these are just words and all the pain and betrayal saps the meaning out of them. The CS really hasn't done anything to warrant faith in what they are saying is genuine.

Many cheaters first attempts at apologizing are really about their own need to escape from pain. They think that if their spouse accepts their apology they will be off the hook. But this step is about something else entirely. This is about looking within oneself and making fundamental changes about the way they think, feel, and behave in order to make sure they will never hurt their spouse again. It ain't easy, it doesn't happen overnight and it won't happen just because the CS says it will.

A form of restitution whenever possible—some actions result in damage, so replace the damaged item; however, some damage cannot be “undone” in which case you might give them what they need in order to feel safe. This one is tricky as it can mean different things to different people. Some will feel that the damage created by an

affair cannot and will not be “undone.” Others may feel differently and can come up with some sort of acceptable restitution.

I think the key word here is “safety.” The CS has to do whatever they can do to provide an environment of safety for the betrayed. At first, the BS might not even know what that is. It can take a little bit of time for them to figure out what they need the CS to do to make them feel safe. Again, effective communication and patience are required here.

However, it’s safe to say that the CS must do certain things like: end the affair and sever any and all contact with the OP, become totally transparent and answer any and all questions pertaining to the affair that the betrayed partner might have, they must communicate their commitment to the relationship and that they will do whatever is necessary to heal the pain – to name just a few.

Hopefully, this breakdown can help in some way. In closing I think that above all, an apology must be genuine. Too many unfaithful people try and apologize in order to hurry the healing process along, which almost always backfires because the BS can sense it.

So instead, it’s important that the CS holds off on any apologies until they are really truly ready. That said, many CS have already said they’re sorry (typically after getting caught), so they more than likely will have to do it again – perhaps several more times – until the BS feels that the apology is genuine.

No Such Thing as TMI – The Importance of Full Disclosure after You Have Had an Affair



by Sarah P.

Many of us joke about situations where someone shares too much information. We close our ears and say: “La la La la” because someone just over shared.

After you have had an affair, it’s likely that your first instinct is to hide the details. You furiously delete all the emails, the text messages, the many compromising photos, and you burn any handwritten love letters just in case.

You feel that you do not want to harm your spouse anymore then he/she has already been harmed. You feel like what he/she knows won’t hurt him/her and so you get to work at deleting all traces of the affair and you spend hours rewriting what actually happened in order to soften the emotional blow.

Even though you have the right motivation, that is to spare your spouse any further grief, unfortunately this is not the way to do it.

You see, those messy details always come out and they will come out no matter how much you seek to hide them. In fact, if you think all that deleting has gotten rid of them, think again. Because it’s most likely even the government has a back up in the database of all those compromising photos. So, it could get out.

You do not want to be in the position of being seen as completely untrustworthy. Because the affair has already caused a loss of trust, you do not want to [further damage trust](#) as you’re trying to rebuild it.

Even though it seems counterintuitive, telling your spouse the hard truth in the light of day, is going to serve your marriage in the long run. That is, if you are like most and you do want to repair your marriage. Statistically

speaking, 90% of those who cheat on their spouses end up staying with their spouse even if they choose the other person for a short time.

Therefore, even though your spouse is hurting, you need to answer his/her questions truthfully when he/she asks. Yes, it's going to hurt. But sparing him/her the truth hurts more in the long run. Because your spouse knows that when you tell the truth, you sincerely want to repair trust. The truth, though it hurts, is actually going to be the foundation on which to rebuild trust.

On the other hand, you may feel that you're such a good liar that you really don't have to take this advice. You think you have it handled and you can just keep lying.

But, here's the thing. As I have said before, truth has a way of coming out despite our best efforts to hide it. It's like the universe itself cannot support too much lying and so it allows the truth to seep out in even the most likely of scenarios.

A True Story...

In fact, I am going to tell you a true story of something that actually happened to me.

As they say, truth is stranger than fiction and this story certainly meets that criteria. I can also tell you that the story was not a figment of my imagination because my parents were actually present to witness it. (I will change names, but all of the other details are the same.)



I went to graduate school in another English-speaking country. During that time, I met a woman who was taking advantage of one of my very best male friends. This woman was from India and from a wealthy family. But, she had an insatiable need to be taken out to expensive restaurants and to be given

expensive gifts. She had actually gone through the money of two of my other friends prior to picking on this third gentlemen.

My friend was in a wheelchair because of an injury he had sustained as a child. I felt toward him like he was a brother and was very protective. Once this woman came around, I knew she wasn't sincere, but she was such a wonderful liar that my friend didn't believe me. I understand why he didn't believe me. He was very lonely and she was very attractive and was showering him with attention. Soon after they started dating and sleeping together, another person told me that this woman had a fiancé in Germany who had been in my program the year before.

After this woman ran through all of my friend's loan money and he had to beg friends for food, she disappeared. She blocked him on her cell phone and on email and pretended like he no longer existed. Is she thinking of her fiancé and changing her ways?

No, it turned out that her new target was one of my roommates. I stayed out of it, but at that point I started asking around to see if I could send a word to her fiancé about what she had been doing behind his back. No one knew how to get a hold of him but I remained outraged and kept thinking of a way to get a hold of him.

Here's the thing, I graduated and came back to the US and got a teaching job at a university. I still did not know the name or the location of the German gentleman. I had left all of that behind overseas, but it still angered me to see how broken my friend in the wheelchair remained.

During the Christmas break, I was at a large dinner with 100 people and it was for all of the exchange students at the university in which I was teaching. My parents were there too since they had international students that they hosted and my dad was teaching in another department at that university.



We ended up sitting at a large table with a couple that my parents know and the students that all of us were hosting. A man with a thick accent sat beside me and we started chatting. I asked him what he was studying and he told me that he was getting his PhD in English at this university. We chatted about graduate school and there in that small town in the Midwest, I found out that this gentleman had graduated from the same department I had graduated from in the overseas University. We were talking about the theses that we wrote and our experience with the professors.

Suddenly, he started to ask me if we knew any friends in common. He started naming several names that I did not recognize. Finally, he said, “Do you know a woman named Imara?”

I said, “You mean the Imara who has made a career out of cheating on her German fiancé or a different one?”

The man turned sheet white. I asked him what was wrong. Then, he started rapid firing questions about Imara. As I answered them he began to look angry.

Finally I said, “You know if she was your friend I am so sorry to have offended you. It’s just that she did something really terrible to one of my best friends.”

The man looked at me and said, “Imara’s boyfriend? I am certainly NOT Imara’s boyfriend.”

I interjected, “Well, I am so relieved...”

And then he continued, “I am Imara’s fiancé. We are supposed to get married this summer in Germany.”

I had an utter lack of disbelief and almost fell off my chair. I thought he was kidding. Then I asked him some questions to make sure that we were talking about the same person. We figured out that, yes, we were indeed speaking of the same person. I sincerely apologized and I felt terrible. He promptly got up and left the dinner. My parents witnessed the whole thing and wondered what it was all about.

There I was, thousands of miles away from that graduate school in another country. There I was sitting at the table in a Midwestern university wondering what the heck just happened.

I mulled it over and thought that it couldn't be true. Because that was more strange than any other coincidence than I had ever witnessed in my life.

The week after that I ran into him at the small campus coffee shop. I felt very apprehensive and approached him immediately to apologize. Suddenly, he smiled. He said, "I'm sorry for being mad at you since I should have been mad at her. But, I went home that day and I confronted her with all of the information that you gave me. Because it was so detailed, she didn't even try to deny it and she told me the whole truth. Even though I was hurt at first, thank you for telling me because I cannot believe that I could have married such a person."

And that was that. I had gotten my wish to tell Imara's secret to the German man. It didn't happen the way I thought it would happen. A series of very random and unlikely events had to happen for me to be able to tell that secret.

Six months later, I saw the German man again walking around campus. He approached me with his face beaming and said, "I truly need to thank you for saving my future. After I broke up with Imara, I met the love of my life and I proposed to her the other day."

I saw him again after that with the woman to which he was engaged and I honestly believe that they were meant to be together.

Here's the lesson...

But the point of this article is not about [whether or not we should break up after an affair](#). In fact most marriages are repairable after an affair since most people are not sociopaths like Imara. (There was a lot more to her story than was relevant to this blog, but take my word for it.)



The point of it is that story should have never come out, at least through me. Given the circumstances, it was very unlikely to come out at all. But, the truth always finds a way of coming out and it does so at the most unlikely times.

When it does come out, the fact that the truth was withheld is almost more damaging than the original offense itself. Therefore, if you want to build trust, you must tell the truth.

Now, I don't mean that you need to tell the truth in a way that's callous or unthinking. You can tell the truth in a judicious manner and you can follow it up with the idea that the truth has no reflection on your partner and what your partner did or did not do. Your actions were about your failings. You need to make that clear to your partner while telling the truth.

Only then can the affair recovery process really begin. Because as long as you withhold the truth, when it does come out you have shattered all trust and your partner may not want to work it out at that point. But, let's say in a twist of fate, the truth never comes out for whatever reason.

In this case, you will never be able to recover from your infidelity because recovery begins with the truth. And when you're not able to recover from infidelity, you have nothing on which to build your marriage.

Yes, the truth hurts, but the truth is also going to pave the way for the best shot that you have at recovering a marriage. [Telling the truth facilitates all kinds of discussion.](#) You will then be able to have the kinds of discussions where you are perhaps able to express why your needs are not getting met and how to get them met.

Many couples find that after affair recovery, their marriage thrives. But never forget that a thriving marriage begins with the truth. So full disclosure after an affair is a must!

Advice for the Unfaithful – Conquer Your Fight or Flight Response



by Doug

Do your spouse's attempts to discover the truth and to understand the affair result in catapulting you into fight or flight mode?

And when that happens, do the tables on the conversation get turned around and result in either a massive argument or in one or both of you completely shutting down?

If you're anything like I was back in those dark days, is your fight or flight response actually a tool to help you avoid those tough questions and conversations?

Well, I'm here to tell you that if you truly want to help your spouse to "move on" and "get over" your affair, then you need to be able get a handle on your fight or flight responses.

What I used to do...

When Linda would approach me with questions I would become defensive in a huge way. When I did, Linda would pull away. She would retreat like a hurt child and it would shut her down.

Though my reactions were somewhat natural due to my fight or flight instincts, the end result was actually what I was hoping for. She would shut down, the conversation would end and I'd be "safe" from answering questions and talking about the affair again for at least another day.

Obviously, at that time, my head was way too far up my ass and I couldn't see the forest through the trees to realize just how selfish my behavior was.

It took some time performing this dance before I learned that all she wanted to accomplish was to get closer to me, yet my defensiveness only served to pull us further away.

When I stopped the defensiveness and instead just listened to her – that’s all she wanted was for me to listen – we got closer, and calm, open communication typically ensued.

Now, you may be experiencing extreme shame and guilt, or you still might be in [that foggy state](#), so conquering your defensiveness may be difficult for you. You may need some help in getting past it. Here is where you might consider some individual therapy, counseling, or at least talking to a trusted friend who can help guide you.

What helped me...

For me, I determined that the biggest thing that helped me to get past – or at least manage – my flight or fight response, was awareness; being aware when I was getting all fired up and ready to make a stand – and why. Also, being aware and taking into consideration Linda’s true reasons and motivations for her behaviors.

Prior to this realization, if Linda would approach me and start tossing questions my way or expressing her anger or frustrations, I’d typically start to get antsy. My heart would start to race and I could sense my adrenaline kicking in. I was physically and emotionally preparing to defend myself from her “ambush attack.”

[Dr. Jim Taylor](#), Adjunct faculty, University of San Francisco says...

“Our “fight-or-flight” reaction may be the best-known expression of our survival instinct. This response set is triggered when we (and all animals) perceive a situation as a threat to our existence; our sympathetic nervous system activates rapid emotional, psychological, and physical changes. Emotionally, we feel either fear or anger intensely. Psychologically, our

senses are heightened, and we're able to make faster decisions. Physically, we get a shot of adrenaline, our heart rate increases, blood flow is diverted to essential parts of the body, and we experience increased strength and stamina."

When this stress response is triggered it becomes hard to rationally think things through. Therefore, trying to resolve a conflict when the fight or flight response has been activated doesn't work well.

[Margaret Paul, Ph.D.](#) has some suggestions when this response is triggered and an all-out battle seems apparent...

What Not to Do

"If one or both of you are triggered, here is what not to do:

- Don't escalate the conflict by attacking and blaming.
- Don't fuel the flames by defending or explaining.
- Don't shut down and withdraw.
- Don't try to pacify the other person.
- Don't comply. Don't give yourself up.

If you do any of these controlling behaviors, you will either escalate the conflict into a fight, or you will lose yourself. In either case, there will be no caring resolution.

What to Do

There are only two responses in conflict that have a chance at leading to healthy resolution:

- Opening to learning
- Lovingly disengaging

Learning: What this means is that you become curious about your own and the other person's reasons for each feeling the way you do. When you each share your point of view, with caring for yourself and the other person, you each open to the possibility of learning something new. By each of you opening to seeing the situation through the other person's eyes, you will each likely gain new information that will enable you to resolve the

conflict in a way that works for both of you — where neither of you feels you have given yourself up or compromised yourself.”

This is basically what Linda and I were able to accomplish.

One day, we had just had one of our “episodes” as described above, and in our post-shut down period we had a calm discussion. Long story short, we discovered our motivations for behaving why we did.

Linda learned that I felt blindsided, attacked and accused, while I learned that she was just trying to express herself and vent some of her feelings. As a result of this, we each made some adjustments and carried them with us when similar situations arose in the future.

Disengaging: “Disengaging is completely different than withdrawing. When you withdraw, you are shutting down, closing your heart, cutting off your love for yourself and the other person. Withdrawal is a form of punishment: “I will shut down and withdraw my love from you until you stop hurting me, or do what I want you to do.”

Disengaging is temporarily leaving the conflict, but keeping your heart open to yourself and the other person. This means that you need to learn to lovingly manage your painful feelings of helplessness over the other person being closed, and of the loneliness and heartache that might be there when someone is angry, blaming or shut down to you.

When you disengage, you might say to the other person, with a kind and open voice, “I don’t think we will get anywhere right now. Let’s try again in half an hour and then maybe we will be able to be more open with each other.”

Once you feel fully open, go back to the other person and see if he or she is ready to learn with you. If not, then you will need to let it go for another time, or even let it go permanently. We cannot have control over whether or not another person opens in conflict. If the other person doesn’t open, then

you will need to decide for yourself how to take loving care of yourself in the face of not being able to openly talk about the conflict.”

I must say that Linda and I rarely practiced disengaging back during those rough days, though we do now. Often the emotions were so high that withdrawing was typically our response. And to be honest, it was our typical response for most of our marriage and was the only thing we were really familiar with. We had to learn a different approach.

Doing things differently

Fight or flight choices are about survival. Knowing when it’s best to make a tactical retreat and when it’s time to fight is baked into our genes.

We know where the flight or fight reaction will lead if it is left to play itself out unconsciously. The challenge is now for us to cultivate awareness and realize that at any moment we are in a position to actually decide to do things differently.

This doesn’t mean that you will never feel threatened or fearful or angry, or that you will never do anything silly or self-destructive. But in general, awareness either reduces your fight or flight response at the time, or it helps you to recover from it more quickly afterward.

To be sure though, if you do not get a handle on your fight or flight response, especially [as you try to recover and heal from the affair](#), you and your spouse will be in for some frustrating times.

How to Tell Your Spouse about Your Affair



by Doug

The ultimate betrayal of trust in a relationship is, without a doubt, an affair. People often don't realize the consequences of their actions until after the act has been committed.

Probably the hardest part of an affair is when you come to the point where you need to tell your spouse exactly what happened. Like anything else, there's always a right and a wrong way to break this heavy news to your spouse.

There are two camps when it comes to telling your spouse about your affair – don't tell and do tell. And there are some valid arguments for both sides.

The main argument for not telling seems to be along the lines of *"What they don't know won't hurt them."* Often the logic is that the pain is so great for the betrayed...So why subject your spouse to all of that? It's also obvious that another reason is that not telling also shields the cheater from [the consequences of their actions](#).

Conversely, those in the "do-tell" camp may argue that the betrayed deserves to know for various reasons. One such reason is that secrets between a couple undermines trust and thus the very foundation that the relationship is built upon. Also, it is important for a person who has been involved in an affair to take responsibility and to tell the betrayed spouse what has happened. If it's not shared, there is always the risk of it the affair coming out in the open in the future.

The premise behind this post is not to argue these points. Instead, we will address the scenario where a cheater has decided it's time to tell his/her spouse about the affair and how to go about doing it. It's a situation where

the affair is over and a person decides that they really need to get it off their chest and tell their spouse.

Here are some things to consider when it's time to tell your spouse about your affair...

Prepare yourself. If you walk in and confess your affair without having done any introspection, you probably are going to create an even bigger problem.

Your spouse will have questions – lots of questions. If you have any hope of saving your marriage, have answers to all these questions before you start your confession. Obviously, these answers need to be honest answers. Tell the truth and don't embellish or deceive.

Here are some of the questions and/or demands you can expect to hear:

- How could you do this to me?
- How long has this gone on?
- Who was the affair with?
- Why him or her?
- What does s/he do for you that I don't?
- Why am I not good enough for you?
- Tell me everything you did with him/her, where you went together and all the other details!
- I want to see any emails, messages or letters between you and the other person!
- Who else knows?
- How did this begin?
- Is it over with?
- Who ended it?
- When and how did you end it?
- Why did you end it?

Choose a time and a location where there's privacy and where there's time. This certainly isn't a conversation where you can say *"Oh by the way honey, I've been having an affair..."* while your spouse is rushing the

kids off to soccer practice. Tell your spouse when the two of you are alone and have the time for a lengthy conversation.

Privacy is important as well because you must give your spouse the opportunity to express himself or herself. Your spouse needs to be able to react and release any emotions they may be experiencing. So send the kids to Grandma's house or get a sitter and find somewhere private to talk.

Speak plainly and truthfully. You must really speak clearly, plainly, and it's going to be a difficult conversation. Get the whole truth and nothing but the truth out on the table immediately. You don't have to share every detail unless your spouse wants you to, but this is not a time to dodge the issue or minimize what has happened. It's hard enough for you – and you know what's happening – so imagine what it's going to be like for the person who is just hearing this from out of nowhere.

Take responsibility. Affairs don't just happen. Granted, oftentimes there are a lot of things that can contribute to this, but bottom line, the decision was yours. You are basically informing your spouse of a series of decisions that you've made that are bad decisions. That have been damaging. That have been hurtful. [So take responsibility](#) and don't make excuses. This is not a time to blame somebody else. Do not defend your behavior in any way and do not defend the affair partner.

Having an affair was the result of your choices. And quite frankly, this can be one of the first steps in the healing process.

Allow your spouse to react. You've just dropped a major bomb on your spouse and your relationship. There are going to be emotions. Don't get frustrated, angry, defensive or violent. Don't run away either (unless they want you to). Accept that your spouse must process the situation and this is a part of that. Unless for some reason you feel unsafe and are concerned that you may be physically harmed, let your spouse vent and express their emotions.

Be apologetic and remorseful. This might seem really obvious but when there are a lot of emotions involved, you can easily forget. Apologizing and showing true remorse can be a huge starting point for the healing process.

Understand the pain and hurt. Knowing that your spouse has betrayed you is probably the most painful experience that he/she will ever know. You're about to tell your spouse something that will traumatize him/her. The pain is not just going to go away overnight. Don't take this lightly and remember to be sympathetic towards their pain and do what you can (and what he/she will allow) to comfort them.

After you've confessed you will begin the long road to recovery and healing. We wish we can tell you exactly how long it will take, but it is different for every person and every couple.

What we can tell you though is if you do choose to confess and if you take ownership of it, demonstrate sincere, honest remorse and then do the things you need to do to help your spouse heal, then that is a good indication that healing in the relationship is more likely to occur than not.

What to Do if You Run Into Your Affair Partner



by Doug

Many of our readers have communicated that they struggle with how to react should they accidentally run into the other person.

It's not just the betrayed spouse who struggles with this issue, but the ex-unfaithful spouse does so as well. For this post, I'm going to address the scenario where the ex-cheater accidentally runs into their ex-affair partner.

First of all, full disclosure here... I've had zero contact since the affair ended so I'm not speaking from experience. However, Linda and I have discussed this potential situation and will address this topic based on that discussion and my own opinions.

So with that said, for any of you who have had this situation actually play out (whether you are the cheater or your spouse was), we welcome you to share your experiences, lessons and advice in the comment section below the post.

Let's be clear that we're talking about an accidental scenario here. This is not meant to address a rendezvous or an otherwise premeditated or purposeful encounter. I'm addressing the chance, unavoidable meeting in public at the grocery store, at a party, at your kid's soccer game, etc.

I am also addressing this to the ex-cheater who is [committed to reconciliation](#) and rebuilding the marriage that he/she almost destroyed. If you're an ex-cheater and you're hoping to run into your affair partner, this post is not for you.

Prior to a chance meeting...

First of all I think it's important for you to understand that this potential scenario is an event that your BS is more than likely dreading. They realize [the importance of no contact](#) and fear that any contact – no matter how little or how accidental – may propel you back into the arms of your affair partner. And in a lot of cases I don't doubt that this happens.

If you have not had any chance meetings with your ex-affair partner since the affair, I feel that it is vitally important that you have a discussion with your partner to address how you should handle this situation.

Most BS will probably want you to either ignore the AP or tell him/her something to the effect that he/she was the worst mistake ever, that you hope you never see them again, that you love your spouse more than anything, and oh yea...why don't you go to hell!

In fact, here are Linda's words on this from almost 3 years ago:

"I am sure that I am not alone in my thinking, I wish if he did run into her, he would tell her that being with her was the biggest mistake he ever made in his life. He had completely lost his mind, and he loves his wife and his life with me is everything he ever wanted. Their time together was a lie and the experience of seeing her makes him sick to his stomach because of all the hurt their fantasy relationship caused himself and his family."

Will I say that? Perhaps. But we have also agreed that if I'm at the store and someone taps me on the shoulder and I turn around and it was the OW, I could say something more in the realm of "Hello. I really don't have anything to say to you. Good bye." And then scurry off.

Of course, we agree that my primary strategy is to avoid the running into her to begin with, but that might not be possible unless I see her first. As long as I do then it's...avoid detection and exit the building!

Will these responses be appropriate for all of you and in every situation? Absolutely not. But they work for us. The point is that you need to discuss it

and then come to an agreement as to what to say and how to react. You may need to practice it as well.

Have that discussion right away. Don't put it off!

During the chance meeting...

This part is easy. Do and say what you and your spouse agreed that you would do and say!

I say it's easy, but I realize that many of you may be shitting bricks when and if it happens and you may start babbling like an idiot. Others may not have any reservations, nerves or thoughts and the whole event is basically a walk in the park.

The point is, stick to the plan and what you rehearsed and get the hell away.

Disclose the meeting immediately...

Almost as important as handling the chance meeting in the fashion that you agreed to, is doing the right thing immediately after it happens. And that would be to tell your wife or husband that you ran into the OP.

Tell him/her what happened, where it happened, how it happened, what you said, what the AP said and perhaps more importantly, how you feel about the meeting. Did it upset you? Did it make you anxious? Did it bring back any feelings or thoughts of your affair? Etc. Be honest and disclose completely. Answer any questions your spouse might have with patience and empathy.

In the coming days and weeks you are also going to want to be understanding of the emotions of your spouse. He or she is going to be anxious and fearful that old feelings may have been triggered and that the affair will start up again. This whole event may even trigger your spouse back to a dark time that seems as bad as another D-day. Know this, anticipate it and be patient with it.

Since you are an ex-unfaithful person and you are working your ass off to help your spouse recover and heal, then you will know to [continue your life of transparency](#) in a way that invokes honesty and trust worthiness.

You should hold your spouse tight and tell him/her that you love them and reassure them that the chance meeting meant nothing to you other than to confirm the fact that the affair was the dumbest thing you ever did, and the OP was the worst thing to ever cross your path.

Changes Cheaters Might Make if They ‘Get It’



by Linda

About a month ago Doug and I were traveling to Nashville for a weekend getaway and while driving we were doing a little work on a book that we’re writing. We had certain topics that we wanted to discuss so we would talk about them into our digital

recorder – interview style.

It really worked well and actually was a great way to talk about things and it prompted several ‘side-discussions’ to boot.

One of the questions that we discussed on our trip was noticeable changes cheaters might make after their infidelity has come to light.

There is no doubt that infidelity changes us. Rick Reynolds recently wrote a series on change and he says...

“The trauma created by infidelity has a way of changing life patterns for both the betrayed and the unfaithful spouse. Healthy activities such as exercise and hobbies often go by the wayside. Mistrust and hurt feelings change our habits of relating to one another and anger does the same. Hurt and disappointment can even change our spiritual disciplines, and I haven’t even begun to talk about how our habits of self-care change. I wonder what percentage of people picked up old habits of smoking or drinking as a result of a betrayal or how many fall back into old patterns of avoidance or escape. How do we get back to a life we love that’s full of meaning and purpose?”

Since this is the first week of a new year, we wanted to concentrate a bit on the subject of change. Below is the transcript of a small portion of the ‘interview’ that Doug and I had while driving to the Music City. It touches on changes in the cheater that might be expected based on a few of the

changes I saw in Doug. These changes are typically only possible however, if the cheater 'gets it.' These changes also aren't necessarily drastic and some may seem silly to you, but they are important nevertheless.

Changes Cheaters Might Make – Transcript

Linda: I think a lot of times cheaters don't change because they're not motivated enough to do so. For the betrayed spouse, the affair is a wake-up call and is a huge motivation to look within themselves. But the cheater is experiencing a huge high. They don't feel they need to change. Their justifications for the affair keep them on this high for quite some time. There comes a time though when the betrayed says something like, "I can't take it. I want to leave." That seems to be the motivation quite often for the cheater to actually [start making changes](#) within themselves. But it takes that big wake-up call, that big substance to motivate them to change. You don't make changes unless there's some motivation for things to be different.

Doug: What are some changes that a betrayed spouse may notice or possibly expect in the cheater as they get to the point where they start to 'get it'?

Linda: Perhaps your spouse wasn't always truthful before the affair. They would tell white lies about investments or where they spent their time and things like that. Or they're not completely honest with their children or any of their relationships in their life. It was something that you probably were aware of but really never addressed. You just figured that was their personality; that was the way they were.

One thing I noticed with Doug was he started being truthful, even though it might be inconvenient for him. There were situations where in the past he might have had an excuse or a little white lie, but instead he owned up and was honest. One of the major changes that I saw from the beginning was that he realized that he needed to [live a more honest life](#).

Another part was the way that he talked to me. When he started looking deep within himself, he realized that he had issues with his own self-esteem, and in years past would oftentimes project his unhappiness with himself onto me and would make me feel inferior. He would not be very patient if I didn't understand things as quickly as he thought or he would put me down for things. Another thing I noticed very shortly was that he became a lot more patient with me and the way he talked to me was a lot more respectful.

Through the years I think he had lost a lot of respect. He used a lot of sarcasm and he would use jokes at my expense. They hurt me and I didn't understand the meaning behind them. A lot of times I think he used sarcasm instead of honestly expressing his displeasure with something or his feelings. Well, those things stopped.

In the past he was trying to tell me what he wanted, but he was doing so through sarcasm rather than complete communication and honesty. That was another huge difference that I saw in Doug.

Another difference is that he started showing that he cared about me. He lessened my load and made things a lot easier for me at home so I would be less stressed and so we could more easily do the things that I had always wanted to do. I was always a fun person. I like doing all kinds of things. But everything else was just overwhelming for me. So he stepped it up and really started lessening the burden and taking responsibility for a lot of the kids' activities and things around the house without having to be asked or having it result in an argument.

He always asks, "How can I help? What do you need for me to do?" I think that really changed my life because it helped me to be able to focus more on myself and enjoy my life a lot more than I had years before.

Another issue that we had in the past was that when we would go out with friends or in other social situations, he preferred to wander around and mingle, which was fine. But many times I would be left by myself or he would flirt or just [cross the boundaries](#) with other females and it would leave me feeling very incompetent. I always felt that I wasn't worthy or good

enough and that he didn't really want to be with me; he preferred being with everyone else and I wasn't really that important to him. That all stopped as well.

I remember a while back going out with another couple and there seemed to be such a change because he was very attentive to me. He asked me if I wanted something to drink. He put his arm around me and asked if I wanted to dance. He was actually there with me, rather than leaving me on my own to take care of myself – which I'm more than capable of doing. It's just nice to know that he actually wanted to be with me and not thinking the grass was greener or that there's always someone better to talk to than his wife.

I also think that these changes have poured over to his relationship with his children. He is very close to all three of our kids. Sometimes I think he's closer to our daughters than I am, which is a big switch. He has been a wonderful male role model for them and I think has shown them what they should look for in a husband, including the little things like bringing flowers or planning special stuff.

He finally realized how important it is to be the husband that his wife wants to be with and vice versa. When you get married you choose a person to share a life with but at times you lose sight of things that are important to the integrity of your marriage or you do things that make you feel good about yourself, but are not good for the marriage.

What the cheater loses sight of is if they are the best husband, the best man, the best father they can be, that's where their self-esteem comes from. It comes from within. You don't get it from someone else [boosting your ego](#) and telling you how wonderful you are. You get it from being that true person. That's what Doug realized. His actions will make him feel the way he needs to feel and will bring him happiness, not some external ego-boosting person or thing that may surround him.

Things a Cheating Spouse Can do To Rebuild Trust After an Affair



by Linda

It's pretty evident that one of the biggest struggles that our readers are experiencing is rebuilding trust after an affair.

If I were to summarize what a betrayed spouse needs for trust to be restored I would have to say that there are basically three things in

general:

1. They have to find a way to cope with the immediate emotions, pain and stress (both physical and mental) that is caused by the affair.
2. They must believe that their spouse is committed to the relationship.
3. They must determine the chances of an affair happening again.

If these three things are not addressed, it is highly unlikely that trust can be rebuilt.

So what can a cheating spouse do to help their spouses in each of these three areas?

Rebuild Trust by Helping Your Spouse Cope With the Initial Emotions and Pain

Stop the behavior that is causing the pain. End the affair and cut off all contact with the other person. Communicate to your spouse if there is any contact attempts by the other person or yourself. Stop whatever it is that has caused the trust to be broken.

Own it. Take responsibility for what you have done and the pain you have caused. Do not blame your spouse for your actions. Be remorseful and express grief for what you have done and communicate that you understand

what you have done to them. Let your spouse know that you are willing to do whatever it takes to make amends. Allow your spouse to express their anger and emotions.

Commit to change. Taking responsibility is one thing, but you also have to prove that you are ashamed of your behavior by working to eliminate the causes of your behavior. Show your spouse you want to save the relationship. Ask your spouse for forgiveness.

Understand their pain. Express your sincere concern for the pain you have caused and make an effort to understand how the affair has impacted them. Show them that they really do matter and that you care for them.

Rebuild Trust by Showing you are Committed to the Relationship

Be truthful. The betrayed spouse will more than likely have trouble believing they have all the truth after the discovery of the affair. If they believe the truth has been withheld, then they will also feel that you're not committed to them or to the relationship.

Be willing to share details of the affair. Let go of any secrets. Be honest, as the betrayed will withhold trust and will not be able to move past that if they feel the truth is still unknown. It's best to do this completely upfront and not subsequently in bits and pieces.

Answer all questions from your spouse in a non-defensive manner – no matter how difficult or painful they might be.

Rebuild Trust by Proving That You Will Not be Unfaithful Again

Just do it. Words are cheap. Show you are trustworthy and committed by your actions. Be consistent in your actions in everything you do – even the most remedial daily tasks. Show that you can handle your life in a

competent manner by working hard, being a good parent and working hard at your affair recovery.

Be thankful. Your spouse didn't ask for all of this pain and to have to go through this. Let them know on a regular basis that you are appreciative and grateful that they chose to stay with you and didn't kick you out on the street.

Really listen. Show that you care for your spouse by your willingness to listen to their side of the story and how the affair has impacted them. Let them express their pain without getting upset or angry. Let them know their pain is important to you. Trust is about what they need, not your discomfort.

Transparent communication. Communicate openly and honestly at all times with respect to your actions, intentions and motives. Your spouse is not a mind reader, so let them know what's going on and trust will grow. Let them check up on you or monitor your activities if need be.

Be trusting yourself. Be willing to trust your spouse and they will be more likely to trust you in return. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. Don't battle for control in the relationship. Share the decision making and the process for healing by validating their needs, opinions, interests and abilities.

Get rid of self-centeredness. Be focused and sensitive to your spouse's needs and desires. Do things that are in your spouse's best interests and do not pursue self-serving activities. Show real concern for your spouse.

Be proactive. Make sacrifices in order to help build the foundation for your spouse's security and happiness. Help them as much as possible during this healing process. Do not be hesitant. Your actions will only serve to reveal your heart's intent. Discover what it is that you can do to help in the healing process.

As you can see, the cheating spouse has to do quite a bit to achieve success in recovering, healing and rebuilding trust after an affair. The cheater's

willingness to do what's necessary will show that they are committed to the relationship and are interested in their spouse's healing and eventually trust can begin to grow.

Real Reasons the Emotional Affair Happened



by Doug

A reflection on the reasons my emotional affair happened.

Over the past 3 years, I've tried my hardest to make amends for my actions that occurred while in my emotional affair. Though I've made my share of mistakes, this whole

process has opened my eyes to my own faults as a person and has been the most painful learning experience of my life.

As a result of the affair our lives are forever changed. Some of those changes are good and others are required. For instance, I now live a totally transparent existence, sharing any and all information that passes before me each day. I stay in contact with Linda throughout the day and am open to communication about the affair whenever Linda desires. When she has questions or fears about things, I accept them openly without anger or defensiveness. I have no problems with her checking voice mail, texts, emails, or whatever.

I'm ashamed for what I did and need to continue to make amends and create the highest level of [trustworthiness](#) possible. I am confident that some day soon my emotional affair will be nothing but a distant memory void of any pain for Linda – though at times she may think otherwise. My [affair recovery process](#) has included deeper analysis of my past character, habits and behavior resulting in a better understanding of why the affair occurred. It has been a truly powerful process.

Here are a few of the things I have learned about why the emotional affair happened:

I failed to maintain boundaries. I always had flirted with attractive women throughout my teenage and adult life. Most of the time I considered it simple harmless fun while at a party or at work. All this flirting back and forth did nothing but build my fragile self-esteem and stroked my male ego, all the while not realizing the possible effects it had on the person with whom I was flirting with. Allowing myself to meet Tanya and other women for lunch even prior to my emotional affair, and even though always work related, were other mistakes in judgment. I think the cumulative effect of this bending of boundaries created a hole in [the fence](#) that should have kept anyone other than Linda out.

I was insensitive and selfish. At the time, I was too consumed with my own feelings, business problems and what was missing in our relationship that I didn't think about the [consequences](#) my emotional affair could have on Linda, our lives and our family. It was selfish and insensitive of me not to share my feelings of discontent in our relationship with Linda and instead shared them with another person.

Also, this selfishness and insensitivity caused me to act in a way that was quite contrary to my upbringing and to the morals and values that I was taught. I was a hypocrite and totally ignored my own conscious.

I lied to myself. Because of the ["affair fog"](#) I was in at the time, I became a master at rationalization. After discussing it at length with Tanya, I truly came to believe that Linda didn't care for me and thought our marriage was destined to be one void of true love, intimacy and passion. I re-wrote the story of our wonderful marriage and turned it into a piece of worthless fiction. If I hadn't, how could I have justified what I was doing?

I was an uncaring coward. When Linda discovered the emotional affair I should have ended it immediately and dropped to my knees begging her for forgiveness. Instead, I continued my justifications and the affair. And

though it killed me to see her in so much pain, I was in my little [bubble](#) thinking that the grass was greener with Tanya. I will forever feel guilt because of that. I erroneously felt that I didn't want to hurt either of them and ended up hurting the person who deserved it the least. I was wrong. My conscious was telling me the way out but I was too stupid to take it.

Though the preceding elements are all negative, please understand that many positives have come out of this whole emotional affair mess – both on a personal level and within our relationship. Our marriage has never been better, as all of the ingredients necessary for a great relationship are at their highest levels in our 32 years together.

Sure we still have a little ways yet to travel to get to total healing and recovery – and I know there will be bumps along the way – but I'm looking forward to the rest of our journey together.

After the Emotional Affair – The Path to Introspection



by Doug

Many readers have mentioned that their cheating spouses are not doing what is necessary to help them heal from their emotional affair or physical affair. The cheater is not working on themselves to bring about real change – or at the very least come to grips with the reasons for why they did what they did.

Last week I was asked what motivated me to start to look inward and I thought I would try to expand on that just a bit here today.

I think what starts the process for personal change and ultimately a turnaround in a relationship is introspection. Introspection is defined as the inspection of one's own thoughts and feelings; the process of self-examination.

[Wikipedia](#) says that introspection is “the self-observation and reporting of conscious inner thoughts, desires and sensations. It is a conscious and purposive process relying on thinking, reasoning, and examining one's own thoughts, feelings, and, in more spiritual cases, one's soul.”

Most of us never take the time to consider how we got to be the way we are now or why we do the things we do. We just are, or it just happened, and that's as far as it goes. The truth of the matter is the way we are and the things we do are influenced by a slew of factors such as, genetics, culture, family, education, social orientation, trauma, birth order, etc.

When we do something wrong (like have an affair), or when we argue we usually don't think to our self about what our part in all of it was. We

typically don't ask ourselves "What did I do to cause this to happen?" We don't because it's so much easier to look without rather than to [look within](#).

Part of looking within and taking responsibility for ourselves is having the willingness and honesty enough to question ourselves about what really drives us. To go a step further then...introspection means a willingness to change what we see in order to make changes.

So the question might be asked..."How can I get my spouse to look inward and become introspective?" After all, chances are that if they were introspective to begin with, their affair might not have happened.

The answer is that quite frankly, there is no sure way to get another person to be introspective. **You can't make anyone do anything about their inner self unless they see the benefit for themselves.**

Here was my answer to the person who asked what motivated me to look inward:

"The main motivation for me to look within was Linda's struggles to completely understand why the affair happened. I realized that for her to be able to move on and for our marriage to survive I had to make some changes. Part of making those changes was figuring out what the hell was wrong with me – what caused me to do the things I did. There were also several extraneous sources that helped spur introspection: reading about affairs and why they occur, reading comments from this site, many discussions with Linda, and starting a meditation program. I think it also helps that I work from home where I'm alone the entire day and have plenty of opportunity to think."

By reading my answer you might be able to interpret that my main motivation (or benefit) for introspection was to [save my marriage](#). I knew that I loved Linda and wanted to stay married to her. I also knew that she felt the same way.

We had made a ton of progress since my emotional affair, but there was a small hurdle to overcome for her to achieve greater healing. In my opinion, that hurdle was me. I had to make changes. **But before I could I needed to understand what changes I needed to make and why.**

I had to confront the question: “Why would Linda want me as I was?” So, I decided to work on my self-improvement to give her what she needed to heal and to give her good enough reason for not kicking my butt out on the street.

Okay, so that’s how I got started and I think that a cheating spouse needs to take a similar path in order to achieve their own self-exploration and self-improvement. I think many cheaters say they’re going to change and may even put forth some work, but often their actions will still reveal that they just don’t get it.

They try to rush the healing, put the affair in the past and just move forward. They remain self-centered and become angry and frustrated at the lack of their spouse’s progress. They become more concerned with their own recovery and not that of the victim’s recovery.

The cheater has no clue of [the pain and the agony](#) they have inflicted upon their spouse as a result of their own choices. And even more so, they have no clue why they made those choices to begin with. They show blatant disrespect by the way they are treating their spouse and rushing him/her to move beyond the affair.

I understand all of this as I did many of these same things. But somewhere along the way I started to get it and I would open up and listen to Linda process her emotions and her pain.

Though my emotional affair can never be justified, Linda was able to begin to look into her own life and address her own issues. It became quite obvious that I had to do the same thing.

It stands to reason that when we as the cheater come to grips with just how much we have hurt our spouses and understand the reasons for why we did so – regardless of the sacrifices – we not only [help our spouses heal](#), but we make our own goals and desires that much easier to attain. The result can be a marriage that is much more loving, rewarding and fulfilling.

Introspection is not a magic cure for all relationship problems. It is a valuable tool for growing up inside and becoming a happier, more complete individual. In my opinion, the self-discovery found through introspection is its own reward, but more practically, being honest with yourself can generate greater peace in life – peace from within and with others.

The Most Common Mistakes Made by the Unfaithful after Infidelity

After D-day and beyond, the unfaithful spouse often makes a ton of mistakes. I sure did.

This guide is simply a listing, if you will, of the myriad of mistakes that I (and many readers) feel I made over the course of our recovery.

Please know however, that not all cases are the same and one person's mistake can be another person's success. So, if you have a question as to whether or not a listed mistake is relevant for your situation, put some serious thought into it and look at it from all sides to determine if you need to adjust your actions accordingly.

That said, I hope this guide is helpful for you.

Best of luck!

Doug

The Most Common Mistakes Made by the Unfaithful after Infidelity

Failure to end the affair permanently. You probably have to put this as the number one most disastrous mistake. Unfortunately, it's a mistake that all too many cheaters continue to make. There really isn't a whole lot to say about this other than ending the affair and any contact with the affair partner is a necessity if there is to be any chance for saving the marriage. There can be no recovery and healing otherwise. Any continued "fence sitting" must stop.

Thinking that since the affair ended that it is really over for good. Just because one of the affair partners decides to end the affair doesn't mean that the other person (or both) will honor that decision. Affairs typically have an "on again, off again" nature to them. Temptations abound for both affair partners and when one is tempted they must be strong enough to refuse contact.

Being abusive, violent or threatening in any manner. We're not sure we really need to say much more than that as it would appear obvious that these things shouldn't happen. The fact of the matter though is that affairs can be life or death situations sometimes. The discovery of infidelity causes extreme emotions and it's important for both parties to be in control of their responses to these emotions so that things do not get out of hand.

Continued lying. No question this is a biggie. Affairs are all about secrets and lies and most cheaters will lie even in the face of damning evidence. Until they stop lying, the betrayed spouse will not feel safe enough to trust again at any level. And it's not just about affair related matters either. Lying about anything – even seemingly harmless little white lies only reinforces the belief by the betrayed spouse that the cheater cannot be trusted.

Only divulging information in bits and pieces, or "trickle truth." Holding back or spinning the truth in various ways can be extremely damaging and only causes the recovery and healing process to be prolonged. Again, it's a trust thing, and trickle truth only serves to delay the trust building process. Additionally, divulging new information or details sends the betrayed spouse back to square one and can be similar to a new D-day.

Thinking that saying “You can trust me” is enough. The unfaithful partner has to show their spouse through their actions that they deserve to be trusted. Words are pretty much meaningless initially. The cheater needs to be consistent in what they do and say and follow through on things as they said they would. Until the unfaithful is acting consistently in a remorseful, loving and trusting manner, there is no way trust can be reestablished. We should also mention that getting upset because the betrayed does not trust them - when it hasn't been earned yet - is also a huge mistake.

Being defensive. This can actually cover a wide range of scenarios. It can range from being defensive about and/or minimizing their behavior, being defensive about divulging the affair details, being defensive about the excuses for the affair, etc. Nobody enjoys admitting when they're wrong, and most people don't want to look weak, but when one is caught after an affair, he/she needs to take personal responsibility for what they've done, be accountable and vow to search for the answers as to why they did what they did. There should be no excuses.

Blaming the betrayed spouse for the affair. This kind of goes along with being defensive but it should be added that even though there might be some truth that the betrayed spouse may have some responsibility towards any previous relationship shortcomings, they were not to blame for the affair. The cheater cannot try to inject blame and needs to give their spouse time to recover before addressing any issues in the marriage.

Failure to Remove the Excuses. Hopefully, the cheater will someday realize what really got them into trouble in the first place. Until the unfaithful spouse confronts the excuses that made it OK to have an affair, they haven't yet learned from their mistakes. Instead, they must be rid of any excuses for they were what caused them to take wrongful and hurtful actions, abandon their integrity and lose their partners trust and respect.

Defending the affair partner. The betrayed spouse may say some pretty harsh things about the other person. Some of that might be inaccurate while some might be spot on. Regardless, one of the worst things a cheater can do is defend their affair partner as it will appear that they are more loyal to the affair partner than to their spouse and to their marriage.

Pointing out their spouse's deficiencies. Every marriage on the planet has issues or problems at some point and typically both parties share the responsibility for those problems. There will be plenty of time to work on

them after the crisis of infidelity has been controlled. It's best to regain some stability before working on the marital issues.

Not showing remorse. Not expressing remorse is a failure to take responsibility for what was done. An affair is not something that can just be swept under the rug. Many of our readers have stated that the biggest factor in their decision to stay in the marriage was their spouse's genuine show of remorse. If recovery takes making a list of every transgression that occurred during the affair and offering a sincere apology and show of remorse for each, then it needs to be done.

Continuing selfish behavior. We all know that having an affair in the first place is an insanely selfish thing to do. Yet even after the affair is discovered and/or ends the selfishness often continues. Some examples are: The unfaithful thinking that everything is about them and how they are hurting, feeling and grieving because they had to end their affair. Or perhaps they have the mindset that they just want to "move on" and thus demand their spouse to just "get over it." Or maybe it's just that they lack compassion and empathy and are unable to see beyond the fantasy world and understand the pain their selfishness has caused. Finally, one of the most damaging acts of selfishness is "fence sitting." The cheater won't make a decision to stay or go, so instead they hold everyone hostage. They want their affair partner and their spouse—the ultimate in having your cake and eating it too! The selfishness must stop!

Unwillingness to endure the consequences of their actions. This is where they tell their spouse to "just get over it" or "it's time to move on." It's not wanting to address the issues, answer the questions, tell the truth and put up with any discomfort as a result of their mistakes and choices. Yes, it sucks and it's a long and painful process, but it's time to man up or woman up and face the music and deal with it.

One other aspect of this is that the betrayed spouse may say things in the heat of the moment that they really don't mean. For instance, they could initially say "Get out!" or "I want a divorce." The cheater shouldn't assume that in this highly emotional situation that these statements are necessarily fact. The cheater should not overreact and might want to accommodate their spouse's wishes at that moment, but they don't necessarily need to assume it's for the long run. The hurt spouse's feelings may change once the emotions die down a bit.

Now this isn't to say that the cheater should ignore or minimize what the betrayed is saying. Rather, they need to affirm that they heard and

understood what was said, but they shouldn't necessarily restructure their life based on these emotionally charged statements – especially if it's in the early stages after the affair discovery.

Lack of awareness or showing sensitivity when their partner suffers from a trigger. When a betrayed spouse suffers from the effects of a trigger it can be like experiencing D-day all over again. The cheater needs to be sympathetic to these triggers and their effects and also aware of what might cause them. Ideally, the unfaithful should actually be aware of what the triggers are and then anticipate them. For instance, if the betrayed spouse knew much of the affair was conducted in a local hotel, then the cheater should steer clear of that hotel when out driving around together. If the affair was hot and heavy during the holidays, chances are that time of year will be one big trigger, so the cheater needs to be super attentive to their spouse during that time.

Trying to rush and/ or not supporting the recovery process. The whole recovery process can be quite confusing and frustrating for both partners and typically the betrayed partner takes longer to move past the initial trauma than the cheater. However, all the aspects of healing – forgiveness, trust, etc. should be controlled by the betrayed spouse's watch, not the cheater's. It's the unfaithful person's responsibility to support and respect that timeframe and do what is needed to move the process forward. When it's all said and done, the unfaithful is far better served to support their spouse's recovery as quickly and effectively as possible rather than living for years with a spouse who is frustrated, resentful, angry and hurting.

Not being totally transparent. Sure, the cheater needs to show transparency by revealing secret email accounts, passwords, unlocking their cell phones, etc. But being transparent also includes revealing their true emotions and feelings and not keeping them bottled up inside. Transparency is more than not lying or being secretive. It is opening oneself up completely to one's partner. Along with this, it's important that the cheater keep any and all agreements that they've made with their spouse. If part of the recovery plan is that the cheater will not go to bars after work, then they shouldn't go to bars after work. If it means the cheater has to go to marriage counseling once a week, they better be there.

Going on as if nothing happened. Life does not go on as usual after an affair is discovered. Not if recovery and healing is the goal, that is. The cheater will typically need to make big changes in their lifestyle, behavior and character to prove to their spouse that they are taking responsibility for their actions and taking steps to ensure that it never happens again.

Not giving up control. During the affair the power to control can be just as exciting as the affair itself. The unfaithful are doing whatever they want to do without anyone intervening and telling them what they should and should not do. When the affair is revealed all of that comes crashing down. Many times they try to hold onto the control/power by refusing to give up the affair but eventually they have to give it up along with their freedom. (surrendering their phone records, etc.). In some respects they also try to maintain that control by becoming angry when questioned or only giving up the information that they feel comfortable disclosing. Blaming their spouse and making the affair partner appear better than they are also means of control/power. By making the betrayed spouse feel bad about themselves or their ability to be a good partner gives them the advantage and the ability to control the situation.

Not talking and/ or answering questions about the affair. This is another biggie. The betrayed spouse has questions. Lots of questions. Understandably so, by the way. In fact, the same questions might be asked a dozen times or more. It doesn't mean that the betrayed is trying to punish the cheater, though it may seem that way. They simply have to understand what happened and why. The cheater's job then is to oblige their spouse and answer all the questions their spouse needs answered honestly and as calmly as possible. This will only help to move the recovery process along.

Not acknowledging the depth of the pain that the affair caused. One common denominator that is the result of infidelity is pain. The pain can be expressed in different ways and it can be responded to in different ways – but it is always there. That pain can be eased if the cheater can get to the point where they too are able to experience the pain with their spouse. Until the cheating spouse gets to this point, the betrayed will often feel the need to be able to ease it somehow – to escape it. Though it's a natural reaction, we urge you not to do this. Enduring the pain helps the healing process.

Not educating themselves about affairs and affair relationships. Though the cheater may feel like educating themselves about this stuff is akin to getting one's teeth pulled, it's important that the unfaithful learn the dynamics of affairs (causes, effects, typical responses, prevention, etc.) and how to recover from them. Doing so will help in the recovery process and can help them understand why they did what they did, and can lead to improvements in their relationships - not only with their spouse, but with their kids, friends, co-workers, etc. as well.

Refusing to look within. It's so very important for the unfaithful to figure out why they did what they did. It's OK for them to enlist the help of a therapist, spouse or a friend to help, but they need to look deep within, ask themselves the tough questions and figure it out as soon as possible. What were the real reasons for the affair? Did they need an ego boosting? Did they feel that no one appreciated them? What were their personal issues? Why were they so selfish? True recovery cannot progress until the cheater shifts the focus to themselves - not in a selfish way - but in an introspective manner.

Demanding Forgiveness. One shouldn't demand forgiveness. It needs to be asked for. And even then, forgiveness is a gift that the betrayed extends to himself/herself and is a process that takes time to work through. It's far better for the cheater to ask for forgiveness and what they can do to help in that process.

Additional Reading

Here are some links to 5 more posts that may be beneficial.

[Ten Phases to Gain Forgiveness for Infidelity](#)

[Affair Recovery and the 7 Stages of Grief](#)

[The Four Stages of Healing After an Affair](#)

[A Cheater's Mistakes after the Emotional Affair](#)

[Cheating Spouses: 6 Reasons Why Their Affair Won't Last](#)