



Healing from an Affair:

A Betrayed Spouse's Companion Guide for Understanding Your Wayward Spouse and Helping Your Marriage Heal

By Sarah P.

Emotional Affair Journey

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Disclaimer

This book is intended to provide useful advice and exercises to help individuals and couples heal themselves and their relationship after infidelity.

The author, Sarah P, possesses graduate credentials in Clinical Psychology; however, this book is not meant to replace traditional therapy since the advice contained herein should be considered as educational in nature. We encourage you to seek professional counseling with a licensed professional therapist in your area.

Aside from all this legal stuff, enjoy the book and best wishes!

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Forward:

Several years ago, Doug wrote a book unlike anything that was published before or has been published since.

Doug wrote the book that he and Linda wish they had when they were recovering from Doug's affair. As a betrayed spouse Linda searched high and low for any information that she could find that would help ease the pain and save her marriage.

Doug wrote a cheater's guide that helped a couple journey from unending pain towards healing and this guide has been priceless for EAJ readers.

Why?

After infidelity is discovered, it is the victim of betrayal that experiences many sleepless days and nights trying to understand how it could have happened. They constantly search for the answers to questions like, "What did I do wrong?" "Why doesn't my spouse love me anymore?" "What's wrong with me?" "How can I save our marriage?"

To this very day, the victim does most of the work of infidelity recovery. It is not necessarily fair, but it continues to be the case. Affairs are not logical or fair.

Sometimes wayward spouses do not want to do the work of recovery because they feel overwhelmed by guilt and shame. Others do not want to do the work of recovery because they are used to sweeping issues under the rug. Still other wayward spouses don't know how to handle conflict OR repress urges.

This book is a companion book to Doug's original guide that teaches cheaters how to help betrayed spouses heal from the affair.

However, this book is about how betrayed spouses can help cheaters heal from the affair.

You might think justice is served if you help your wayward spouse fix his or her problems. You are right; justice is not served. But this book is not about

justice – it's about how each spouse within a marriage can do their part in healing from an affair.

This guide is about helping betrayed spouse's not take an affair personally; it's about how to speak with a wayward spouse in a way that reduces conflict, and this book is best read side-by-side with Doug's original guide.

While Doug's book addresses how a wayward spouse can make recovery smoother for a betrayed spouse, this book is about how to make recovery smoother for both you (the betrayed spouse) and for the wayward spouse.

This book's goal is to create a "meeting of the minds" between you (the betrayed) and your wayward spouse. With Doug's book and this book, you will have the chance to access both perspectives and get to the truth of the matter.

This book takes aim at the exact things that each spouse needs to do to understand the other. Best wishes!

Sarah P.

Preface:

Several years back Doug had an emotional affair with a co-worker and ever since then Doug and Linda have been working hard to rebuild their marriage.

The work still continues to this day and probably will for a long time to come. However, as a result of the work Linda and Doug have done on their own, combined with the experiences obtained from their *Emotional Affair Journey* blog, they have been able to identify certain behaviors on the part of the cheater that can either lead to success or failure at surviving infidelity.

When I came to the blog, I had only recently finished Master's courses in Clinical Psychology and saw that Doug and Linda needed a writer. This was a no-brainer to me since I have one Master's in English Literature, another in Psychology, and I have been the product on an affair.

I was the betrayed spouse during the affair and it nearly destroyed me.

I had spent years reading self-help books and figuring out how to essentially heal myself. There were no infidelity sites at all when I was betrayed. No one was addressing infidelity online!

After I finished my Master's courses in 2012, I soon came across Doug and Linda's site. First, I was a reader and a fan of the site. That evolved into becoming a regular contributor to the site. Later that involved to writing longer material for the site. Finally, years of working with Doug and Linda cumulated in my decision to become a marriage mentor and collaborate solely with Doug and Linda.

I do not like to reinvent the wheel when a perfect wheel already exists. That metaphorical wheel is the Emotional Affair Journey website. Thus, it was a no-brainer for me to collaborate with Doug and Linda and help meet the great demand for marriage mentoring services.

After much thought, Doug, Linda, and I agreed that a companion book to Doug's original book would be a powerful recovery tool. This is that book and it is a culmination of what I know both as a marriage mentor, a Gottman certified professional, and as a betrayed spouse.

In general, what we have found is that the cheater must become the healer. They are the key to affair recovery and to their spouse's healing.

It's not easy for those with the best of intentions, and is certainly more difficult – if not impossible - for those who just don't "get it."

If the cheater is a "rug sweeper," or someone who tends to say "the past is the past," this will drive a betrayed spouse crazy.

The attitudes and actions of the cheating spouse affect the time it takes for the betrayed spouse to heal. I know people who have never healed, and most of the time, it is because their wayward spouse is insensitive, or someone who wants to shut out the betrayed by building emotional walls, or worst of all, the cheater who becomes emotionally and physically abusive to their betrayed spouse.

Some have healed rather quickly and their spouses have opened up, found humility, and when wayward spouses meet all the requests of a betrayed spouse.

This book will address what wayward spouses can do to become the healers and what you can do to hold a cheater accountable and become a co-collaborator in helping your wayward spouse heal the marriage.

This book will offer guidance, advice and suggestions for those who wish to rebuild their marriages.

You see, even the most remorseful wayward spouses who want to repair the marital rift may not have a clue as to what they need to do to help their spouse heal.

We hope that this book will offer you sound advice and suggestions that you can put to good use so that you can effectively and more quickly recover and heal from the affair.

There certainly are no guarantees that your marriage will survive your affair because two people must choose to salvage a marriage. But, if both of you choose to salvage your marriage, there is a very good chance that you can repair your marriage and use the affair to make your marriage closer.

The tools provided in this book are your best chance.

Why Doesn't My Spouse "Get It"?

Because someone who experiences an event that causes them pleasure won't get it. At least not for now. He or she won't "get it" until the pain of your spouse's affair exceeds any pleasure.

Some outside of your marriage might tell you just to let time and perspective do its work.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Time heals all wounds." While there is an element of truth to this saying, time won't heal a metaphorical wound that is left to fester, to become filled with bacteria. And when that bacteria are left to spread; this is an excellent way to get gangrene. That's when people lose limbs. Time doesn't heal all wounds and sometimes physical wounds left unattended have the ability to cause death.

Emotional wounds are the very same; they must be attended to in order to keep a relationship alive.

On the other hand, time does help heal, but hard work and effective effort by the couple are the real catalysts for healing. This would metaphorically equate to doing all the necessary concrete actions that it takes to heal a wound. A person would clean a wound, disinfect it, dress it with anti-bacterial salve, wrap it in cotton bandages, and continue doing this until a wound has been replaced by new and healthy skin.

Similarly, your wayward spouse must tend to your wounds. He or she must take the steps to heal your wound as well as get the necessary topical medication to heal it. A wayward spouse must do this until a wound is replaced with healthy, new skin.

We must look at a marriage the same way. A marriage is a system, much like the body, that has many different functions and actions. We must take care of it, not neglect it.

Being betrayed by your spouse can feel much like a shot to the heart. The pain will feel more acute the longer you have been together and the more you have to lose.

Doug and Linda have recovered nicely and they have been for over 10 years. They have helped thousands of marriages through their blog and they have a proven recipe for success. But, 10 years ago...they did not.

Doug freely admits he was the issue. In their case, Doug was trying hard, but he simply was not doing all the things Linda needed in order for her to heal.

This same theme has been played over and over again with the folks we mentor and from our blog readers. Most of the time however, the stuck feeling occurs because the cheater is helping very little - if at all - during the recovery process.

Thus, it will often be up to you (as the betrayed spouse) to hold your spouse accountable. That may sound negative, but I like to think of this as a team effort. You and your spouse have done thousands of things as a team; this could be the hardest thing yet, but the best possible outcome remains if you do recovery as a team.

It seems like such an easy thing to do, but for some reason the cheater either refuses to give the betrayed spouse what it is they're most longing for or they simply just don't know what it is they need to be doing on a consistent basis. Your communication is key.

There are also many victims of infidelity who have no idea what it will take to get them through the healing process. This book will help you identify what you need and how to communicate it, so that your spouse has clear directions on your needs and wants.

If your wayward spouse believes he or she is not willing to salvage a marriage, there could be several reasons:

- Is it because of their feelings of guilt and shame?
- Are they hoping the grass will be greener with someone else? (It's not!)
- Is it because your spouse is in the affair fog?
- Does your wayward spouse question if he or she has the ability to repair significant damage?
- Is your spouse giving up because starting over is easier? (It's not!)

- Does your wayward spouse say, “I love you, but I am not in love with you?” If your spouse says this, you can tell your spouse that they have officially been demoted to the status of a walking and talking cliché.

Now I'm not naïve enough to think that every marriage is going to be successful after an affair, but if each partner follows the advice in this book and puts forth a strong and honest effort into trying to heal and rebuild the relationship, the chances are quite good.

However, if one of the spouses - and this is usually the cheater - refuses to do the work necessary, and the other person is left to try to heal on his or her own, languishing in painful emotions and feelings, then the chances of surviving an affair become quite less.

It's true that you and your spouse may be able to stay married, and yes, your marriage may not lead to divorce, but the chances of you having a happy, trusting, worthwhile and fulfilling relationship will be nearly impossible.

Your wayward spouse is not permitted to keep you in limbo. As Doug said in his book, your spouse needs to *sh*t or get off the pot*. This really is true.

It's not okay for a wayward spouse to keep you in limbo, second guessing what your future will be. You must hold your spouse accountable to making a decision.

If a wayward spouse really doesn't want to repair a marriage, it's probably best for you to call for a free consultation with an attorney so that you know your options.

This book is for the couple where a wayward spouse has realized that they have demolished the marriage you had before, where your spouse is remorseful and wants to try to save their marriage and help their spouse heal as effectively and as quickly as possible.

Is Your Spouse A Fence Sitter?

A fence sitter will drive you crazy; however, the good news is they can get off the fence. Almost every cheater goes through the fence sitting stage at some point when they are in the affair fog. This phase is horrible and keeps both of you in limbo.

Getting off the fence is a must. I would recommend giving your spouse a month to get off the fence and let your spouse know that during the month he or she is on the fence, you will be speaking with attorneys so that you can figure out how to move on. Then you, the betrayed, must make a basic plan of what it would look like to move on.

Never give your power away to your wayward spouse by sitting around and waiting. We teach people how to treat us; if you teach your wayward spouse it is acceptable to fence sit, then your spouse will continue to do so.

How do you teach your spouse not to fence sit?:

- Tell your spouse he or she has a month to figure it out
- Tell your wayward spouse you will be assembling a team of attorneys and therapists to support you.
- Hire a team of therapists and attorneys. It is possible to speak to as many attorneys as possible if you talk to all the ones in your area that provide a free consult.
- You must find a therapist. If your insurance will not pay for it, go to affair blogs that have strong communities of support that are free and administered by volunteers.
- Also, consider hiring Doug, Linda, or myself for marriage mentoring. We charge at least half the price of a regular therapist and we specialize solely in infidelity. Sarah has the same credentials, but generally more credentials than most licensed therapists.

I realize that the above can seem very scary; so, I would like to reiterate that you are in full control of your situation. You do not have to do anything that you do not want to do.

Also, consulting attorneys does not mean you will get a divorce. I believe that knowledge is power. I have always lived my life in a way where I gain the most knowledge possible. I don't act on 80% of my knowledge, but my

knowledge allows me to analyze difficult situations when they come up. Knowledge is your friend.

Of course, you may want to give your spouse more than a month to get off the fence. Some are slow to change. But it is still in your best interest to explore all your options. *It will help you to sleep better at night knowing that life will go on and that you could be perfectly happy even without your wayward spouse. However, this is not a decision you must make – I am only asking you to gather information from experts.*

Once your spouse gets off the fence, what matters is that your wayward spouse puts 100% effort into the tactics presented in Doug's book. I will also address these very same tactics, but from the perspective of how you can help your wayward spouse be accountable and change his/her behavior.

When spouses start doing the healing work together and working as a team, it can be quite surprising how quickly spouses can fall in love again and even rekindle a passion that they thought was lost years ago.

Your wayward spouse must put 100% of an effort into affair recovery. If you continue to feel stuck, you must find ways to articulate why you feel stuck and offer suggestions to your spouse on what he or she can do to get you “unstuck.”

You will generally feel stuck due to being immobilized by fear OR by having your trust obliterated. You will often feel stuck because you want a guarantee that it will not happen again.

A word on serial cheaters. If your spouse is a serial cheater, he or she will cycle through different affair partners and will spend most of his/her life on the fence. You must decide if that is good for your mental health. Hint: It's terrible for your health and well-being to be married to a serial cheater. Also, always keep in mind that there is NO PERSON on earth that can make a serial cheater happy.

Why? Because they will never be happy with themselves. They will use people outside of themselves as a drug and they will self-medicate their emptiness by going from person to person. They can only get “high” on one person for a certain amount of time. On average, a person stops getting “high” on another person anywhere between the 6-month mark and the

two-year mark. Then, it's off to the "next drug," which comes in the form of another affair partner.

If you are married to a serial cheater who has no desire to do anything to help you heal and just doesn't "get it," then I will truthfully tell you that you're wasting your time in your marriage.

Rather, unless you are willing to live in a marriage of convenience for the rest of your life where your spouse has a rotating door of lovers, then you will live a very unhappy life. Note: It's human nature to pair bond. Serial cheaters are so broken, they cannot pair bond. They go from one hook up to another their whole lives. This will break your heart.

Finally, if your spouse tells you that you are the problem, tell your spouse that he or she is an adult and that cheating is a choice. Your spouse – and perhaps the other person – share the blame.

Relationships are like a dance, with each person's movements somewhat dependent on the other person. Therefore, it will be absolutely necessary for your wayward spouse to examine their feelings and behavior and where this dance went wrong.

The 4 Stages of Healing from Infidelity

I want to give you an idea of the stages of healing from infidelity that you can expect along with some common emotions during each stage. These stages may be a little different in each case but most will go through them all at some point, possibly in a different order.

Stage 1: Initial shock after finding out about cheating

You will feel completely lost, disoriented and crushed after learning about your spouse's affair. You will feel strong anger towards your spouse and your spouse's affair partner. You may even find an anger and violence rising inside of you that you never knew was there.

Life can take someone who is an absolute saint by nature. If that saint is horribly mistreated multiple times during life, they will snap. If you are a saint, you may wonder where that sweet and kind saint within went. Well, that sweet and kind spouse that you used to be will disappear after you learn that your spouse had an affair on you.

When this happens, the burden falls on the cheater, but you will likely snap. Snapping in half is a normal response and a wayward spouse is going to have to live with and repair the damage he or she created.

Your mind might become full of painful thoughts related to the affair, most of them being a mixture of pain, anger, jealousy, frustration, depression, anxiety and mistrust towards your cheating spouse. And you have these emotions for good reason; they too are a normal, human response.

You will feel that you have entered into a nightmare universe. You will likely pinch yourself and wonder if you are in a horrible dream. After all, the day you find out your spouse has cheated, you will go into a state of shock, disbelief, and denial. Denial is a good thing to experience on D-Day because it's your brain's way of spoon-feeding the pain of betrayal to you. If you felt it all at once, you simply would not survive.

Then your anger is likely to appear. You may lash out verbally at your cheating spouse, you might throw objects, or you may even get physically violent with a wayward spouse. I have observed people who have never touched anyone in anger, slap a wayward spouse.

Releasing your anger is normal, although I would recommend against hitting your wayward spouse. It is normal for you to relentlessly question your wayward spouse. You may begin to hate your wayward spouse and this too is normal. This phase usually passes if your wayward spouse shows remorse and accountability.

Stage 2: Attempt to stabilize life after the affair

Your family will be thrown into utter pandemonium after your spouse has an affair. It is essential to take a deep breath and get back to life's normal routine as soon as you can.

This is an excellent time to have your wayward spouse close all social media accounts. This is an excellent time to get all of the passwords of your wayward spouse. This is an excellent time to ensure that your name is on all investments and bank accounts.

You might start to settle into your "new normal" easily or this new normal might continue to cause pain.

You wish that you could somehow brush away the memory of the affair and that life could be the way it used to be. But your life will never be the same. In this phase, it is important to radically accept that your marriage will never be the same and work on things that make you happy.

During this phase your self-confidence slowly starts to return and you may start to feel more secure. Your wayward spouse must play a role in rebuilding your self-esteem. However, you too have control over your self-esteem. During this time, physical exercise is important because research studies link physical exercise as a deterrent to depression.

Now, let's talk sexuality.

During this phase, one of two things will happen sexually. You will either kick your cheating spouse out of the bedroom and refuse to allow your spouse to touch you OR you will participate in an act called hysterical bonding.

When people are cheated on, it appears that half of them kick their husbands/wives out of the bedroom and it appears the other half participate in hysterical bonding.

Why?

As an example, let's first start with the woman who kicks her cheating husband out of the bedroom. A woman who does this cannot stand the thought of her husband giving his tongue, hands, and penis to a total stranger. Since almost all men choose partners inferior to their wives (this is true for women and their affair partners as well), a wife has a very good reason to kick her husband out of the bedroom. Women who have sex with married men often have more than one married man with whom they are having sex.

Remember how in elementary school, a child would touch a kid and declare that child had cooties? Then all the other kids would flee because they did not want to be touched by the cootie kid. The cootie kid would be ignored until the cootie kid touched someone else and gave that kid the cooties.

When I was a child, I always knew there was no such thing as the cooties; it was a stupid game that bored children played and it was almost an alternative form of tag since the cootie kid would have to chase another child to pass the cooties along.

But we are adults and now I know that the cooties are real, only they have names derived from diagnoses written in Latin.

- Syphilis: an ancient Latin word for a bacterial infection that was sexually transmitted.
- Gonorrhea: This word has a more interesting origin since it started in ancient Greece. In ancient Greek *gonos* meant semen and *rhoia* meant flux. Gonorrhea literally means "semen flux" but Latin combined it into one word. Gonorrhea causes enormous amounts of puss to ooze of a man's penis.
- Herpes: This one came from the ancient Greek *herpein* which means "to creep." Latin later changed the word to Herpes. This disease creeps with painful sores all over a person's genitalia.
- Human Papilloma Virus: I am skipping the word origin. There are over 200 kinds of this virus and HPV is responsible for all warts, including genital warts. Sure, genital warts can be burned off with acid, which is a super-pleasant experience. (Sarcasm). But the ones that cause deadly cancers don't show up as warts at all. There is

nothing in this world that prevents genital warts from being spread, except for abstinence and/or two monogamous partners.

Friends, my feeling is that you kick your husband or wife out of the bedroom until he or she gets a full STD screen, with you present. Betrayed spouses, get a separate STD screen. Even better, go and get an STD screen together. There are anonymous labs, throughout the United States, where you walk in, get an anonymous STD test and leave. After an affair, you must demand total transparency from your wayward spouse.

Then there is the second type of betrayed spouse; the hysterical bond. Folks, I do not recommend this. It puts your health in danger and it prolongs a cheater's decision-making process.

If you and another person are fighting over a cheater and you are both giving him/her more sex than he/she has ever had in his/her life, you will be reinforcing his/her bad behavior.

It will also prolong any fence-sitting behavior. In some cases, a cheater will observe that two men/women are fighting over him/her, upping the ante in terms of sex, and he/she may go online and attempt to meet more potential partners.

That way, they can have an entire harem vying for his/her attention: and sex is guaranteed! It is kind of like the show "The Bachelor" or "The Bachelorette" *except your spouse is already married to you.*

Also, they have to pick one partner by the end of the show.

If you hysterically bond, hoping that your spouse will remember how amazing you are – because you actually ARE AMAZING – please do not hold your breath.

He/she will be too drunk with the neurochemistry that is created when someone is caught up in an exciting, thrilling, and pleasurable adventure. But, it's only pleasurable for him/her.

It's a nightmare for you.

Of course, I am speaking about situations where he/she is still seeing the affair partner. We have learned over the past 10 years that a couple might have **4-5 D-Days** before a cheater breaks it off forever.

It is in your best interests to ensure that he/she is not secretly contacting the other person. Even if he/she is not, there is an enormous chance that the other person will try to contact him/her. In fact, the other person might love bomb him/her with text messages all day long.

The other person knows EXACTLY what they are doing and their goal is to break your spouse so that he/she comes back.

You may be to the point where you are tearing your hair out because your spouse either feels torn between you and the other person emotionally, or your spouse may not have stopped the affair.

It is essential to obtain concrete data that the affair has stopped.

Even if it has stopped, you will still be surrounded by triggers, you have not gotten the answers you need to have peace of mind, and to make matters worse, some wayward spouses just want to stop talking about the affair and they will tell you it is time to move on.

But it is essential that you keep pressing for the answers that you need. It is essential that you spell out, in plain language, what you need from your wayward spouse.

You must hold your spouse accountable and require your spouse to address the issues at hand.

Most people have the idea that what a betrayed spouse does not know won't hurt them. Many people have been socialized to believe such a ridiculous idea. You need to tell your spouse that the truth will come out; the truth always comes out.

Your wayward spouse needs to understand that it is better to address this now, no matter how painful it is for him/her to tell you what he/she did and no matter how painful it is for you to hear it. The sooner you know, the sooner you can move on.

If a wayward spouse continues to hide the truth, you will stay in a type of limbo. This is not good for either of you.

Doug addresses this in great detail in his book, which is written for a cheating husband.

So, you are hearing from me what you must do and what your rights are as a betrayed spouse. Doug reinforces these same ideas in his book for cheaters.

In other words, know that your cheating spouse is receiving consistent information from Doug's book. Know that what I am writing is consistent with Doug's message, so if your wayward spouse says that your ideas are unreasonable, you can be assured that Doug, Linda, and I have the same united message. But we write from different perspectives due to who we were: cheater or betrayed.

Most of all, never accept the blame for your spouse's affair.

Also, you must make it clear to your wayward spouse that lies are unacceptable. If your spouse starts to lie, he/she will have to pay the price later.

I will say it again: the truth always surfaces so it is in the interests of you, your wayward spouse, and your marriage for your wayward spouse to tell the truth.

Do not let your wayward spouse dismiss your questions or concerns. Do not accept your spouse using ways to talk around the truth, delay telling the truth, and do not accept stupid statements from your wayward spouse such as:

- If I talk about it, I will only think about my lover more.
- She/he means nothing to me; it's not important.
- I did not love him/her. (That doesn't change the fact that there was no affair.
- If you do not drop it, we will never move on.
- She/he came on to me all the time, what was I supposed to do?

My favorite cheater excuse of all time: Bill Clinton said that having a sexual moment with Monica Lewinski that involved an expensive cigar was not sex or an affair.

One interesting factoid about this event: In the court case, it was disclosed that Bill Clinton delayed an appointment with Yassir Arafat and sent him to walk in the Rose Garden while Bill and Monica had their kinky moment.

Apparently, cigar sex with an intern was more important than meeting with the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

For anyone who follows Middle East politics, you would be aware that conflict in this region could ignite WW3. But our President was more interested in playing with cigars and an intern while one of the most important world leaders (at the time) waited.

This is also a testament to how some people literally go off their rocker when they are having an affair.

Cigar and intern versus nuclear bomb. Bill chose the cigar.

A word for betrayed spouses who are engaging in hysterical bonding: this process will not fix your marriage. Eventually, you will start to think clearly again and want the answers.

I would also like for any female betrayed spouses to think about something and think about it carefully. Somewhere, evolution acted against a woman's best interests.

If a woman has a sexual relationship with a man, her brain releases neurochemicals that bonds her body to his. These chemicals are released in her brain, even if she is not aware of them. If you are a woman, any time you have sexual intercourse with your husband, your body will continue to re-bond to him.

So, if you are participating in this hysterical bonding, it will confuse you. It could make your grieving worse and your anger more intense.

In fact if you are hysterically bonding with your husband, he will assume that all is well. He will believe you have moved on. Even if you have not moved on, he will pressure you to move on.

He will be having a great time having a raw and intense sex life with you and he will be very hesitant to revisit the affair and talk about it. He will assume your relationship has turned a page and he will assume that you will move forward.

But, this is not the case at all.

Why?

Me have sex to have sex. It is as simple as this.

Women are much more complex creatures. Women have sex for many different psychological reasons. Women also have a sexual drive and will have sex just to have sex as well. But, most women have a huge number of psychological ties to the act of sex.

If you are hysterically bonding, you will be having sex with your husband due to psychological reasons that you may not even be aware of.

Hysterical bonding will cause your spouse to think you have moved on.

You must explain to your spouse that you have not moved on and that hysterical bonding can actually be an outgrowth of the grieving process you feel due to his/her affair. Hysterical bonding will also help your subconscious mind see that he/she is still there with you; quite literally.

Make it clear to your spouse that hysterical bonding does not mean that you have moved on. Tell them there is much work to do. Tell them that this is about your healing and not about them. He/she must be a partner and help you heal.

He/she caused the mess; he/she cleans it up.

During this stage, most cheaters still believe that you – the betrayed - did something to cause your spouse's cheating.

I can't express enough how misguided this type of thinking is.

Again, this is the most important stage of the recovery because if you can do what is needed now it will be less painful for both of you.

Talk it out; let your spouse know you need more to move on; and let him/her know your daily feelings.

Stage 3: Second wave of anger after cheating

You go through this phase if you have decided to stay together and you are trying to make your relationship work again. One of the things that might happen is that you discover yet another D-day. Or perhaps you discover information that was withheld.

After some time has passed and the routine has again stepped in to your relationship, you will still feel the sting of betrayal. You will still experience triggers. You may make connections to important events that your cheating spouse missed due to cheating.

Your anger will often times come out of nowhere. Your wayward spouse might wonder why you are not over it. Well, you are not over it because it takes time and work to get over a betrayal.

The memories of the betrayal, lying and cheating come like a tsunami and you can cycle through anger, frustration, anxiety and strong mental pain. This is completely normal. Our minds will revisit a topic a million times to understand it. It can take quite some time.

Your wayward spouse was the very foundation of your life. Your (wayward) spouse was the one person who was supposed to have your back and who you likely believed had your back. Your wayward spouse was supposed to be the person who always had your best interests in mind as well as the best interests of your children in mind.

The thing is, you were CORRECT in believing those things because the marriage covenant spells out the rules of marriage very clearly: you two become one, for better or for worse, and no person shall ever break your bond. The marriage covenant and the devotion required by the marriage covenant is strengthened by the idea that couplehood and faithful hearts

and acts are part the marital contract. Additionally, adultery is against God's laws.

If a person does not believe in God, all societies have moral codes. If they did not, civil society would fall apart.

You will realize that there is no rewind button for life and this will likely trigger more anger.

Another thing that is common occurs when you are bombarded by thoughts of the other person.

The fact that your spouse had an affair will bring up feelings of worthlessness. It's not uncommon to feel homicidal both towards your wayward spouse and the other person.

You might experience several mood swings per day, which is a type of hell in itself. It is your spouse's job to reassure you. You may feel that you can never trust your spouse again, under any circumstance. This too is normal.

I tell all betrayed spouses that it is up to the wayward spouse to earn trust. Some ask if they can stay married while not trusting a person. Of course you can stay married while not trusting your spouse; rebuilding trust takes TIME. Each betrayed spouse has their own time line to trust.

It is up to your spouse to do concrete things to regain your trust:

- Take down all social media profiles
- All email passwords need to be shared
- Your spouse must build bridges to you and, mend fences.

Until your spouse has acted like a trustworthy person for at least 6 months, I advise not trusting your spouse. This burden falls on your spouse to fix.

Phase three of the recovery process is often the hardest one of all four phases. It is important not to get stuck in this phase. But, the burden of not getting stuck falls almost entirely on your wayward spouse. She/he must show through consistent and unwavering actions that he/she has changed.

If your spouse cannot help you move past the third phase of the recovery, you may end up becoming bitter and depressed. If this happens, the burden falls on him/her.

However, it is very important that you communicate constantly what your spouse can do to make it up to you. He/she must help you move past this phase.

Both you and your wayward spouse must see eye-to-eye. If you need to give him/her a list of concrete things that they must do to fix it, then give them a list. Your spouse must find a way to help you get over this trauma.

If he/she cannot, please see a therapist who is certified in treating trauma.

Stage 4: Final adjustment after cheating or an affair

If your relationship has survived until this point after cheating took place, it has a good chance of continuing even after the trauma created by the betrayal.

Now is the time that both of you need to decide if you will reconcile. If you both decide to reconcile, the so-called enemy of your marriage will be the trauma that you have been subjected to as a betrayed spouse.

The trauma may surface for you at the most unexpected times and leave your wayward spouse bewildered.

During reconciliation you must each decide to grieve and let go of the marriage you once had. Then, you need to partner together to create a new one.

The paradox is that if you and your spouse survived up to this point, your relationship has a chance at becoming even stronger than it was before cheating took place. This is a great paradox; how can a marriage become stronger after betrayal?

I believe it can become stronger because you both will let out years of pent-up frustrations, talk in brutally honest ways, and come face-to-face with what the destruction of a family could look like. Couples who experience the kind of turmoil that causes them to talk often about wants, needs, and dreams, will go closer.

Here you must hold your wayward spouse accountable for destructive behaviors such as lying. You must hold your spouse accountable for old patterns that cause conflict. You must hold your wayward spouse accountable for helping you heal.

Action Steps:

- Determine as best you can what stage of infidelity you and your spouse are currently in.
- Think of how you and your spouse have responded while in whatever stage(s) that you have already experienced - or are currently experiencing.
- Your wayward spouse must be aware of your emotional state. Your spouse must communicate with you about your feelings and needs and make necessary accommodations for you.

Understanding your spouse's pain

Most cheaters (or ex-cheaters), have no clue how much pain they caused. They are having fun while you sat home miserable and alone.

Most betrayed women and men say the pain of finding out about their spouse's affair 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 you experience a trigger, the pain is there again as if the affair just occurred.

You will have many questions, emotions, images and feelings that constantly stir up more pain. The pain from the affair remains in your mind through every waking moment.

Your wayward spouse must honor your pain and let you grieve on your timeline.

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.

Give yourself room to grieve. Do not allow your spouse, friends, or family to tell you to "get over it." You grieve on your time line.

Your wayward spouse is responsible for honoring your timeline and helping you heal.

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 women an affair is like being raped. Men 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.”*

If you feel like your life is over, this is normal. However, your life is NOT over. I beg you to contact a suicide hotline if you feel like you cannot go on:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

1-800-273-8255

How Can A Spouse Have an Affair without Thinking of the Harm?

Let's take a step back here just a bit to talk about some of the differences between men and women.

It is my opinion that many of the problems that arise in relationships and especially after an affair are due to the differences (and misunderstandings) between genders when it comes to communication and relating in general.

Why does this matter?

Well, I think it's important to understand the differences so that you can be aware during your many conversations and interactions.

One of Doug and Linda's biggest issues was how Doug once lacked understanding of how Linda communicated. This was a major hurdle when they would discuss the affair.

By practicing and paying attention to what each of you needs in your marriage, communication-wise, you are opening up a new road that can be clean and clear of any misunderstandings, arguments and resentments.

The following is meant to be an overview of some of the gender differences and is in no way a comprehensive resource on the subject. If you wish to learn more, there are several books on the subject, such as *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray.

Richard Drobnick, LCSW, DCSW, Director of the Mars and Venus Counseling Center, says that men and women are different in many ways as they see the world through completely different perspectives. The key to understanding the differences is in the way that we communicate.

6 Ways Men and Women Communicate Differently

One. Men believe communication should have a clear purpose. Behind every conversation is a problem that needs solving or point that needs to be made. Communication is used to get to the root of the dilemma as efficiently as possible.

Women use communication to discover how she's feeling and what it is she wants to say. She sees conversation as an act of sharing and an opportunity to increase intimacy with her partner. Through sharing, she releases negative feelings and solidifies her bond with the man she loves.

Two. When a man tells a story he has already sorted through the muck in his own head and shares only those details that he deems essential to the point of the story. He might wonder why women need to talk as much as they do and he often will interrupt the woman once he has heard enough to offer a solution.

A woman uses communication to explore and organize her thoughts to discover the point of the story. She may not know what information is necessary or excessive until the words come spilling out. But she isn't necessarily searching for a solution when she initiates a conversation. She's looking for someone to listen and understand what she's feeling.

Three. A man is conditioned to listen actively when a woman initiates conversation. He assumes she is seeking his advice or assistance. He engages with the woman, filtering everything she's saying through the lens of, "What can we actually do about this?" Learning to listen patiently not just passively doesn't come easily to him.

A woman sees conversation as a productive end in and of itself. If she feels sufficiently heard or understood, she may not need to take further action to resolve a problem or make things better. The fact that she has been listened to assuages her anxieties and the pangs of negative feelings. Sharing with someone who understands and loves her heels her from the inside and equips her with the emotional tools necessary to handle the trials and tribulations of the outside world.

Four. When she is feeling down, a man would want to tackle her problems head-on like a fireman. He feels impatient to put the fire out as quickly as possible. For him the quickest way to put the fire out is by giving solutions. Because he wants so badly to provide for his spouse, he may take her mood personally and defend himself. He might hear things literally not realizing when his spouse is upset.

A woman will use words as tools to explore and express difficult emotions. By using words as tools to explore and express her difficult emotions when she is upset, she is able to process her negative emotions and let them go. Women value, support and nurture, and are most fulfilled by sharing, cooperation and community. When a man shows interest in her by asking caring questions or expressing heartfelt concerns, she feels loved and cared for and he is fulfilling her primary love need.

Five. When he is feeling down...He will often withdraw into his cave. This means he becomes quiet and withdrawn when he's upset or stressed. A man's cave time is like a short vacation: he reduces stress by forgetting about his problems and focusing on other things like watching television and reading the newspaper or playing video games.

He might avoid communication with his spouse during times of duress. If she persists with nurturing questions or criticism he withdraws even further, fearing that his partner doesn't trust him to take care of business on his own. However with her support and understanding, a man will return and be more emotionally available caring and loving.

A woman might interpret her spouse's silence as a sign that she is failing him or that she's losing him. She instinctively tries to nurture him through his problems by asking an abundance of caring questions. Or she may react defensively out of fear that her own need for healthy open communication is not being respected within the relationship.

Six. Communication breaks down when...He feels like he's being told what to do. The most important thing to a man is doing a good job. When his competence is questioned he'll not only feel hurt, but he'll throw up a wall of resistance, and communication begins to break down. He thrives in an environment where he's the expert. Rather than being told, "You should do this," he is likely to respond better to "What do you think of this?" The trick to improving him is to resist telling him what to do.

A woman hears from her spouse that her problems are as real and pressing as they seem in that very moment. Her spouse may mistakenly think he's being helpful in providing reality checks like "You're making a mountain out of a mole hill!" or "You're getting overly emotional about it." To her it feels like he is attempting to minimize her feelings or talk her out of having them.

Men and women typically desire to satisfy their partners, but they may miss the mark because it is truly difficult to understand and accept our partner's different ways of communication.

I would recommend the book about The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman.

If you take this information above and dissect it and try to analyze it based on situations that occur in your own relationship, I bet that you will find that there are times, maybe more often than you care to admit, where your communication breaks down because of gender differences in communication styles.

According to Melissa Dittman Tracy there are five main communication differences between the sexes:

1. **Women's brains are always on.** There is more neural activity in the female brain at any given time than in the male brain.
2. **Men just want the facts.** Men usually ask questions to stimulate conversation in their work relationships and often end conversation more abruptly than women.
3. **Women focus on friendship first.** For female salespeople for instance, they tend to build relationships when they sell. They don't tend to go into a transaction focused on the final outcome, but wanting to build rapport and learn more about the client first.
4. **Men take it one task at a time.** Men tend to like to focus on one task at a time, whereas women's brains are more geared to multitask.
5. **Women remember the little details.** Females can generally remember more physical and relational details than men.

Some additional observations about how gender differences can affect marriage:

- Women interrupt to demonstrate concern. While men interrupt to try to control the conversation.
- In negotiations women prefer discussion with the goal being agreement. Men feel that this is a manipulation. They are more direct and want speedy results.

- Women need to know that a lack of communication on the man's part has more to do with their different wiring, not because of a lack of affection.
- Men tend to express themselves better through actions more than words.
- Working to earn money in order to take care of their families is a man's expression of love. By the same token men need to understand that women express themselves through verbal communication. The feelings need to be acknowledged as opposed to explained away.

The differences between men and women include differences in thought process, sensitivity, memory, and communication. A successful relationship is one that recognizes the differences between men and women and is able to get beyond the 'he said, she said' scenarios.

This would be especially true in the case of infidelity because you are already at each other's throats and you're trying to solve many problems all at once.

The task that faces men and women is to learn to accept their differences, avoid taking their differences as personal attempts to frustrate each other, and to compromise whenever possible.

Ok, so now we have a better idea of the differences between men and women and how it's going to create some challenges for you when you're communicating about and working through the affair issues – if it hasn't already.

Here is a link to a video that will give you a somewhat humorous view of the differences in the way men and women think:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XjUFYxSxDk>

Action Steps:

- Think about the differences in communication styles that exist between you and your spouse. How does each of you react when demonstrating these differences?

- Have a discussion with your spouse about these differences and the meanings associated with his/her various styles. For instance, what is behind your need to control a conversation?
- Discuss ways that each of you misinterprets the meaning of one another's communication styles.
- Suggest to one another how you can better manage the differences in communication.

What your wayward spouse needs to do to help you heal.

I am sure you have run into this situation at least 100 times if you are reading this book. Your wayward spouse just cannot begin to wrap his/her head around your pain.

When I run into this type of thinking – where a wayward spouse just cannot get it - I like to work with imagery and “what if” questions. I like to use situations that most people can relate to in order to get my point across.

But, I also choose imagery that has nothing to do with infidelity.

Here is a hypothetical situation that I like to ask wayward spouses:

As your wayward spouse (a male in this example) to imagine this: Ask him to imagine a boat. Ask him to imagine that he has spent thirty years building this boat and working hard to do so. The intention of this boat is to ensure that his entire family has a safe space to exist if the world were flooded.

Now, imagine that the world actually starts to flood and everyone must get on the boat quickly and together: children, pets, and both spouses. Every person wants their children safe and sound.

Now, imagine another woman swims up to your boat and asks for pity because she did not spend time preparing. Imagine you let her on to the boat thinking you were doing the right thing.

Now, imagine this woman pushing your wife, your children, and even your pets off the boat while you were not looking. Sure, your wayward spouse would now be alone on a boat with a new woman. How exciting!

But, at the very same time, his children, his pets, and his wife (you) would be drowning.

Is it really fair for a wayward spouse to abandon and to allow his biological family to drown? The answer is NO.

Now, let's turn the tables. Tell your wayward spouse that instead of another woman pushing you and your family off the boat, tell your husband that

you and your children would push your wayward spouse and the other woman off the boat, so that they could drown together.

Tell your wayward spouse gets his happy ending; he gets to spend the rest of his very short life with the other woman. That life with the other woman may only last 5 minutes, but hey, he gets to spend the rest of his life with his soul mate.

Meanwhile, you and your children, and your pets would have control of your boat, survive the storm, and one day the stormy seas would be calm as glass.

Ask your wayward spouse if he would like to be tossed off that floating sanctuary - the other woman - and drown.

Your wayward spouse would probably huff, puff, and become extremely upset that you could think of throwing him and the other woman off the boat. Ask him why that would upset him so much?

After all, your wayward spouse has already metaphorically thrown you, your kids, and your pets off the boat – ruining the sanctity and foundation of marriage.

You need to ask your wayward spouse how he would feel if you threw him out of the marriage sanctuary just because you found another lover and felt like it.

I can tell you that your wayward spouse will be angry. But, I would like to impress upon your betrayed spouse over and over again that this is what he has done to you.

It is of utmost importance that you make your wayward spouse to understand and empathize with your point of view.

Specifics

Now we are going to get into the specifics of what your wayward spouse needs to do for you in order for your healing process to progress.

Doug and Linda have regularly conducted surveys and have had discussions asking this very question. The suggestions below are all fair things to ask your wayward spouse to do. In fact, many are necessary.

From the perspective of having a background in psychology, I can vouch for the fact that these things heal and you have every right to hold your wayward spouse accountable to the behaviors below:

- Your wayward spouse must stop all contact with the other person – forever
- Your spouse must understand that you will be triggered and these triggers often come as a surprise to you.
- Your wayward spouse must take responsibility for actions – and inactions
- Your wayward spouse must cultivate an atmosphere of trust.
- Your wayward spouse must not stonewall you when you wish to talk
- Your wayward spouse must be transparent and honest
- Your wayward spouse must acknowledge the depth of the pain that his/her affair brought to your marriage
- Your wayward spouse must figure out why he/she had an affair
- Your wayward spouse must be thoughtful and reassuring
- Your wayward spouse needs to stop being so defensive. When he/she does this, you can call a time out.
- Your wayward spouse must be loving and supportive
- Your wayward spouse must stop thinking that the grass is always greener somewhere else. There are many psychology studies out there. I have yet to find an actual case of the grass being greener.
- Listen – really listen
- Your wayward spouse must not blame you for the affair
- Your wayward spouse must make his/her life and everything he/she does an open book that you can access at any time.
- Get some counseling or therapy
- Your wayward spouse must ask what you need from them
- Your wayward spouse must experience gratitude or gratefulness

We will address each of these points individually.

Your wayward spouse must accept that he/she is a cheater and betrayer before you can begin the healing and recovery process. If you or your wayward spouse are still living in denial about his identity of betrayer, he/she will not be able to accept change.

Stop all contact with the affair partner - forever!

This is non-negotiable.

If your wayward spouse has not ended the affair, now is the time to do so. There simply is no way that a marriage can be repaired when the third wheel is around.

There are four possible ways your spouse can let the affair partner know that the affair is over:

1. Simply do not contact her/him ever again
2. Tell her/him over the phone
3. Send her/him a letter
4. Send her/him an e-mail

Your spouse must communicate that the affair was wrong and that he/she is moving forward with the marriage. Your spouse is not able to meet with their affair partner in person to end the relationship, this will make him/her open to the affair partner's manipulation.

Most unfaithful people tend to think they owe the other person something. They owe her/him nothing; she/he has stolen from your family. He/she owes the affair partner nothing.

The only thing owed to anyone is to you, the betrayed spouse—and you are owed complete fidelity.

And you and your wayward spouse must make a plan on how to be a united front if the affair partner initiates contact. Change all phone numbers, close the email accounts, suspend Facebook, and get off-line. You, the betrayed spouse, must also have access to all passwords, all bank accounts, and you must know where all the money is.

Don't be afraid to partner with your wayward spouse and speak with a judge about restraining orders. Your wayward spouse must be completely honest with you when and if the affair partner contacts him/her.

Action Steps:

- Formulate your plan to end the affair and discuss it as a couple.
- Follow the plan and stick to it.
- Make a plan on how to handle the days when the affair partner attempts contact.
- Close all social media.
- Share all bank account passwords.
- Shut down all media accounts that were used to communicate with the other person.

You will be triggered and your wayward spouse must partner with you to end your triggers.

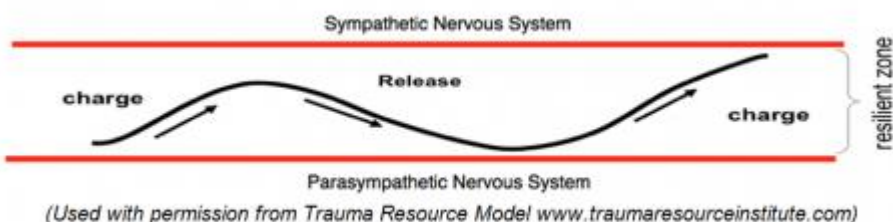
According to [Joyce E. Smith, MA, MFT](#), when you experience a trigger, there are actually physiological changes that are happening inside your brain that you cannot control.

Here's a brief Anatomy and Physiology lesson on what happens inside your brain when you suffers a trigger caused by the trauma of infidelity.

First, let's side step a bit and give you a very brief description of something called our Autonomic Nervous System, or ANS. As the first part of the word "auto" implies, this is something that happens automatically.

Think of it as something akin to breathing – most of the time we do not give it a second thought. Our brain stem controls breathing and this is why we are able to breathe without constantly reminding ourselves to breathe all day.

Contained in our ANS are two branches: the Sympathetic Nervous System or SNS, and the Parasympathetic Nervous System or PNS. The SNS (think stress) gets our organs ready for action, causing an increase in our breathing rate, blood pressure, heart rate, stress hormones, sweating, and our pupils to dilate. Our PNS causes a slowing down in the same areas. Under normal circumstances, there's a gentle ebb and flow between the two, which looks something like this:



When we experience trauma, our SNS kicks into action. This is referred to as "fight or flight." There is also a third component which most people are not familiar with called "freeze." This results when we perceive we are not able to "fight or flight".

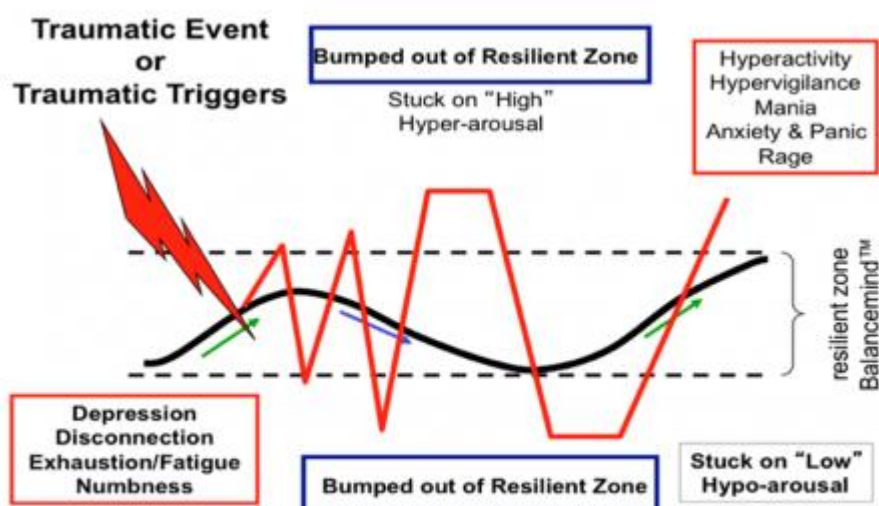
All traumatic events cause a person to fight, take flight, or freeze. Each person is highly individual and there is no "correct" response to trauma.

Some people choose to stay and fight, some people flee for their lives, and some freeze due to the utter shock of what they are experiencing.

When there is a traumatic event (like when you discovered your spouse's infidelity), or any trigger of that event, your ANS goes wild, metaphorically ping-ponging out of control.

If you have been betrayed, your spouse's infidelity will activate this system in your brain over and over again.

But, there is some structure to it. This usually does not happen randomly. It is usually related to an event that triggers the memory of your spouse's infidelity. There is almost always a direct trigger to activate thoughts and grief over your spouse's affair. Your wayward spouse must understand that he/she created this trauma in you and he/she owns it.



(Used with permission from Trauma Resource Model www.traumaresourceinstitute.com)

Betrayed spouses, if you find yourself doing and saying things you never thought possible, you have been triggered. Your nervous system has been activated and once activated, it has to process in order to wind down.

It's interesting to know that when triggered, the oldest part of your brain comes into action.

There is no thought process involved because this part of the brain acts on instinct. When this part of the brain is activated, our bodies release a

stream of chemicals, such as cortisol that can cause us to act in ways that can surprise us.

This brain function is not the issue; it just has not caught up to the idea that we are not experiencing that very same trauma at that moment. Our brain can become stuck. So when something triggers you, your brain reacts as if an event is happening to you at that moment, even if it is not. This can become problematic for healing because your brain keeps going back to the same event.

Having said that, there is hope. One of the most powerful ways to clear trauma is to either verbally say out loud or write on a piece of paper what is happening in there here and now. You may have been triggered, but you may be at home and all is safe. You will say out loud, “Right now I am safe. I am sitting at home on my couch, with a cup of tea, and reading a book. Right now all is well.”

That’s an example of how it works. Wherever you are when you are triggered, bring your mind back to the present moment in time. Feel the temperature of the room, look around at your surroundings, look outside and watch the birds, take out a good book, get on the treadmill, or buy a punching bag and start punching.

You must teach the oldest part of your brain that whatever event you are reliving is no longer happening. This may seem like a silly exercise, but neuroscience has shown that by bringing our mind back to the present event and consciously noting all is well, can help your brain heal. It can metaphorically “turn down the volume” on your trauma.

This does not let your wayward spouse off the hook. This is an exercise solely for your well-being. Your wayward spouse must take ownership for causing the trauma.

One interesting thing about the human brain is that it experiences and processes every event in life long before our pre-frontal cortex can begin to make sense of what is happening.

Some people have talked about the concept of “holding trauma in your body.” Well, this is not as far-fetched as it seems. Since the oldest parts of our brains take in all experiences before the rational part of our brain kicks

in, it can very much feel like we hold trauma in our body. We kind of do; the oldest part of the brain holds it.

Like all experiences, traumatic experiences are taken in long before the rest of our brain can catch up. However, a traumatic experience is very different than the experience of buying coffee. A traumatic experience can cause a physical imprint in the brain, which can be seen on MRI's. In this case, we literally do hold trauma in our bodies.

The good news is, there are ways to treat trauma. You do not have to be stuck in the trauma of your spouse's affair forever. Your wayward spouse must take an active role in your healing. He or she must lead the healing process.

But, even if he/she does not, you will not be stuck with trauma forever if you find a therapist who knows how to clear trauma.

More on the Nature of Trauma

In order to educate our own personal mental SWAT team, in the moment of trauma, our brain takes a snapshot-like photo of everything related to the traumatic event— and I mean *everything!* It could be a color, a smell, the time of day, or a specific word. It could be an important date such as a birthday or anniversary.

Here is the worst part: Many betrayed spouses are triggered merely by the company of their wayward spouse. The fact that a wayward spouse still exists is a trigger.

Many have told me that it would have been preferable for their (wayward) spouse to die and for the betrayed spouse to know they had a faithful marriage. Rather, they would rather have had their spouse die of natural causes than cheat.

Many wayward spouses cannot get it through their head why a betrayed spouse feels this way. Well, it's like this: being betrayed by the person you loved the most and who was supposed to have your back is the hardest pill to swallow. The marriage you once had is dead, but they are not.

In Doug's book he explains extensively to your wayward spouse what you are going through. So, your spouse will be reading similar information.

But, I wanted to write about trauma from the perspective of how it makes you feel and how to get through it. Know that Doug's book is giving your wayward spouse a huge lecture on how trauma affects you.

One thing that I recommend for you to do is to write a list of ALL your triggers. You need to be aware of them so that you can try to minimize them. But, your spouse also must be aware of your triggers and he/she must not do anything that activates your triggers.

However, you won't know what all your triggers are until you experience them. Keep a running list of everything that triggers you. Show it to your spouse.

Why?

Am I asking you to be a shut-in to avoid all triggers? Nope! I hope that you and your spouse can look at the list together and navigate around it. Eventually, you will be able to expose yourself to triggering situations and they will lose their pain.

But, until that happens, it is wise to identify triggers, so that both you and your spouse can be very mindful. Mindfulness is about being aware of your environment; being sensitive to it, and moving through your environment in a purposeful way.

Ideally, you and your spouse will tackle these triggers together. But, until you have found ways to cope, it is best to be mindful of them and plan around them.

Still, there were be universal triggers that affect all betrayed spouses. I wanted to talk about these universal triggers so that you – the betrayed – know that the feelings you experience are normal.

I am here to validate you and to let you know that you are absolutely normal in feeling these things and that your wayward spouse needs to be alert to these triggers.

We have a large readership base and they are kind enough to discuss their thoughts and concerns on the public forum. There are some universal situations that can trigger almost every betrayed spouse:

- 1) You do not get the information you need from your wayward spouse and/or the story constantly changes.

A reader named Tabs said, “Triggers occur when there are still unanswered questions. I’m “three years” out from D day and I still think about the OW. There are lots of half truths and many blanks that keep me obsessed.”

These half-truths told by a wayward spouse and changing of stories by your wayward spouse will keep you up at night. You might even be up at night this very moment reading this book. Whether you are reading it at night or during the day, I offer you a giant hug. I have been through it. This experience joins us on some level. Of course, it is not the club any of us want to join.

If your wayward spouse does not come clean with the whole truth at once, you will be massively triggered each time new information arises. Quite honestly, some people experience each new piece of large information as another D-Day. Your wayward spouse must understand that he needs to tell you everything.

- 2) When there were noticeable negative changes in the physical environment, such as catastrophic storms, that happened at the time of your spouse’s affair. For example, if you have the knowledge that a catastrophic storm hit your area during your spouse’s affair, future catastrophic storms can trigger you.

A reader named “TryingHard” explains how this works, “On to triggers; this was the topic with my [therapist] today. Spring has been rough for me since it was this time three years ago that my H [husband] left for 3 months [for the other woman]. The weather during this time was horrible. Storms, tornados, snow you name it, we had it, and I was by myself with the dogs; alone in my basement listening to the trees cracking and the winds howling. I hate wind. He never called to see if we were ok. Now me I can see, but he loves his dogs:). Anyway, so we’ve had some [more catastrophic weather] storms and honestly I felt transported back in time. At one point, I went to the bathroom and when I looked in the mirror [during a

trigger], I was white. And for me one trigger begets another. I go from being triggered about the physical aspect of the affair to the emotional aspect and then back.”

TryingHard really encapsulates that idea of the “ping-pong affect” that our brain goes through when a trigger hijacks our nervous system. That trigger can sometimes lead to another one. All of a sudden, we are caught up in a tornado of emotions that are not even of our own making.

The biggest part that a wayward spouse needs to understand is that he/she caused you to be this way. Your wayward spouse must understand that because of his/her selfish actions, your mind, body, and spirit have been devastated and changed.

Your wayward spouse must understand that you may not be the same person that he/she married due to the harm he/she caused you. Your wayward spouse must understand that he/she caused it and has to help fix it.

- 3) When your wayward spouse went out of his/her way for you during a happy event – such as your birthday – specifically to hide the affair.

Some wayward spouses will create lavish surprise parties for their betrayed spouse and ensure everyone in town is there to celebrate you. A wayward spouse knows that others will automatically view him/her as the perfect husband or wife. But, later, when you find out that your spouse did this as an elaborate ruse to proactively cover his/her tracks, often every birthday will become a trigger.

A reader named “StrengthRequired” Experienced a situation similar to this. About it, she said, “As for some triggers, I have my wedding anniversary and birthday coming up, and honestly, that is a trigger in itself. We celebrated our 21st wedding anniversary and had a wonderful time reconnecting when we were in the throes of his EA (emotional affair). Unfortunately for me, he wasn’t as involved as I was at the time, still calling and texting her. My birthday, he threw me a birthday party,

invited some friends and family, it was beautiful, but after seeing all the times afterwards, where he was still declaring his love for the ow, that birthday just doesn't seem so special anymore, more tainted and felt more like it was forced into him by my friend. I had even told her, please, I didn't want any celebrations, I wasn't up to it and I didn't want him pressured into giving one. It took another 8 months to get the turd out of our lives, everything in between just feels half hearted and him not really there."

This is a betrayal on top of a betrayal: in this case, a wayward spouse throws his wife lavish parties on the most special occasions in her life to cover his tracks. On the very same day, wayward spouse declares his love for his wife publically, the wayward spouse is secretly reassuring his mistress his undying love for his mistress.

- 4) When a wayward spouse's affair happens during the time a key family member is dying.

I do not have a reader example for this. But, I have read the experiences of strangers who have mentioned their husband started an affair when one of his parents was dying. Quite often a betrayed spouse will step in and do a lot of day-to-day care of her husband's family member because she feels she is helping him.

A wayward spouse will often use the free time to pursue their affair. This is a huge slap in the face for a betrayed spouse who cared for a dying relative.

The betrayed spouse did the right thing: people who are dying need company more than ever; the dying need to see relatives; the dying need connection and care.

When a wayward spouse is busy with the affair, this is the ultimate betrayal both to the wife/husband and to the dying relative. You cannot sink any lower than that; yet many people do.

So, when a relative dies, the day they died will be both tragic due to the loss everyone feels when they lose a loved one. But, when a betrayed spouse can look at the date a relative died and know that their spouse was having an affair, it feels like experiencing two separate deaths.

- 5) When an affair occurs during a time when someone in the family loses a job or someone in the family contracts an illness that takes many months to overcome.

This is the time when a family should be together. This is the time when everyone in the family should be rallying around each other, building a life raft, and figuring out how to survive this process together.

Instead, a wayward spouse checks out of the family and checks into a hotel with another person.

If you reconcile after you have put your life back together, there will always be a lingering resentment on your part since you had to hold the family together while your spouse was playing hide and seek with a strange person in a Motel 6.

- 6) When the affair partner contacts you and sends you proof of the affair.

The other person will do this most often IF you have reconciled with your spouse.

A reader of the site named “OceanGirl” posted a horror story about this in our public forums. She said,

“I found out in July right after moving back home after a 10-month separation (due to the abuse) that the affairs were both emotional and physical. He bought her many expensive items, such as jewelry, western wear like jackets, vests, and boots, took her to expensive restaurants, and spent several nights with her.

The affair was still going on as he was trying to “reconnect” with me by going on movie/dinner dates and concerts. He was still kissing her in his office up to the week before I moved home. I didn’t know until I got an package in the mail with things that left no doubt that it was deeply emotional and physical and has been for the past 18-20 years. I am devastated all over again.

The triggers are everywhere! I have to cross the bridge that he tossed his throwaway phone over while going home. I have to go by the hotel in which

they had their fun every time I go to tutor a particular student. I have the ugly texts that the AP sent to me describing all the places and things that he did for her, such as put rose petals in a heart shape on the bed in the hotel and a night that he spent on our farm with her down by the pond. Many graphic details that won't get out of my head.

Now he wants 6 months to "prove" to me that he wants me. I feel like I am undermining myself and my self-respect by staying in the marriage, yet I still love the man and I don't even know why after all he's done. The triggers are everywhere. I am having to start over in recovery after 18 months of work. He has lied for the past 18 years – half of our marriage- and for the past 18 months. All this has sent me into a tail spin and he can't understand why I am still so angry."

Well, you and I can certainly understand why OceanGirl is so angry. The fact that her husband cannot understand it is incomprehensible. Her husband fits the typical profile of a psychopath/sociopath. A wayward spouse who is a psychopath does not understand. Their brains are literally wired differently than the brain of a normal human.

The mistress sending OceanGirl texts about the details is cruel. OceanGirl will never be able to get it out of her mind. In fact, I would venture to guess that any time OceanGirl sees a rose, she will get triggered. Her brain will associate roses with trauma due to her knowledge of the part roses played in her husband's affair.

7) Being around your wayward spouse.

Recently a reader submitted a question to Doug about how to get over being triggered just by living in the same house as their wayward spouse. My answer to Doug was to tell the reader to move out.

But that was not a fair answer and so I have spent some time thinking about how to help betrayed spouses who are triggered when they interact with their wayward spouse.

Some people are not in a financial situation where they can just divorce. Many divorces end in poverty for both spouses, especially if they have been married for years and have little retirement. I believe in looking at infidelity in practical ways; not just in emotional ways.

I did not end up staying with the man who cheated on me and who did HORRIBLE things in addition to cheating. It did not matter that we permanently parted ways. I still have trust issues. I still get triggered. The hurt was so deep that sometimes I even think of it.

So, for a person like this, moving out is not really the best option for her. Even if she divorced, the fact that her wayward spouse still exists and walks the earth will trigger her. I have not spoken to her personally, but I have been doing this work for so long that I could predict this person leaving her spouse might not cause the trigger to go away.

So, is the trigger really about the woman's wayward spouse or what he represents?

Well, the trigger is about both. But, from the standpoint of how the brain works, her wayward spouse is a symbol of pain and betrayal. Being in the same room with her spouse will cause her brain to feel triggers and these triggers *will be outside of her conscious control*. Only when they hit the conscious mind, will this betrayed spouse be able to take a deep breath.

In situations like these, it is best for a couple to speak with a marriage counselor and in an office setting. The counselor will help a couple develop concrete strategies – that they both adhere to – in order to give the betrayed wife's brain a break.

Of course, the burden of helping his wife heal still falls on the wayward spouse. In such a case, I would imagine that a betrayed spouse would be given an instant coping strategy to utilize when she is triggered. However, the mending of her heart and the mending of her trust is up to her wayward spouse.

Also, a practical answer: I would recommend that a betrayed spouse take a job outside of the home during the times when the wayward spouse is home. I would also recommend separate bedrooms, as far from one another as possible. Another thing a betrayed spouse can realize is that she is no longer responsible for cooking for her husband, cleaning his clothing, or doing anything at all until he finds a way to help her recover.

Also, Doug has a section in his book for wayward spouses that will help your wayward spouse understand your triggers and Doug will give your

wayward spouse tips on what your wayward spouse needs to do to help you.

However, there are some universal things that you should expect from your wayward spouse when you are triggered:

- Your spouse may not anticipate a trigger that you are going to experience and you may not anticipate it either; sometimes triggers arise when you least expect them. Your wayward spouse must listen without interrupting you
- Your wayward spouse must recognize why you have been triggered
- Your wayward spouse must be patient with you
- Your wayward spouse needs to ask you what he/she can do for you in that moment to help. You will need to tell him/her what you need, because he/she may truly be ignorant.
- Your wayward spouse must not engage in stonewalling, gas-lighting, contempt, argumentative, or defensive behavior when you are triggered.
- Your wayward spouse needs to reassure you that all is well without trying to fix the situation. Unfortunately, this is usually not the answer, nor is it even possible.

Action Steps:

- Figure out what events trigger you and tell your spouse. Of course, if he/she has read Doug's book, Doug would have instructed your spouse to do this and he/she would have asked you already.
- Anticipate your triggers.
- Plan for events when you know you will be triggered.
- Have a good friend on speed dial if your spouse is too emotionally immature to help you through triggering situations.

You Might Run into Times When Your Wayward Spouse is Selfish

Doug said in his book, “We all know that having an affair in the first place is an insanely selfish thing to do. One of the most disturbing behaviors I have observed by the cheater is selfishness – thinking that everything is about them and how they are hurting, feeling and grieving – as a result of their affair. They believe there are only two people in the world that are important or valuable – the wayward spouse and their affair partner. Additionally, they more than likely have the mindset that they just want to move on and demand that you get over it.”

Linda said about Doug’s affair, “After three years I truly understand how much selfishness played a part in Doug’s affair. I remember about almost a year after the final D-day, Doug wrote a post about his selfishness and how he realized that that was part of the affair and the reason why he didn’t end the affair after I found out. I think that was the first post that he actually started to get it. Before that, Doug really didn’t care about anyone but himself. It was all about how he was feeling. That selfishness allowed him to be dishonest and to say things that were very uncharacteristic of him.”

I believe that most affairs are selfish acts.

Action Step: Remind yourself that selfishness is NOT about you.

A Cheater Must Take responsibility for His/her actions - and/or inactions

When a cheater blames you, must remind him that he/she is an adult and controls his/her actions.

Our mantra at EAJ is that cheating is a choice. Your spouse cheated; your spouse chose to cheat; now he/she must choose to take actions to restore the marriage.

I am sure that you have lost a lot of respect for your spouse during this time. This is a big deal for most people: when he/she loses the respect of the people who matter.

Even if you don't feel like it, you matter. If you did not matter, he/she would not have married you. Even though he/she cheated on you, you still matter.

Why?

Your spouse's cheating was absolutely NOT about you as a person. Your spouse's cheating was solely about him or her. Since that is the case, he/she will be able to still desire and even need your respect. It's a hard concept for many people to understand – especially for women: why would a man still crave our respect when he cheated?

Because a man can compartmentalize like nobody's business. There is a good reason men have large tool boxes. Three hammers go in one compartment, there are five different compartments for different types of nails, 5 more compartments for different types of screws, a compartment for nuts....and stop thinking about sex.

What we now for certain is that men can compartmentalize sex and love. The male brain is literally like his toolbox and he has different compartments for each thing in his life.

While this may sound sexist, it is backed up by neurology. Men have more gray matter in their brains and gray matter keeps things separate. Women have more white matter in their brains and white matter is the thing that connects both the right part of the brain and the left part of the brain. This

connective material prevents women from being able to compartmentalize to the extent that men can compartmentalize.

On the other hand, everyone has the ability to compartmentalize. The question always is: to what degree? In general, the male brain is built to *compartmentalize more easily than the female brain*, but all of us have this ability.

My opinion is that the differences in our brains can allow men to separate sex from love *more easily*, while many women have trouble separating sex and love.

Still all of us are individuals.

But, as a woman: I cannot separate sex and love.

Before I was married, I had a couple of very long-term relationships. I was unable to separate sex and love and so I could only have a physical relationship once I was in a long-term and committed relationship.

However, I might be on the extreme end because I had many female friends who were able to engage in casual sex while they dated.

I was never able to do that and I believe it's one of the reasons I am incapable of having an affair. I was incapable of having a physical relationship even when I was single, unless I had dated a man for many months and it turned into a long-term relationship.

But, when I was single, I knew of men who engaged in what they called "recreational sex." They saw sex as no more than a tennis game. Fortunately, these men were honest about how they viewed sex so that they found female lovers who also agreed to recreational sex aka "friends with benefits."

But, lets go back to psychology.

Many studies have shown that men can separate sex and love.

Here is the paradox that all betrayed wives face when reconciling with their husbands: why was it possible for your husband to love you and still have an affair with another women?

This has to do with compartmentalization.

In fact, during the time he was having an affair, he may have told you that he loved you but was not in love with you.

Sometimes men will say they love you, but they are not in love with you. Deep down, this is generally not true. Most of the time, your husband never stopped loving you, even during his affair.

He would convince himself that he loved you but was no longer “in love” with you to assuage his inner guilt and also in an attempt to understand why he still felt love for you, but also felt driven to continue an affair. The idea that he “loves you but is not in love with you” allowed him to continue his affair.

Now that you are on the path to reconciliation, you may have trouble respecting your husband because he was able to separate sex and love.

The other paradox is that your husband needs your respect and craves it, despite what he did. But, you will have trouble respecting him.

There will come a time during the recovery process when this must be dealt with.

In Doug’s book for wayward spouses he talked about the importance of a wayward spouse accepting full responsibility for his affair. About this, Doug said, “Accepting responsibility is a measure of one's self-worth, their level of security, and the true sign of strength and courage. Having this ability can empower you to grow in ways that would bring you great rewards and accomplishments in your life.”

This companion book follows the same message as Doug’s book, but it is written for you, the betrayed spouse. Many people will struggle with responsibility and this will block your ability to respect him/her.

However, there is a new regime in town and you are the leader of it. You must take control of your life and possibly make some hard decisions to ensure that your husband or wife knows you are serious.

But, in so doing, you can teach your spouse how to earn your respect back.

Action Steps for you (the betrayed):

- Do not accept your spouse's excuses
- Do not allow your spouse to place the blame on you.
- Is your spouse someone who likes to defer responsibility in other areas of his/her life? If so, the affair and lack of taking responsibility is more proof that his/her actions are about him/her.
- Remind yourself that whomever your spouse is with, he/she still brings himself/herself with him/her. He/she would not magically become a better husband or wife to someone else.
- Walk away when your spouse attempts to bring out a laundry list of your faults.
- State what you need in plain language
- Take control of all aspects of your life
- Do not allow your spouse do to anything that endangers your marriage.
- Open separate bank accounts, take total control of the finances, build a life outside your marriage.

You must behave in ways that show him/her you are no longer a push over. You must show him/her that from here on out, you look solely at the family's best interests and he/she will have no say until he/she too can 100% work in the best interests of your marriage.

Track Your Progress in the Marriage

Keep a journal about daily conversations and changes you see in your spouse.

Keep the lines of communication open about what you want and what you need. If you need to say it 50 times a day, then say it 50 times a day.

But, you need to actually set some concrete goals as well. Woman's Day magazine suggested:

“Spend some time looking at your relationship and figure out which parts work and which parts don't. Bowman suggests that you take a moment to imagine a perfect day in your perfect relationship. What would this look like? How would you and your partner interact? Then create a plan of how you might get from point A (your current reality) to point B (that perfect day). Write it down if you need to, then start breaking the issues into bite-sized pieces and tackling them one at a time. Before you know it, there will only be a few bite-sized problems left.”

Commination is Key When Tracking Progress: Use the Three Sentence Rule

“When you need to ask your partner for something that could be misconstrued as nagging, keep the request at three sentences — max. “The art of being assertive without coming off as aggressive lies in being succinct and using a warm tone of voice and body language,” says Bowman. “When you keep your requests to three sentences or fewer, it's almost impossible to blame, use sarcasm or use put-downs.” It's also a lot more likely that you'll get your point across without losing your spouse's attention. Make your request with a smile. Be sincere and encouraging. You might even rest your hand on his thigh as you say, “Honey, the house is a mess and I am exhausted. Could you help me clean this place up? I could really use your help.”

Now let us apply these principles to affair recovery.

Action Steps for Marriage Progress:

- I want both you and your wayward spouse to write a short sentence about how you perceived your marriage before the affair.
- Next, I want you to each write a sentence about how you perceive the marriage now.
- Finally, I want you to write several sentences about what your ideal marriage will look like after recovery.

Action steps for the three sentence Rule:

- Use a positive tone of voice when making suggestions
- Talk about what you desire and state it specifically
- Do not get sidetracked by the blame game
- Talk about what you need using specific and short language

Talking about an affair is hard. Talking about anything while going through affair recovery can become a metaphorical nuclear war. For example, your wayward spouse could spill your coffee and you two will fight about the coffee. Your wayward spouse will say it was an accident and it probably was because everyone has clumsy moments.

But, if your spouse has betrayed you, all kinds of feelings will well up inside of you over spilled coffee. You will probably feel like he/she is careless about things you care about; that he/she does not consider your needs or pay attention; that he/she does not care about harming you, and that he/she does not consider how his/her actions affect you.

In this case, it is best to say: Please clean up my coffee that you have spilled. I would appreciate it if you could also make me another cup of coffee and bring napkins.

Keep communication to the three-sentence rule in place. State what it is you need in clear terms and leave it at that. After your spouse leaves the room, you can scream into a pillow for 20 minutes if you want.

All About Trust

In Doug's book for your wayward spouse Doug said,

“Ah, trust. Trust is the most difficult hurdle for the marriage to overcome after an affair. I will tell you that when it comes to rebuilding trust in your marriage and in you, the work is all on your shoulders. Your wife will need to work at rebuilding trust in herself, but the rest is up to you. Here, your words mean next to nothing and your actions mean everything.

Many cheaters believe that if they surrender their cell phone, their passwords, their e-mail addresses and things like that that they are being trustworthy, but it goes a lot deeper than that. Being trustworthy means you are keeping the promises to your spouse and not just saying, “I'm not going to see the affair partner anymore. I'm going to stop the affair.” It's how you live your life on a daily basis.”

If your wayward spouse is reading Doug's book, you can gently remind him/her about how important it is to actually be a trustworthy person.

Every used car salesman will say, “Trust me, I have just the right car for you! This beauty has at least another 300,000 miles on it, without even maintaining it!”

Wait... a car has another 300,000 miles on it? Most cars break down around the 150,000 mile mark, especially if they are not maintained. There is no used car in existence that contains another 300,000 miles without engine rebuilds, transmission rebuilds, multiple sets of breaks, 10 sets of tires and on and on. Such a car does not exist.

Anyone can say anything about anything.

But, living in a trustworthy way is a different story. You must keep your spouse accountable to his/her promises. Your spouse must keep promises. If he/she promises that he/she will shut down all social media accounts and block calls from the other person, he/she must do so.

Better yet, he/she could do this in front of you and then give you access to all of his/her passwords and his/her phone.

Also, if you have to keep your spouse too accountable, that will get old. You need to let him/her know that some toddlers have more manners than that.

You may have to draw some concrete boundaries and if your spouse violates them, you will need to dole out consequences.

Each Time. Every Time.

You need to remind your spouse that the only meaningful thing you need is for him/her to be a trustworthy person; not for him/her to simply *say* he/she is one. **He/she must keep his/her word, keep his/her promises, and make life-altering changes in himself/herself.**

If your spouse tells you that he/she cannot move forward until you trust him/her, you can tell him/her that you cannot move forward until he/she has proven himself/herself to be a trustworthy person.

The ball is in your spouse's court.

Some will never trust their spouse fully again. That's actually okay. Some have asked me if it is okay to be married to someone who they cannot trust 100% yet. I tell them trust is a process that takes time and effort.

A wayward spouse must prove himself/herself trustworthy by altering their behavior forever. Do not allow your spouse to bully you into trusting him/her too quickly.

If he/she does, I would ask why that is so important to him/her. Does he/she want you to trust him/her so that he/she can continue an affair? Why is your trust so important when your spouse was the one who proved to be untrustworthy? Your spouse must prove himself/herself to you.

Trust is such a difficult and fragile thing. If you want to know more, Linda & Doug wrote a book about it called: *"Journey to Trust: Rebuilding Trust After an Affair."*

Action Steps:

- Assess the level of trust within your relationship. What are some of the things that cause you to mistrust your husband?

- Commutate this to your spouse.
- Tell your spouse how the loss of trust has affected your marriage/relationship and how it hurts you.
- Tell your spouse about the barriers to trust.
- Spend time together – offline – and go take walks in the park. Let your spouse get to know who you are again. He/she needs to really “see” you again. This will also give him/her an opportunity to behave in ways that help you feel more loved.

Talk about things

In Doug's book, he gives a pep talk to your spouse about talking about things. So, know that Doug has your back covered on this one and he has many tips about how your spouse can talk to you effectively.

In Doug's book he said, "When mentoring cheaters, one thing I will tell them is that if they want to help their wives get over the affair, recover and heal, they need to wrap their heads around the fact that if they just give their wives what it is they're looking for, the healing process will go so much faster. It will help their wives to "move on" more quickly, which is exactly what they (the cheaters) really want in the first place. Certainly talking about your affair is arguably the most important thing that you're going to have to do. So do it for both of you! For your wife, the pain, the emotions, the anger and the questions are only just beginning. Talking about the affair so that she understands it is what she needs right now."

If your wayward spouse wants to sweep the affair under the rug, change the subject, or pretend he/she has suddenly been struck "deaf" and cannot hear a word you are saying, this is not okay.

Your wayward spouse **MUST** talk about his/her affair.

But, I will say this: listening to your spouse talking about his/her affair can be paradoxical.

On one hand, you are relieved, but some of the details might leave you devastated. That is a gentle FYI.

The other thing that might occur is your spouse might automatically slip back into old patterns of blaming everyone but himself/herself. You must stay on guard during conversations about the affair. If your spouse starts to blame-shift, you simply need to remind your spouse that cheating is a choice.

You must get all the answers you need in order to be at peace with your situation. The answers you need are individual to you; you decide what you need to know, what you do not need to know; and you decide when you have heard enough.

Action Steps:

- Be in control of the conversation.
- Set a specific time to talk about the affair.
- Write a question list.
- Agree to some ground rules that help to create a safe environment, which fosters open communication.
- If someone gets angry, it is time for a 15-minute time out. Each of you can go to a separate room to cool off.

Talking about sex is hard. In Doug's book, he and I have a small difference of opinion. He recommends to wayward spouses that they should not talk about specific sexual details such as whether or not the other woman was "better in bed." I understand where Doug is coming from; he wants to protect the feelings of a betrayed spouse. Doug is an advocate for betrayed spouses and writes information based on the highest good of the betrayed spouse. If you need to know about sexual details, you **MUST** prepare yourself for them.

Finally, there are some things you **MUST KNOW**. You must know if your spouse had intercourse. I also recommend that you and your wayward spouse go and get STD checks together since if your spouse could lie about an affair, he/she could also lie about anything else.

The biggest issue about affair sex is that if partners wear condoms, cancerous sexual viruses can still be transmitted. There is a myth that condoms equate to safe sex. That is no longer true; condoms cannot prevent cancerous STDs. The only safe sex is 100% monogamous sex or complete abstinence.

You must know if your spouse had sex with the other person; even if it was oral sex. Even oral sex can transmit cancerous STD's.

Hold Your Wayward Spouse Accountable to Honesty

In Doug's Book for Wayward Spouses, Doug said, "The most important thing after an affair is discovered is that you are completely honest about the details of the affair. Keeping things a secret on the misguided belief that it will hurt your wife or it will be uncomfortable for you will come back to haunt you down the road."

As a betrayed spouse, you have probably experienced firsthand the scenarios that your mind can create if you do not know the details. It's how the human mind works.

Literally. Our brain's job is to take account of the world around us, take all the audio, visual, and emotional stimulation we experience each day and filter it in a seamless way.

Our brain's job is to help us understand and assimilate the world around us so that we can survive and make solid decisions. Since our brain is the ultimate survival mechanism, we must know what we face so that we can make decisions that cause us to survive and succeed.

When your spouse has an affair, life as you know it will seem like a confusing nuclear wasteland. Or, if it doesn't look like a nuclear wasteland, it might look like an illusion.

An affair can be so disorienting that some say they feel adrift at sea, with no anchor, and no guiding light. This is an excruciatingly painful place to exist.

In Doug's book for Wayward Spouses, Doug keeps your wayward spouse accountable to honesty.

But, if your spouse is having trouble being honest, paint a picture in his/her mind. You don't need to use words that shame, you don't need to yell, you just need to tell your spouse things such as:

- I feel very frightened; I feel like a part of me has died. That part is you, since I believed we were a team.
- I need to you to be honest with me. My mind conjures up the most terrible scenarios and it is extremely painful.

- When I ask you questions about the affair, it is not because I want to attack you. I need to make sense of my life.
- As long as you keep secrets from me, I will be unable to move on.
- If I cheated on you and you decided to stay with me, would you want me to lie to you all day?
- Keeping secrets is not a kind thing to do, even though many people incorrectly say, “what he does not know will not hurt him.” What I don’t know will hurt me.
- When I talk about your affair, I am attempting to process the affair. I must know all the details in order to fully grieve and process your affair.
- When I want to talk about your affair, it is not because I view you as a terrible human being. I ask about your affair so that I can gain understanding.

One of the things that I recommend is that your wayward spouse find an “accountability partner” (of the same sex) such as a minister, a brother/sister, or a good friend. That person is there to hold your spouse accountable to staying honest and the accountability partner is there to keep your spouse focused on helping you recover.

Remind your spouse that he/she must be honest because small, white lies create bigger lies. If your spouse starts lying, he/she will trigger you because your life was a lie during the affair.

You need to impart to your spouse that all the bad habits he/she developed during the affair must be broken.

In essence, your spouse must “unlearn” all the techniques learned while cheating. He/she must shed the person he/she was during the affair. Your spouse must return to the person he/she was before the affair.

Of course, there is no real returning, so to be more specific, he/she must shed all of the bad traits and habits that he picked up during the affair and then he/she must become a better version of the person he/she was before.

In Doug’s book for wayward spouses, he echoes this same message, “Your wife will not fully get over your affair until you are completely honest about everything that happened. That means the physical aspect, the emotional

aspect, where it took place, how it took place. Those questions all need to be addressed. You also need to be honest going forward in every aspect of your life. Be open and honest with your thoughts and feelings and how you conduct yourself. Your relationship is either going to survive these difficult times or it won't. You will want your relationship from here on out to be fresh and new and based on complete honesty. It's important that your marriage can survive with honesty.”

Indeed, your spouse must be honest if he/she wants your marriage to survive.

Remorse, Apologizing, and the Affair Fog

Many people are terrible at apologizing. Either they were not taught how to apologize, they are too arrogant to apologize, or they feel they have done nothing wrong.

Most people I know, do not know what a real apology even looks like. Some people might say, “I am sorry. Let’s put the past in the past.” This is not an apology, it does not show remorse, it undermines, and minimalizes your pain. It’s also a common phrase that people who want to sweep their actions under the rug will do.

Here is the anatomy of what a proper apology looks like and what you should expect from your wayward spouse:

- 1) He or she must first admit of his or her own volition that the affair was 100% wrong and they must take ownership of the choice to have an affair. *Affairs are always a choice.*
- 2) He or she must express sincere remorse to you in a way that validates and satisfies you.
- 3) Your wayward spouse must make amends by asking you what you need to move on. *You can help by giving concrete and very specific examples of what you need.*
- 4) Your wayward spouse must promise and then ensure an affair will never happen again. *Apologies are meaningless unless the person has stopped the hurtful behavior, such as an affair.*

But, before your spouse is truly able to apologize, he/she might have to face what we term the Affair Fog. Some like to claim the Affair Fog is a myth or an excuse.

However, in my own studies I have found that there is a strong biological foundation for the Affair Fog.

This does not discount the fact that your wayward spouse laid utter ruin to your life and turned into someone you do not know. It simply explains why your spouse could turn from Prince Charming to Prince Harming without your spouse having the insight to stop.

What is the Affair Fog?

The term Affair Fog refers to a state of mind where the person who is experiencing it cannot have insight or make rational decisions. The thrill of the affair envelopes the wayward partner in good feelings and triggers the same chemicals in the brain as drugs such as cocaine. The excitement can be overwhelming.

They must brush up against feelings such as guilt and shame, despite feeling excited. In order to avoid having to see themselves as the bad guy/gal, they begin rewriting both the entire history of their marriage as well and rewrite who you are to them.

The most common misstatement that a person in the Affair Fog will say is that the other person is their soul mate.

Over time, they really begin to believe all the lies they've told themselves. Their beliefs are reflected in their actions; loving to the affair partner, and angry and hostile towards the betrayed. Wash, rinse, and repeat, and soon, they are deeply entrenched in the fog.

At some point your wayward spouse experienced a misguided state of mind where he/she believed that he/she was entitled to an affair. But, in order to be able to feel so entitled to an affair, your spouse had to rewrite the entire history of the marriage. Your wayward spouse did this as a defense mechanism so that he/she would not be destroyed by guilt.

Why doesn't guilt prevent the Affair Fog in some people?

Wikipedia defines guilt in this context: *“an emotion that occurs when a person believes that they have violated a moral standard.”*

Guilt is not a strong enough feeling to prevent the Affair Fog because guilt leads to shame. Shame is painful for most people to endure, so they build walls around their behaviors.

However, after your spouse's affair, they will might feel flooded by guilt and shame. But, this only happens after they have enough insight to have remorse for their actions.

When they are in the Affair Fog, they do not believe they have violated a moral standard and cannot feel guilt.

Why?

The Affair Fog is all about rewriting history and the Affair Fog causes a wayward spouse to tell themselves outright lies. Sometimes a wayward spouse will go as far to project foul character traits onto you, the betrayed spouse, so that he/she can feel justified in this affair.

I have literally encountered cases where the faithful spouse is a virtual saint and the other person comes from the lowest rung of society. A wayward spouse will project all the foul behaviors and traits about the other person onto their spouse; meanwhile they will see the other person as a saint.

Some cheaters have to write a horrendous narrative about you – the betrayed spouse – in order to escape guilt. The more a wayward spouse convinces himself/herself that they are the victim and have been driven to have an affair, the more he/she will demonize you. This pushes a person deeper into the affair fog and further away from guilt.

Guilt and shame are necessary emotions because when someone has actually done something wrong, guilt and shame become reality checks. I have heard some psychologists say that shame is toxic.

This is true and untrue at the same time.

For example, if a person has been sexually assaulted, they will often feel shame. This is toxic shame because they are a victim; not a perpetrator.

Using the same example, if a person sexually assaults another, feeling shame about sexually assaulting another person is a good thing. Shame can cause such a person to seek help, so that they will not sexually assault others. If they seek help, they may even apologize to their victims one day.

Now, let's go back to the construct of infidelity.

At some point, your wayward spouse will likely wake up and feel guilt and shame.

Resist the urge to save your wayward spouse from guilt and shame. Your wayward spouse must feel shame as part of the process of fully breaking away from the affair partner.

However, depending on your wayward spouse's mental health, the guilt may be overwhelming and cause bigger problems. Your wayward spouse might dive deep into depression, have angry outbursts, extreme mood swings, resentment, and unpredictable behavior.

After coming off the chemical high of the affair, they might "switch addictions" and start using alcohol and drugs to excess.

It is necessary to contact a skilled therapist if your wayward spouse does the following things:

- Becomes severely depressed and talks about suicide
- Develops uncontrolled aggression that your wayward spouse takes out on you, your children, or other innocent beings such as pets.
- Becomes erratic with spending money; something like a new boat will not solve the problem
- Drug and alcohol use
- Picking fights
- Engaging in self-sabotaging behaviors such as quitting their job before he/she has another one, doing things to intentionally drive you away.

Otherwise, guilt is an essential process that will occur during affair recovery. In Doug's book written for wayward spouses, he said:

"It is *vital* that you be honest with yourself. You must be 110% sure that: (a) what you did was a mistake and you will learn from it and make efforts to avoid repeating it and, (b) you are willing to make the significant effort to get the marriage back on very strong foundation."

You can help keep your spouse accountable by modeling honesty and transparency in your marriage. Of course, you may have already been an honest and transparent person throughout your marriage. This is just a suggestion to keep modeling these behaviors and ensure that your wayward spouse is honest with you.

You also must encourage introspection in your spouse. Your wayward spouse needs to pin-point the behaviors that led him/her down the path to an affair. Your wayward spouse must analyze the why behind the affair.

Was he/she an attention seeker?

Did he/she have loose boundaries around his/her behavior and words?

Did he /she put himself/herself in situations where finding another partner was easy?

Did he/she have lunch or dinner with the opposite sex frequently?

Those are only a few examples that I can give in terms of introspection. Your spouse needs to figure out what it is that caused him/her to act out.

In Doug's book, he said about himself:

“I busted my butt trying to atone for my betrayal and ease my guilt by basically being ultra loving and helpful to Linda. I was at her beckon call.

This was all well and good, but I was leaving some very important things out – mainly the part about looking within and learning from what I had done. Introspection and personal change were pivotal aspects for gaining Linda's forgiveness and resulted in lessening my own feelings of guilt.”

Linda also wrote about her experience with this. Linda said:

“Often times when the betrayed spouse brings up the affair due to triggers or insecurities, the cheater will combat their feelings of guilt with anger or by deflecting the questions or situation. I learned to be in tune to Doug's anger and deflections by realizing that his anger is a direct result of the guilt he feels.

In the beginning I thought that Doug acted this way because he was hiding something, or didn't want to relive the wonderful feelings or times he had with the other woman. I learned to understand that talking about the deceitful and selfish things he did during the affair produced a large amount of guilt for him and his reactions were to avoid it at all costs by going back to his old coping mechanism of fight or flight.

Both you and your wife need to understand that you are most likely feeling tremendous guilt for your actions and you have yet to learn how to cope with those feelings.”

Action Steps for you:

- Tell your spouse about the transgressions that he/she committed against your marriage as a result of the affair. In Doug’s book, he also asks your spouse to write down their transgressions. Compare the lists.
- Explain to your spouse how these transgressions affected you. Sometimes it is best to do this in writing so that your spouse cannot interrupt you.
- Ask your spouse to reflect on how the affair harmed the lives of you, your children, your extended family members, and friends. The harm that affairs cause effect everything in your life and often the harm is inter-generational.
- Tell your spouse what remorseful behavior looks like to you. One person’s version of what remorse looks like may not match the other person’s version. Be specific.

Ensure that Your Spouse Acknowledges the Depth of Your Pain and the Harm Caused to the Larger Family Unit

Another hurdle that I would like to talk about is ensuring that your spouse acknowledges the depth of your pain and also how he/she harmed his/her children. This chapter builds on the last because the deeper your pain goes, the more skittish your wayward spouse can often get.

One of our blog commenters, named “TrustingGod”*, explained to us what her wayward husband did and said in order to ignore her suffering. This is what she shared about her cheating spouse:

“Rewriting of history was a problem - not one good year with me, not one, according to him. He said he was not happy during our whole married life. The truth is that this was news to me.

He did “stop being happy” about 2 years ago when I stopped allowing him access to my inheritance. The inheritance money was just flying out the window without consideration of who brought it to the marriage or what to plan to do with it for the future.

He used blatant sabotage using passive/covert/overt/aggressive behavior. There was always projection and blame-shifting. He accused me of doing the opposite of what I actually do and did. For example, I supported him in his efforts to spend more time with his sons - to have more father/son bonding time - by not always including myself in their activities. I even helped plan and fund weekend getaways for them.

However, I was accused of getting in the way of him bonding with his sons, saying no to this, and saying no to that. When I confronted my husband about the blame-shifting, he literally punched the wall.

To this very day, our marriage counseling sessions keep getting hijacked by him and the counselor talking about him and his ex, or him and his sons. This has been going on for months. Our counselor even quipped “Well, you’ll have to be on the back burner again.” I’m wondering if he (the counselor) has a strategy, almost like he is trying to prove to me that I’m better off leaving this jerk since my husband is consumed with himself and won’t take the steps necessary to save/rebuild our marriage. The counselor has asked us both why we are ok with living with so much

dysfunction. I am not ok with it. I want it to change. And I keep trying. I'm thinking of the definition of insanity at this moment..."

Unfortunately, the experience above is more common than anyone would know. I would go as far to say that every betrayed spouse is the recipient of these terrible behaviors at some point.

This is why it is so important to show your wayward spouse all of your pain and trauma as soon as you can. Do not hold back on sharing the depth of your pain.

One of the most powerful ways to communicate this is to create a narrative of "what if" that puts your spouse in your shoes. I will tell you that this strategy has worked for many betrayed spouses, but it must be stated within a "what if" scenario.

Here is the script that I use:

Imagine that you had not met me and married someone else. Imagine that you thought the person you married was the love of your life. Imagine that you loved this person with all your heart, trusted this person, and wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of your life with this person and grow old together. Now imagine that one day you came home and she had emptied your house of all its possessions, emptied your joint bank accounts, and simply left a note on the counter telling you to not wait because she had found someone better than you.

Imagine being served with divorce papers the next day. Imagine that you do not have the money in your bank account to find an attorney to represent you because she and her lover took all of it.

Now imagine finding talking to friends and finding out that she had told many people that she was not happy with you for a long time and this is why she had her affair. Imagine her telling your group of friends that you were a terrible lover, that you have a small penis, and a small bank account. Imagine her making you the laughing stock of an entire town and everyone saw you as "the broke guy with the small penis" wherever you went. How would you feel?

Present your spouse with all of those words and ask him/her how they would feel about that. Ask if he/she would feel lost, angry, upset, and suicidal if such a thing happened to him/her.

Ask lots of “what if” questions about the scenario above, but do NOT connect it to your marriage. Your spouse will know that you have already connected it to your marriage and that will start a fight. Stay in the realm of the hypothetical. Staying in the realm of the hypothetical allows people to have insight without having shame introduced to the picture. Now, does staying in the realm of the hypothetical let your wayward spouse off the hook?

No.

This is an exercise in empathy building.

A wayward spouse must have insight in order to have empathy.

It is difficult for someone who is the *bad guy/gal* to have insight. Yet, your wayward spouse must have insight.

What If It Still Does Not Register?

There are some people in this world who will never register what they have done is wrong. What is wrong to the rest of society is not wrong to them.

Why doesn't a cheater see his/her actions as wrong?

In short, a cheater uses a menagerie of mental and verbal acrobatics to see themselves as blameless. Scientific American wrote an excellent article to explain this phenomenon. It is called *Cheaters Use Cognitive Tricks to Rationalize Infidelity*:

“Most people believe that they are moral and good. They also believe cheating on a partner is wrong. So how do cheaters live with themselves after their infidelity? Understanding how they reconcile their indiscretions with their beliefs about themselves can help us figure out why “good people” cheat.

Dissonance theory predicts that when individuals' thoughts and behaviors are inconsistent, something has to give. Have you ever wondered why anyone would be a smoker these days, given what we know about the link between "cancer sticks" and cancer? A smoker knows that smoking causes cancer, but might rationalize it by saying "I don't smoke very much" or "My grandma smoked two packs a day and lived to be 90 years old!" By coming up with these rationalizations, people are able to preserve the impression that their behaviors and attitudes are consistent.

Similarly, cheaters might minimize the significance of their infidelity as a way to cope with knowing they did something wrong. The authors of a new study published in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships propose that cheaters feel bad about their indiscretions, but try to feel better by reframing their past infidelities as uncharacteristic or out-of-the-ordinary behavior...

In short, people know that infidelity is wrong, but some still do it. And when they do, they usually feel pretty bad about it. But through various forms of cognitive gymnastics, cheaters are able to discount their past indiscretions to feel better about themselves. Since the negative consequences, at least in terms of how they feel about themselves, are diminished, maybe they do not learn from their mistakes – and might be susceptible to cheating again in the future."

When you hit the wall of your partner's inability to understand why their cheating hurt you, your partner is likely experiencing cognitive dissonance.

But, more importantly, getting your partner to have insight into what he/she did is important because it is essential your partner never rationalizes himself/herself into having an affair again. A cheater must feel some pain in order to change.

When Doug had an emotional affair on Linda, Linda found that it was essential for Doug to feel the pain as well. Linda remarked:

"What helped to ease the pain was to get to the point where Doug was able to experience the pain with me. This took a few months and multiple conversations and experiences, but became quite a healing experience when he did acknowledge the pain he caused.

Looking back on it, it is apparent that this acknowledgement cannot be forced. It only came as a result of open and honest communication and the sharing of feelings between the two of us. Without this process, I'm positive that any further unwillingness to acknowledge the pain or his part in causing the pain would have cost me a significantly longer period of feeling that pain.

Until the cheating spouse gets to the point where they can live through the pain with you [the betrayed], you will often feel the need to be able to ease it somehow – to escape it. Though it's a natural reaction, I urge you not to do this. Enduring the pain helps the healing process.

...Another common way for pain avoidance is when the cheating spouse attempts to spare their spouse further pain by withholding information. An example might be where the cheating spouse has further contact with the affair partner, perhaps even by accident, but fails to communicate this to their husband or wife.

This error in judgment will eventually come to light causing more pain and a significant setback to the healing of the marriage. There is a renewed feeling of deception and any trust that has been reestablished will be wiped out. Further deception plus loss of trust, equals more pain.

Another pain avoidance tactic that I have witnessed, both in the comments on this blog and with my mentoring clients, is the cheater intentionally sabotaging any attempts to talk about the affair. They do this by getting angry or somehow deflecting the conversation.

Until Doug saw the light, he was very good at this. He didn't always do it, but often he would become angry and frustrated by my questions or attempts to talk about his emotional affair which would cause me to back down (which I'm sure he knew I would do). The message that came through to me was, "Just get over it." Obviously not something I was ready to do at the time.

...Once the cheating spouse can feel your pain and empathize with what you've gone through, you will be surprised at how it can help in your healing from an affair."

Your spouse must understand that the pain he/she caused by cheating runs deep. This deep pain will affect everything in your life. If you have children,

infidelity will affect your children. If you have grandchildren, nephews, and nieces, infidelity will affect them.

While many cheaters believe that “what someone does not know will not hurt them,” there is no basis in psychological research to back up this idea. In fact, psychology studies have found that infidelity affects everyone in the family and infidelity even has an inter-generational impact.

Eric Dolam, an author for PsyPost explored this intergenerational affect:

“People are more likely to cheat on their partner if they believe that their parents were unfaithful, according to research recently published in the journal *Personal Relationships*.

“I find infidelity very interesting to study because in the U.S., infidelity is almost universally condemned yet a fair percentage of individuals will engage in infidelity (among married U.S. couples, the infidelity rate is about 15-20%),” said study author Dana Weiser, an assistant professor at Texas Tech University.

“There is a lot of research about how family experiences shape individuals’ relationship and sexual behaviors, and I was curious as to whether infidelity was also influenced by family experiences.”

The three-part study, which included a total of 1,254 participants, found that parental infidelity was associated with a higher propensity for offspring to engage in infidelity themselves. In other words, children who thought their parents engaged in infidelity were significantly more likely to cheat on their partners in their own adult relationships.

“There are still many questions to be answered; specifically, why does this association between parental infidelity and one’s own infidelity exist?” Weiser said. “My work suggest that socialization is at least one partial explanation. More work needs to be done to assess biological, psychological, and contextual factors to explain this association.”

“Our research indicates that parental infidelity sends memorable messages to offspring about the greater acceptability of infidelity, and these communications are internalized and used to construct offspring’s belief systems,” Weiser and her colleagues wrote in the study.”

While this study explored the belief systems of an adult child of unfaithful parents, there is more research to show that infidelity has a terrible impact on children when they know for certain that a parent has been unfaithful.

This raises the question about whether or not your children should know about your spouse's infidelity. After years of working solely in the area of infidelity, I have come to believe that it is best to tell children. However, I believe it is best to tell them with the assistance of a therapist.

Why?

Because children are not naïve and children are not stupid. Children notice even the smallest changes in their environment. If you cultivate a culture within your family that revolves around secrecy and sweeping problems under the rug, your children may not have the skills to engage in healthy relationships. Whatever behavior that you model in front of your children will likely be the behavior they carry into adult relationships.

I believe it is important to bring large problems out in the open with the aid of a skilled therapist.

If you do this with the aid of a skilled therapist, you will teach your children conflict resolution skills and demonstrate to your children that there are ways to get through life's most difficult experiences.

On the next page there is a diagram that explores the inter-woven complexity of how infidelity affects families.

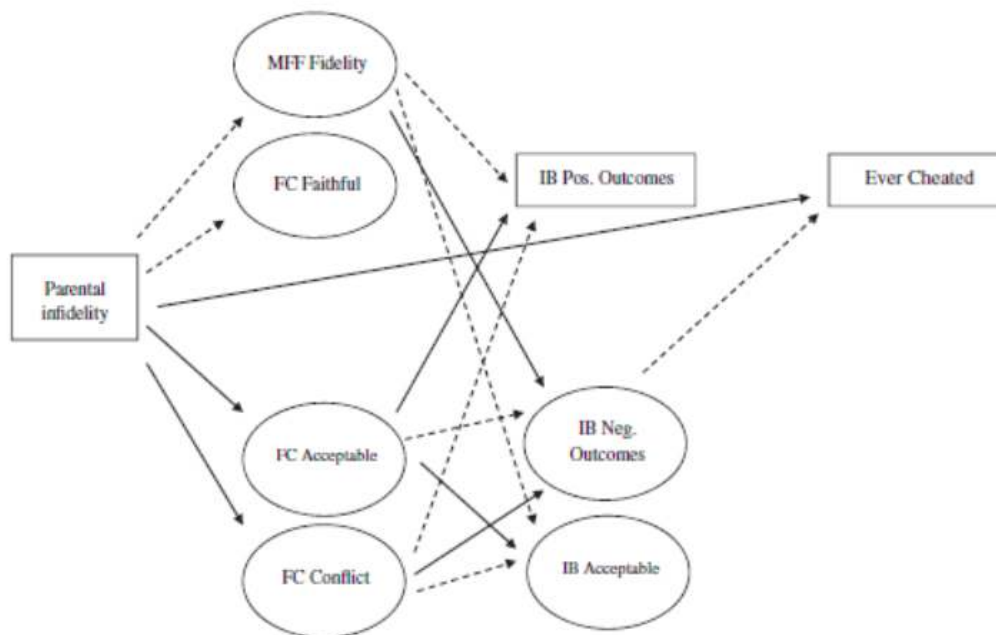


Figure 2. Structural equation model for all Study 3 participants.
Note. Only significant relationships ($p < .05$) shown. Solid line = positive relationship; dashed line = negative relationship. Age and gender are covariates.

Source: Weiser & Weigel, 2017

What is my point?

My point is that infidelity cannot be swept under the rug.

If your spouse has been unfaithful, it is necessary for your wayward spouse to get help and to understand that he/she has impacted his/her children.

I believe that wayward spouses should apologize to their children, take their children to therapy, and wayward spouses must take the initiative of recovering the marriage. Even if a wayward spouse doesn't believe their cheating is a big deal, they must realize it is hurting their children.

He/she needs to find the courage to do the right thing, to repair the marriage, and to show your children that adults can work through these things. If your wayward spouse does not lead the healing process and also

help the children recover, he/she is setting in motion intergenerational pain.

In a Psychology Today article called *My Partner's Parent's Cheated: Will My Partner Cheat on Me?* Brant Hilary Brenner MD, explores several studies that have measured the impact of infidelity on children:

“Infidelity is one of the greatest fears many of us have about intimate relationships, and it can be a traumatic experience characterized by betrayal and injury, or a relief allowing one to finally leave an unfulfilling relationship.

Nevertheless, infidelity is the most common reason for relationships to end, and may cause a great deal of pain and suffering for both the victims and the transgressors, as well as other parties (e.g., the person cheated with, children, and other stakeholders). Both predictive factors (including the finding that people who have cheated are more likely to do so) and protective factors are fairly well understood.

Study findings

1. The experience of parental infidelity will be positively associated with offspring infidelity behavior.
2. Parental infidelity will be associated with a greater likelihood of having received negative messages about fidelity and faithfulness, as well as positive messages about infidelity, from their family of origin.
3. Parental infidelity will be associated with more accepting infidelity beliefs.
4. Offspring who received more negative messages about fidelity and more positive messages about infidelity will report more accepting infidelity beliefs.
5. More accepting infidelity beliefs will be associated with a higher likelihood of offspring having engaged in infidelity.

Parental infidelity predicts infidelity among offspring in their adult relationships, supporting the general impression many people have observed. The odds of infidelity were 2.5 times higher in participants with parental infidelity. Even with that sub-group, the odds of infidelity are still low, with about 75 percent exposed not cheating.

Beliefs about infidelity, surprisingly, were not found to be related to unfaithful behavior. However, the actual messages people report hearing

growing up did have an impact, and correlated with a higher likelihood of infidelity. This is an interesting finding, because it points to a radical split between self-reported beliefs from behavior and communication in family of origin, and requires further investigation. It is not unusual for people to hold different beliefs than their behaviors would suggest — a common finding in social psychology.”

It is essential that your wayward spouse takes the lead in healing. Your wayward spouse must fully understand the harm he/she has caused you and the harm he/she has caused your children. Your wayward spouse must be courageous and lead your family’s healing process. If your spouse is not willing to do this, he/she is setting in motion trauma that will touch many generations. Your wayward spouse must face his/her infidelity head on and lead your family to healing.

PTSD As A Result of Infidelity

To keep the whole pain aspect in perspective, you need to realize that the reactions to infidelity can cause lingering trauma. Much like some veterans of war experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), so too can the victim of infidelity.

I have come across many readers of our blog who express the idea that they feel as if they are living with PTSD.

I can assure you that if you are experiencing symptoms of PTSD, you have probably developed PTSD.

There is a myth that PTSD is only a mental condition that affects war veterans and victims of natural disasters where a person loses everything in the blink of an eye.

But, if you think about it, when you have been betrayed by your spouse, the marriage and life you believed that you had was taken in the blink of an eye. Life will never be the same and this is a factual statement; not a feeling. It is a fact that your life and marriage will never be the same due to your spouse’s infidelity.

To complicate matters, you will experience triggers and these triggers will cause your body to experience the biological fight, flight, or freeze response.

It is imperative that your wayward spouse understands that when you experience a trigger, this will initiate a biological process in your body. Once this process is initiated in your body, there is no turning back. If your wayward spouse accuses you of being manipulative, your wayward spouse is manipulating you.

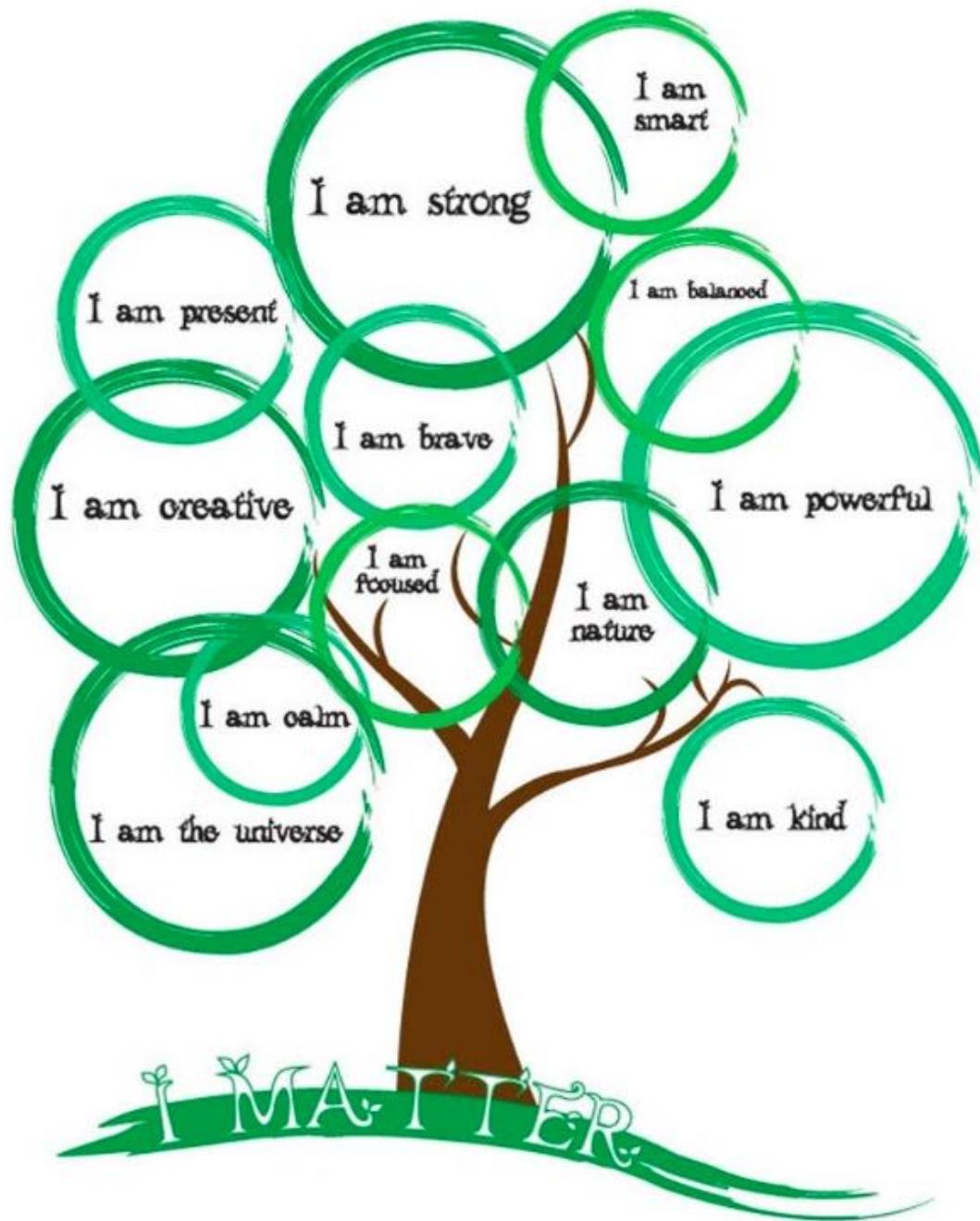
Here is a diagram that illustrates the biological component that occurs when trauma is triggered.

Action:

Our thoughts can affect our reality.

On the next page is a beautiful illustration that you – the betrayed spouse – can refer to when you are feeling triggered. This is a visual diagram of thoughts that you can use to help shut out any negative messages that play in your head. This illustration will not stop the biological process that occurs when you are triggered.

However, once the biological process has run its course, it is important to reset your brain and ground yourself in reality. This diagram helps you ground yourself and it brings you back to the present.



The Challenges You Will Face for a While

When your spouse cheats, your entire world changes. What you once knew to be life is no longer your life at all. You will question everything about your marriage and your past. This is normal and this questioning can go on for months, sometimes even years.

Your wayward spouse must honor your healing process. Your wayward spouse is not allowed to dictate when you can feel and when you must shut off your feelings (for their benefit).

Your wayward spouse must be aware of your triggers and attempt to be mindful of where they are so that he or she does not trigger you.

One of our readers, “Blindsided,” said this about triggers:

“Though today the affair is over, and has been for several months, the triggers on days with which I have a definitive memory are very difficult and strong.

Yesterday when I left work, I texted H to tell him I was headed to the restaurant to meet him for our Valentine’s dinner. He didn’t respond. As I was driving, my heart began to race as more time went by without a response. I started to imagine all kinds of things in my head.

After about 1/2 hour he called, said he was on his way, and seemed overly concerned with when I would arrive (I know now I was reading too much into that, but that is how the triggers work ...) In my heightened state, I decided that I would go to the bar where the two of them carried on most of their affair – surely, they were taking a stroll down memory lane on this romantic holiday!

Thankfully, his car was not there. I had created an entire scenario in my head. I have done that far too many times I wish it would stop.

He has given me no reason to believe that they have had any communication whatsoever in months ... yet I am still on high alert, I continue to “look” for trouble where it doesn’t exist. I hate my lack of trust.”

Unfortunately, this reader was still very early on in her recovery when she wrote her comment on triggers. I am aware of readers who still suffer triggers years later.

Even though I was betrayed several years ago and I did NOT reconcile with my betrayer, I still get triggered. I still live in the same geographical location where the betrayal took place and still know many people who knew us.

To complicate matters, he and I both worked in the field of software engineering at the time. When my ex was cheating on me, I was one of the rising stars in the industry. Perhaps this threatened him. He was stuck at a desk job while I was out on the team that invented and implemented 3G cellphone technology. I was not yet 30 years old and was working with teams of Ivy League engineers twice my age.

I often worked 12-14 hours a day in a windowless room to bring this proprietary technology to market quickly. This gave my ex a lot of time to find interests elsewhere, but it also provided an ego boost he sorely needed since I was the one being put on the projects most only dreamed of.

Still, I never rubbed this in his face, I never minimized his contributions to the world of software, and I always made sure he knew he was the man in the relationship. No matter how late I arrived home, I always had dinner.

I continue to suffer to this day because he and I still know hundreds of the same people. Because the other woman was so proud of her “take down” of me, all several hundred of those people got to hear – straight from her mouth – about how she took me down.

Even though she and I had never met, she took particular joy in destroying the lives of strangers whom she had never met, let alone strangers who did not know she even existed.

I believe that she qualifies as a malignant narcissist, per the DSM 5 criteria. I deal with frequent triggers because I either get an email

from someone we knew in common, drive past a place that was significant to us, or see that he has been snooping around on my LinkedIn profile.

Fortunately there are ways to deal with triggers.

One of the things I do is I write out my pain. It usually comes in the form of free-style poetry. This is one of my favorite poems that I wrote about betrayal.

The Nature of Pain for the Betrayed and Betrayer

By Sarah P.

When you are betrayed,

Pain breaks you.

Pain shakes you.

Then pain creates you.

If you let it.

Pain can make you soar,

Or, pain can bring you to the floor.

Which do you choose?

Pain is not the first,

And it will not be the last.

Do you drink the poison,

Or does the poison drink you?

Do you know the difference?

Some ask who to blame.

Some ask who to shame.

And do you know the essence, of pain?

Does pain even have a name?

Is pain named Jeff, or Harry, or Dan?

Or is pain called Susan, Cindy, or Nan?

*Do people use pain,
or does pain use people?*

Who is to blame in this romance of eternal pain?

*If you feel inclined to betray another,
What do you say if you have a chance—
With Dan, or Jeff, or Jerry?*

*What do you say if you dance—
With Maude, Midge, or Kari?*

*There is the moment,
And there is eternity.*

Which do you choose?

*There are consequences to your moves.
Consequences to what you choose.*

*There are consequences to what moves you.
and consequences to not moving at all.*

*There are consequences to who chooses you,
and if you choose them too.*

*Be careful when you want to find yourself.
You may find yourself in someone else.
You may find yourself in the worst pleasure,
Because that pleasure will become your worst nightmare.
Who gets the last laugh?*

*How will you face it?
How will you relate it?
What will become of your betrayal?*

*You learned long ago there is a higher road
That will lighten your load.*

*It's called redemption.
But, it always comes with a price,
And always with a sacrifice.*

*You will have to give up your selfish needs.
You will have to hear the cries as your betrayed spouse pleads.
When your spouse asks if it was true love,*

*Will you tell your betrayed you fit hand and glove?
Or, will you say it was not from above?*

*Will you be present to face the pain of reality?
The reality that you are not who you thought you were,
Or, will you have amnesia and say “it’s all such a blur.”*

*Can you look at yourself again, knowing that you laid waste to a
family?*

*If you have decency, you will feel the pain of those your harmed.
And you will accept such pain makes you feel anxious and alarmed.
You will understand it wasn’t worth it just to be charmed.
When you and your betrayed spouse metaphorically came unarmed.*

*There are no easy answers.
There are just eternal dancers.
Each who wear different masks.*

*All of us dance on the stage of life but for a bit.
And some stay loyal, while others remit.*

*And so pain is passed down through the generations.
None learning, certainly the most awful creations.*

*The world has fallen and the garden is no more.
Hopefully one day, enlightenment will come and settle the score.*

Do any of these images in the poem resonate with you?

Luckily, there are ways to deal with triggers. One of the most powerful ways is to bring yourself back to the present. Dr. Karen Finn has these recommendations:

- 1. Accept that triggers are normal.**

Until you’ve completely come to terms with your spouse’s betrayal, you’ll have flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and triggers. Everyone who discovers their mate has been unfaithful suffers through the same traumatic responses.

But just because triggers are normal, that doesn't mean they need to become your new norm.

You can cope with them, then control them, and finally, you can overcome them.

2. Choose your mindset.

Mindset is critical for surviving infidelity triggers.

When your spouse is unfaithful, there's a tremendous temptation to view yourself as a victim. And in a lot of ways you are a victim.

HOWEVER, the longer you see yourself this way, the harder it will be for you to overcome your triggers because you'll feel helpless.

The most powerful realization you can have right now is that you can control your mind and your thoughts.

And this realization allows you to know you are strong enough and capable enough to overcome your triggers.

3. Identify your triggers.

Unfortunately, this is one of those things that you can only do after the fact. So, you'll suffer through the trauma of the trigger before you can name it.

But once you can start naming your triggers, you've found the beginning of your trek to triumph over them.

4. Develop your plan.

Each time you discover one of your triggers, it's time to get strategic. Figure out how you can either prevent yourself from being in a similar situation in the future or how you will change your response to it the next time.

5. Ask for help.

Surviving infidelity triggers is difficult and everyone needs help with

at least one of the tips. So be brave and seek the assistance you need *and deserve*.

As you've already realized, these tips aren't something you do once and expect to have immediate victory over your infidelity triggers.

You'll need to revisit these tips often (maybe even multiple times a day). Eventually, you'll discover that you're consistently capable of surviving your infidelity triggers until you're completely healed from the betrayal."

Other people find specific grounding exercises helpful when dealing with triggers. Here is a common way to ground yourself during a stressful moment. Jordan Killebrew wrote the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method of grounding and many people have achieved success with it:

"There are 5 steps to take to help create progress towards finding symptom reduction and/or relief. Taking these 5 steps might not be overnight magic but can significantly help reduce symptoms of anxiety, trauma triggers, and other unwanted emotions or thoughts.

With any type of trigger, emotion, or thought that needs coping skills, it is important to always remember the breath! Like in yoga, slow, deep, long breathing can help maintain a sense of calm or help return to a calmer state. Start with deep breathing as the introduction to any coping skill. Breathe in for 5 seconds, hold the breath for 5 seconds, and breathe out for 5 seconds.

Continue this pattern until you find your thoughts slowing down or until necessary. I suggest at least 5 rounds of these sets but more is of course allowed and encouraged. After you are able to find your breath, go through the numbers in order to help ground yourself in present thinking through external factors:

5: *Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. Maybe it is a bird, maybe it is a pencil, maybe it is a spot on the ceiling, however big or small, state them.*

4: *Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you. Maybe this is your hair, hands, ground, grass, pillow, etc., whatever it may be, list out the 4 things you can feel.*

3: Acknowledge THREE things you hear. This needs to be external, do not focus on your thoughts; maybe you can hear a clock, a car, a dog bark, or maybe you hear your tummy rumbling, internal noises that make external sounds can count, what is audible in the moment is what you list.

2: Acknowledge TWO things you can smell: This one might be hard if you are not in a stimulating environment, if you cannot automatically sniff something out, walk nearby to find a scent. Maybe you walk to your bathroom to smell soap or outside to smell anything in nature, or it even could be as simple as leaning over and smelling a pillow on the couch, or a pencil. Whatever it may be, take in the smells around you.

1. Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like, gum, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch? Focus on your mouth as the last step and take in what you can taste.

These five steps are a way to ground yourself in the NOW! Take ‘you’ out of your head and help stop your flooded thoughts.

In Cognitive Behavioral Therapy it is believed that your thoughts are directly linked to how you feel and although we feel like we lose control of our thought processes, we have tools that can help us gain back a sense of control and lead to healthier thought patterns.

In moments of anxiety or triggered trauma it is important to stay present focused to help find symptom relief. Hopefully this coping technique can help you or someone you know stay present, stay grounded, and stay healthy.”

Make grounding your best friend during affair recovery.

Symptoms of PTSD

When your spouse has an affair, you have experienced the death of the relationship you once knew. This causes PTSD in many betrayed spouses.

I’ll bet previously you had thought only something akin to soldiers returning from a war could cause PTSD, right? Wrong!

Many people experience PTSD and have no idea that's what's going on – AND there's a pretty substantial chance this may be exactly what she's been going through.

Let's go over some of the other required criteria (somewhat paraphrased here) for a diagnosis of PTSD contained in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition Text Revision (DSM IV-TR).

See if this sounds all too familiar to you:

1. The trauma is persistently re-experienced in one or more of the following ways:

- Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions
- Emotionally and/or physically reacting more intensely than the situation calls for (as if the danger of an attacking tiger is still in the room, right in front of you)
- Making attempts to ignore or suppress the intrusive thoughts, impulses, or images by trying divert your attention with another thought or action
- Intense physical reaction to anything either internal or external that remind you of the traumatic event
- Intense emotional reaction to anything either internal or external that reminds you of the traumatic event

(Beginning to see a pattern here?)

2. Persistent avoidance of anything associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness subsequent to the trauma (as indicated by 3 or more of the following):

- Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
- Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others

- Restricted range of affect (i.e. unable to have loving feelings)
- Sense of a foreshortened future

3. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal subsequent to the trauma (as indicated by two or more of the following):

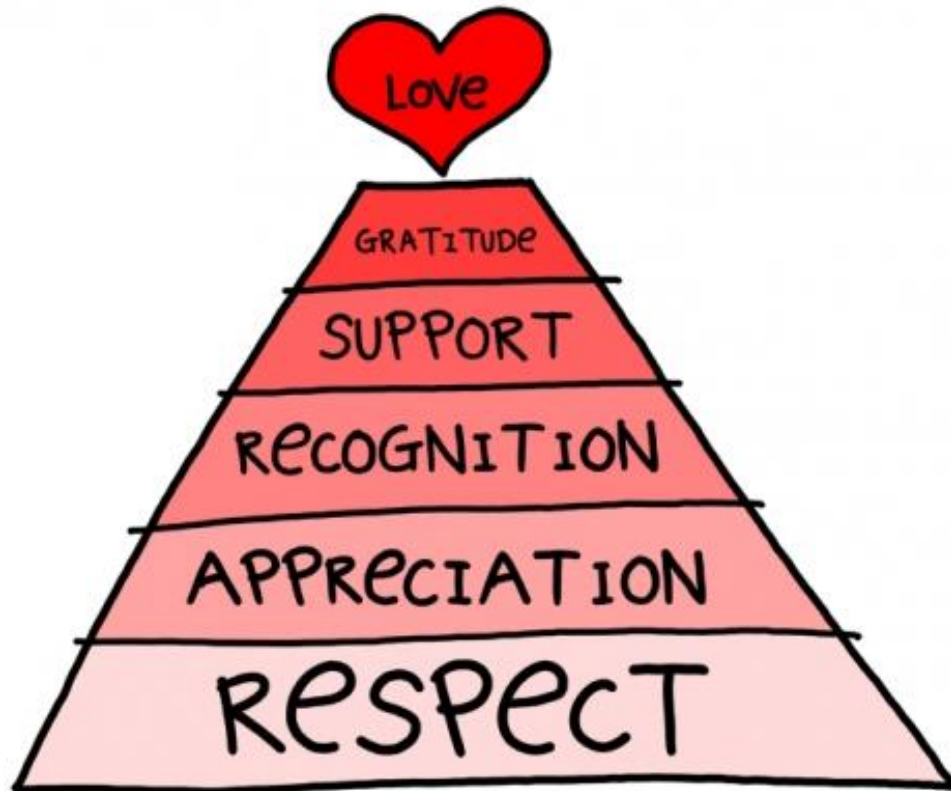
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response

In addition, there are a couple other requirements in the DSM IV-TR, such as a continued duration of over one month. Given most people seem to take an average of 2-4 years to heal from the betrayal of infidelity, I think it's safe to say this condition is fairly prevalent!

Action Steps:

- I recommend seeing an EMDR therapist in person since EMDR has been found to help treat PTSD.
- Don't feel guilty over developing PTSD.
- Don't listen to people who undermine your experience.

Educate Yourself About Affairs and Relationships



I venture to guess that your wayward spouse probably does not like to read relationship books.

Well, your spouse is in a different world now and it is important that both of you educate yourself on the dynamics of affairs (causes, effects, typical responses, prevention, etc.) and how to recover from them.

Also, both of you need to educate yourself on relationships in general, so as you move forward, you can improve upon your relationships - not only with your wife or husband but with your kids, friends, co-workers, etc.

The reason that a wayward spouse may not want to read a relationship book is because doing so brings up shame. There is a possibility your wayward spouse will come across ideas that have nothing to do with infidelity, yet these ideas will challenge the reality of your spouse.

Additionally, a wayward spouse may think that you are giving him/her a book to read because you are attempting to rub his/her nose in the affair. Or, he/she may think you are trying to control him/her.

So how do you get a reluctant spouse to read relationship books?

You need to explain that you are giving your spouse a relationship book because you genuinely want to work through your marriage. You also need to stress that you too will be reading the book so that you can literally *be on the same page*.

Also, a your wayward spouse does not need to sit down and spend hours reading the book in one sitting. If he/she reads several pages a night, that is progress. Allow your spouse to go at his/her own pace when reading these books.

But at the same time, please let your spouse know that you expect him/her to read a minimum number of pages per week. Then, let go of the reigns.

What book your spouse reads is up to him or her and what specific parts of the book that is read is also up to him/her. This will cause your spouse to feel as if he/she has some control over the situation and it will cause him/her to be more cooperative.

When an affair occurs and you catch your spouse, they are likely to feel as if *he/she is a bad little boy or girl* who just was caught with his/her hand in the cookie jar *that was NOT supposed to be touched*.

If your spouse is reluctant to read books and either reacts with anger or silence, please be as patient as possible. Starting a fight over him/her NOT reading a book will make things worse.

Here are some things you can say to a reluctant reader:

- Use humor and empathy: “I understand that you may not have the time or inclination to read these books and that is okay. Reading about this topic is not as fun as kicking back with a beer and watching the game. So, if you could start at your pace that would be wonderful.
- Be direct: “You might wish that I would let the past go and move on. In fact, I would love to do that very thing. But, to move forward, we need to have the same understanding. I am reading these books and I hope you can too so that we move forward as a team.”
- Ultimatum: “I have to be completely honest with you. Whatever lead you to have an affair is still there. The only way to get rid of that part of yourself is to read these books and to gain insight. I won’t sweep this event under the rug and pretend it did not exist. Ignoring your affair is NOT good for either of us and it is not good for our marriage. You can’t change the past, but we must create a new future together and we must do this. Otherwise, I will have to explore what measures I need to take to protect my own well-being.”

Sometimes we have to be hard-nosed to get something done. Your marriage is worth saving and sometimes you must take a hard-nosed approach for your spouse.

What is it about men?

In Doug’s book he chimed in about how difficult it can be to get a man to read a book. And Doug is a very enlightened man. In his book he offered perspective:

“I have no real statistics on this, but I’m betting that men aren’t exactly the primary market for relationship books. We just don’t read them. Well, at least not voluntarily.

Before my affair, I can honestly say that I never read a marriage book of any kind. The only thing remotely close was John Gray’s *“Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus.”* If my memory serves me right, I do believe that Linda “suggested” it to me about 15 or so years ago. Obviously, the information didn’t exactly stay fresh in the old brain.”

Don’t be surprised if your husband is reluctant to read books. This is completely normal and please do not take it personally. When Doug and

Linda went through this, Linda often had to read a book first and she would highlight pages.

Action Steps:

- Read and apply the information in this book together.
- Ask your spouse in non-threatening ways his/her thoughts on this book series.
- Be open to reading other books, articles and websites that are suggested as a couple. Better yet, go out and find some on your own.
- Ask your spouse if he/she learned anything that he/she would like to share because you are also learning new things.
- Reiterate that this is new territory for both of you and tell your spouse that you will use this life-altering event to become a better team.
- Start and continue a regular habit of reading at least one relationship book per month.
- Put into practice any applicable and/or beneficial strategies that you've learned in the process.

Your Spouse Must Figure Out Why He or She Had an Affair

True recovery cannot progress until the cheater shifts the focus to themselves - not in a selfish way - but in an introspective manner.

Obviously there have been some issues with a cheater's life that need to be addressed.

When Doug had an affair, the recovery process lasted about three years and it opened his eyes to his faults as a person. While it was painful, it was also the most enlightening experience of his life.

It's not easy to look at yourself and discover your own faults and character flaws. But at the same time, it's also a very powerful process that can help you become a better person in all areas of your life.

Your wayward spouse needs to conduct a thorough analysis of his past character, ingrained habits, flawed assumptions, blind-spots, and the specific behaviors that led up to the affair.

I like to say that infidelity is a journey of a thousand steps. At any point in time, someone who is headed toward infidelity can decide to stop and turn around.

An affair does NOT happen over night. In fact, behaviors that lead up to an affair can happen slowly. All it takes is the slightest loosening of boundaries.

But, the truth is, all affairs start with a simple conversation. If a cheater is going to a massage parlor, he has to have a conversation about what he wants from that experience.

But, most affairs actually occur between coworkers. The beginning of an affair could occur when a couple of coworkers discuss light topics such as movies.

Now, it takes two to tango and two people to consent to an affair. If one of the people in the conversation is against adultery and has strict boundaries, they can talk about light topics to a coworker for 20 years and never have an affair with that person. If someone has tight boundaries, they can even

say “no” to coworkers who ask to have a sexual relationship. If one person always says, “No,” there will be no affair.

But, those people who *do not* have strict boundaries often get into a situation where an affair starts with a simple “hello.”

So, all affairs begin with a simple conversation, but not all conversations turn into affairs.

Doug provided a great account of what led to his affair. He described it below:

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 stroke 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 my affair partner 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 the other woman, I truly came to believe that Linda did not 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 the other woman. 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.

The self-assessment that Doug wrote above contains very important information because Doug's feelings and thought processes tend to be universal to most men and women.

I have found that the patterns unfaithful people follow are universal and cross cultural, religious, educational, and socioeconomic boundaries. Even this book that you are reading now is preparing you on how to ask your spouse to help you heal, I believe in having the whole story.

Ensure that Your Spouse is to be Thoughtful and Reassuring

If you've been married for any length of time, you probably observed how spouses can take each other for granted. Spouses can get into a rut and treat each other less passionately.

While this happens to all couples, it is NOT what causes affairs.

One of the most powerful healing tools that the Gottman Institute uses for couples involves asking couples to remember *the good time together*. Through their research, they have found that if both partners in a couple positively reminisce about their early relationship together, the marriage has an excellent chance of surviving.

Even though the act of positive reminiscing seems so simple, the research has shown that it is a sign that a couple can repair their marriage after difficult times.

Ask your spouse to tell you what he/she remembers about you from the first date. Ask what his/her impressions were about you. Ask your spouse if he/she remembers what you wore on the first date. Ask your spouse if he/she remembers what you smelled like on the first date (if you wore perfume or cologne). Ask your spouse if he/she remembers where you went and how he/she felt about you.

Ask your spouse to tell you about the first time you two had an intimate relationship. Ask him/her what your body felt like. Ask him/her what your mouth tasted like and how your kisses felt. Ask your spouse how he/she felt when you made for the first time. Did he/she feel like the luckiest person on earth? Did he/she love the warmth of your skin against his or hers? Does your spouse remember the smell of your hair and the look on your face as he/she made love to you?

Ask your spouse if he/she can remember the first time he/she knew that he/she was in love with you and that you were not just a passing fling. What was your spouse doing the day he/she realized that you would be his forever partner?

What about your marriage proposal? Did your spouse have butterflies in his/her stomach?

Even though your spouse had an affair, he/she needs to tell you that he/she loves you. Even though it's hard to understand, it's a paradox that people who love their spouses can have affairs.

Affairs are NOT about the lack of love that a person has for their spouse. Even if your spouse went through a phase where he/she stupidly said, "I love you but I am not in love with you," he/she did not mean it. Your spouse said that as a way to assuage their guilt.

Your spouse needs to start doing acts of kindness for you. He/she needs to work on building a new and better marriage.

For example, Doug makes breakfast for Linda every day, turns on her car, and carries her briefcases out to her car each morning. Before she gets in her car, he tells her she looks beautiful and gives her a genuine hug.

Your spouse needs to do things that build bridges towards you. In the best case scenario, you will tell your spouse WHAT you need him or her to do to feel loved. You need to communicate to him or her what building a bridge looks like.

People are not mind readers; none of us are. So, it is very important that you state your needs and that your spouse meets them.

A couple of years ago, I took training from the Gottman Institute about how to recover from affairs.

When people have affairs, they are probably not going to be in tune to your needs. The Gottman's developed a formula for couples to work through infidelity.

The therapy the Gottman's have developed has three phases: Atonement, Attunement, and Attachment.

Atonement

This is the first step to repairing a post-infidelity relationship. Several things must happen during this phase:

- The wayward spouse must express sincere remorse.

- During this phase, the wayward spouse must answer the betrayed spouse's questions, no matter how uncomfortable.
- The wayward spouse must be honest in their answers and be transparent. They also must refuse to withhold information since this is a form of lying.
- Each partner must agree to and uphold the principle that there will be no more secrets and that promises will be kept. During this phase, secretive behaviors that allowed the affair to continue must be stopped. This may involve deleting secret email accounts and offering passwords to email and social media. The betrayed spouse must be able to continually validate and verify that there has been a change.

“The first step is to help couples have an atonement conversation about the affair. The betrayed partner may have a lot of questions that need to be answered. They need the whole, sordid story. The betrayer's task is to be open and honest, and answer the betrayed partner's questions in a truthful, forthright manner. It is very important the details of the affair not be glossed over or minimized, otherwise this fragile relationship will suffer another blow when more details surface at a later date. The betrayer also has the obligation to express remorse and take responsibility for what happened. Any attempts to blame the affair on the “problems in the relationship” will be heard as making excuses for their behavior, or even worse, heard as blaming their partner. That will certainly sabotage the conversation.” (1)

One important thing to note is that healing cannot occur unless a wayward spouse is completely transparent about everything, especially the affair. Withholding details about the affair ensures that the wayward spouse is not trustworthy. While there are still lies in the form of withholding, trust can never happen.

Another essential thing that must happen is for the wayward spouse to sever all relationships connected with the affair. If there were friends who enabled the adultery, ties with such friends need to be severed.

Attunement

In this context, the word attune is an acronym. It stands for:

Attend to partner's feelings

Turn towards partner's bids for connection

Tolerate partner's negative and positive feelings

Understand partner's point of view

Non-defensively listen

Empathize with partner's feelings

The second phase of affair recovery asks a lot from a wayward spouse, but rightly so. A wayward spouse must delve deep into his or her emotional wells and find empathy, attention, and tolerance within themselves. They also must practice the art of active listening and accept a partner's bids for connection.

“The second phase, attunement, is only possible when a couple moves ahead with forgiveness and is ready to rebuild their relationship without blaming the victim of infidelity. During this phase, the couple must make a commitment to learning how to handle conflict so that it doesn't overwhelm them. Further, a critical aspect of Phase 2 is that the former cheater must now decide to make their relationship a priority. As part of this new commitment to cherish each other, the couple goes public with the state of their relationship and alerts the people closest to them (such as children and in-laws) that they are recommitted and are working toward rebuilding trust. This helps establish this new relationship as “real” and garners support.” (2)

I also believe that if a wayward spouse trashed the betrayed spouse to family and friends, he or she must tell the truth to his or her friends. Even if the wayward spouse does not tell his or her friends about the affair, he/she needs to correct the things that he/she said to others about their betrayed spouse and let them know that his/her venting was not a reflection of reality. If your spouse did real damage, he or she must work on helping rebuild your reputation with family and within the community. *This process is not optional.*

Attachment

What is attachment? Attachment refers to our bond with others (or lack of bond) and how it affects us.

But, the Gottman's use this term contextually and it refers to the rebuilding of a couple's sexual relationship. However, there is more to it than just the act itself.

This phase is also about continually deepening trust, demonstrating constant investment in the rebuilding of the relationship, and recreating shared meaning.

I understand that post-affair sexuality is a contentious topic for many people and once again I am reporting the winning formula per the Gottman's research.

“Simply put, the final phase of this model is about being willing to reconnect with your partner by risking physical intimacy. If a couple is determined to stay together, the ability to attune must reach the bedroom as well. Dr. Gottman explains that, “Without the presence of sexual intimacy that is pleasurable to both, the relationship can't begin again.” Sexual intimacy is founded on emotional connection, which serves as a barrier against future distractions. The key to maintaining a pleasurable and meaningful sex life is intimate conversation.”(2)

But first, one of the most important things for a couple to do is to create a shared meaning in life. Creating shared meaning involves developing goals that both partners feel equally meaningful, such as raising successful children, paying off a house early, or perhaps having the funds to pay fully for a child's college education.

In the wake of an affair, the betrayed partner no longer knows what the wayward spouse does or does not value. Because of the affair, it becomes more than obvious to the betrayed spouse that the wayward spouse no longer valued monogamy or the other spouse's feelings. The foundation for their marriage was obliterated. Nothing can be assumed any longer. Couples need to write down the things that they value most post-affair and find areas of value that meet. The couple must rebuild shared meaning and their shared values all over again.

Another important element in this phase is the ability for the couple to create new rituals for connection. This can include anything from how you deal with family illness to what you do on Sunday mornings.

A couple must find new ways of doing things that are specific to their couplehood. For example, a good friend and her fiancé had developed a Sunday morning ritual specific to them. This ritual included coffee in the kitchen together while both of them prepared homemade blueberry scones. These scones were always eaten out on the covered deck so that they could snuggle in blankets and look at the garden while enjoying their favorite treat.

The next step in this phase is building rituals around how to reduce stress in conversations. For example, a couple could decide to have a stress-reducing conversation each night after dinner. During these conversations each partner takes on the role of listener and speaker and they take turns. The first part of the conversation has to do with positive topics or showing gratitude for something in life. The last part of the conversation will contain more stressful topics and partners will learn how to work through these topics productively.

This is not a time to talk about the affair or about family. These conversations should be about external stressors such as work stressors where partners can lend support to each other. This is not a time to air grievances to a partner, to discuss triggers, or to discuss family matters. The goal of these conversations is to create a united front so that it is no longer “me against the world” but instead “we against the world together.” Even if you do not agree with your partner, it is essential to be an ally.

The next step is to create intimate trust and to rebuild sexuality. During this stage, most betrayed partners will experience triggers. It is up to the wayward spouse to soothe the betrayed spouse when triggers emerge.

For example, if a betrayed partner starts withdrawing when the clothes come off, the wayward partner would do well to reiterate the betrayed partner’s beauty and sexual attractiveness while sincerely reassuring the betrayed partner that the other person is long gone.

A wayward partner cannot force a betrayed partner to move quickly or too soon if the betrayed partner is not ready. The wayward partner must be understanding and patient since the wayward partner caused the injury.

Another step is to set up “a high cost for subsequent betrayals.” This could include drawing up a post-nuptial agreement where the betrayed spouse will be entitled to the lion’s share of the assets if the wayward spouse slips.

This is not a punishment; it is a warning and one the betrayed spouse will follow through on should there be another transgression. The wayward spouse can never feel so safe that he or she could slip up again. This also causes the wayward spouse to commit 100% to recovery.

The final goal is to create a “sacred one-hour state of the union meeting.” During this meeting, each partner will talk about what has gone right during the week. Next, each partner will compliment the other partner’s strengths and show appreciation. Then, each partner will discuss any regrettable incidents that occurred during the week and process it. Finally, each partner will ask the other what he or she can do better in order to make the other partner loved.

The Gottman’s have provided an excellent roadmap for how to bring you and your spouse closer together.

One of our betrayed reader’s, “Hopeful,” said this about the Gottman material and her marriage.

“Atonement was totally botched by my husband. And I am struggling with that now. But, it seems to be another one of those things in the past I cannot control. I feel exactly as this says the initial betrayals were bad enough but then not being totally honest I would say caused greater trauma than the initial injury. My husband has agreed and acknowledged he did not handle this well at all but I am left with one more thing that was out of my control. So I either hold on to it or just move on. I feel like this is a big stumbling block for me.

As far as Attunement goes my husband gets an A+ in this. He is a master at this. I wonder if he has read this list. I mean he fulfills all of those and has from an early time. Probably the hardest one was not being defensive. He has that down well now.

And Attachment we have parts of this down perfectly and other not so good. I honestly thing what has kept us together and moving forward is we have such similar life goals and desires. Even at his worst we had so many common goals. Neither of us have strayed from that. The rest is all a mixed bag and changes. I am honestly tired and sometimes I just do not feel like we have energy to have all of these conversations much less time. It is harder in the summer with the kids around more. To me this phase seems the most overwhelming. There are so many components to it.”

Action Steps:

- Talk about the things that made you fall in love
- Think about what you have in common with each other and what you like to do as a couple.
- Talk about new adventures that you two would like to do together.
- Schedule date nights.
- Think of things – simple things – that you need from your spouse on a daily basis.
- Talk about future plans for your home, retirement, travel, holidays, etc.

Defensiveness

Every couple will deal with periods of defensiveness. You have a right to be defensive because you were betrayed.

But there will be times when your spouse is defensive. It is actually not his or her place to be defensive, but he or she will be defensive anyway.

You will probably be left fuming.

But, let's understand defensiveness.

Defensiveness is often a knee-jerk reaction that shields a cheater from guilt and self-doubt. This behavior also takes the spotlight off of their bad behavior and puts the focus back on you.

How do you cope with your wayward spouse's defensiveness?

Avoid using “blame” language. Don't use phrases like “always” and “never.” Instead, state your factual feelings and observations from your point of view.

Attempt to use positivity. If your wayward spouse is getting defensive, you can say things like, “We are having this conversation because I love you so much. Because I care for you, I want to work on our marriage, even if these conversations can feel difficult.” Tell your wayward spouse that you appreciate that he/she is listening to you and acknowledge it is hard for him or her. By doing this, you are being the bigger person and modeling good communication skills.

Allow Yourself to be Vulnerable. Say things like: “When I think of the affair, I feel like my whole world is falling apart around me. All I want is your love. I am terrified to lose it.”

Focus on your perspective without blame. Tell your spouse that the affair makes you feel lost and frightened. Tell him or her that you know their intention was not to make you feel lost and frightening, but it is how you feel. Ask for comfort, such as a hug.

Maintain Balance During Arguments. This isn't easy to do when your spouse isn't listening to you, or if your spouse is listing all your faults to assuage their guilt. Do NOT REACT. Slow down, take several deep breaths, and ask for a 15-minute time out in separate rooms.

Even though your spouse's affair is not your fault, it's a good idea to model the behavior you would like to see in him or her.

Remember the Grass is not Greener

One of the things that makes me angry about affairs is that there is no level playing field. The affair partner will have done everything she/her could to cause your spouse to think they were the perfect man or woman.

Many affair partners figure out what a man or woman believes the perfect partner is and then they attempt to mold themselves into this person as a way to draw them into an affair. If she/he succeeds in drawing them in, he or she is dating an illusion.

Your spouse will go through a period of time where he or she believes the affair was real. But, the affair was no more real than the House of Mirrors at a carnival. Everything was distorted and it did not reflect real life.

It is very uncommon for affair partners to marry. But, if they do, these marriages are tremendous FAILURES.

The fact is, the grass is greener where you water it.

Your spouse must start watering the grass in his or her own yard and garden. Love will soon bloom there.

I have noticed that many betrayed spouses feel the other person was better than them. But, M. Gary Neumann did a study on this and his findings were surprising.

Here is an excerpt from a Newsweek interview about infidelity and M. Gary Neumann's findings. He said:

“I think most people ascribe to the theory that men cheat for sex. Women are being told that unless they are unbelievably sexy and have a Ph.D. in prostitution education then the husband is going to cheat. But when the results came in [from my study] only 8 percent of cheaters said that sexual dissatisfaction was a primary contributor [in cheating] and only 12 percent said the mistress was better looking or in better shape than their wives. It really started to show a completely different pattern than what most expect. In fact, the majority—48 percent—said that the cheating was about an emotional disconnection.

The No. 1 reason for cheating was feeling underappreciated. What I found is that men are far more insecure than they let on, and they do want to please their wives and feel valued. They like to win and as long as they are winning with their wife then they stay in the game. It is feeling underappreciated and like they can't win—and maybe they do things that make it hard for her to appreciate him—that usually leads them into dangerous waters. Appreciation is what they first and foremost get from the mistress.”

If you have read my material for any amount of time you will know that my mantra is: cheating is a choice. Still, I believe that what M. Gary Neumann found out about affairs is worthwhile to know. It provides us with a different perspective. Most importantly, it shows a person that the affair partners are almost NEVER better than a husband or wife.

Active Listening

Effective listening requires an understanding that it is not just the speaker's responsibility to make sure he/she is understood. The listener has a major role to play in hearing the complete message.

Both you and your spouse will have to hone your listening skills since affair recovery is also about good communication.

The following ideas offered by Herbert G. Lingren from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will assist you in understanding the real message.

Stop talking! You cannot listen when you are talking. You will only be thinking about what you are going to say next instead of paying attention to what the other person is trying to say. Consciously focus your attention on the speaker.

Put the speaker at ease: Relax, smile, look at the speaker and help that person feel free to talk. Look and act interested. Remove distractions: turn off the TV; close the door; stop what you are doing, and pay attention.

Pay attention - to the nonverbal language of physical gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture. An authority on nonverbal language says that 55 percent of the message meaning is nonverbal, 38 percent is indicated by tone of voice, and only 7 percent is conveyed by the words used in a spoken message. Few people know how to listen to the eyes; what a tapping foot means; a furrowed brow; clenched fist; the biting of nails. These often reveal the key feelings behind the words.

Listen for what is not said. Ask questions to clarify the meaning of words and the feelings involved, or ask the speaker to enlarge on the statement. People often find it difficult to speak up about matters or experiences that are very important or highly emotional for them. Listen for how the speaker presents the message. What people hesitate to say is often the most critical point.

Know exactly what the other person is saying. Reflect back what the other person has said in a "shared meaning" experience so you completely understand the meaning and content of the message before you reply to it. A good listener does not assume they understand the other person. You, as

the listener, should not express your views until you have summarized the speaker's message to her satisfaction.

Be aware of "tune out" words. These are words which appear in the media that strike an emotional chord in the listener and interferes with attentive listening (e.g. abortion, nuclear war, communism, homosexuality). Avoid arguing mentally. Listen to understand, not to oppose. (This is a tough one since words like affair, infidelity, cheat, etc. may be "tune out" words.)

Concentrate on "hidden" emotional meanings. What are the real feelings behind the words? What is the tone of voice saying? What does the emphasis on certain words mean? Notice how the meaning of the following question is changed when you change the emphasis from one word to the next.

What do you want?
What **do** you want?
What do **you** want?
What do you **want**?

Be patient. Don't interrupt the speaker. This is disrespectful and suggests you want to talk instead of listen. Allow plenty of time for the speaker to convey ideas and meaning. Be courteous and give the speaker adequate time to present the full message.

Hold your temper! Try to keep your own emotions from interfering with your listening efficiency. When emotions are high, there is a tendency to tune out the speaker, become defensive, or want to give advice. You don't have to agree to be a good listener. Don't argue! Even if you win, you lose.

Empathize with the speaker. Try to "walk in the other's moccasins" so you can feel what that person is feeling and understand the point of view the speaker is trying to convey.

True attentive and reflective listening offers the opportunity for others to share their feelings with you. Listening and leveling has a chance of healing hurts and building bridges in a relationship. When someone listens to you and you feel understood, you are much more likely to trust the other person, thus opening the gate for more intimate communication.

Do Not Accept the Blame for Your Spouse's Affair

Cheaters justify their actions. They rewrite the history of your marriage due to the affair fog.

Regardless the justification, there was no excuse for the affair.

Cheating is a choice.

People who are prone to codependent thinking will fall into the trap of taking the blame for their spouse's affair.

Where does codependence start?

This article in Psychology Today explains it well (from a codependent woman's standpoint):

“The Codependent Woman Was the Parentified Child. The parentified child was expected to take care of and fulfill the emotional needs of one or both parents (*emotional parentification*) and/or actually take care of the physical needs that includes housework, babysitting siblings, and the management of her parent's affairs (*instrumental parentification*). The effects and consequences of parentification on a child emotionally run deep.

As the codependent woman, she tends to underestimate her intellect, talent and abilities, overestimate the intellect and self-worth of other people, nurture and take responsibility for the growth and welfare of friends and family (at her physical and emotional expense), and struggle with feelings of depression, anxiety, shame and guilt resulting from a suppression of needs. She has to get ill to let others take care of her and her physical illnesses often result from too much physical tension around bottled-up needs.

The *emotionally healthiest of parentified children* spend much of their adult lives building their identities and a secure home base with little to no help from other people (Parentification of Children).

On the surface, you would never know that they harbor dependency needs. In fact, they often take care of everyone around them, as a psychological way to meet their needs. Becoming the confidante of people gives them a way to subconsciously experience need, and it also reinforces their persona of self-sufficiency and independence. Although they have not regressed into destructive dependencies on people, food, alcohol or drugs (as many codependent women do), they are still replaying dysfunctional roles of their childhood. It is no surprise that they attract narcissistic and borderline friends and lovers whose needs and desires often eclipse their own.”

You may not have been a caretaker during childhood. Caretaking is not the only cause of codependence. But, if you see yourself as the one who must caretake and the one who must subvert her/his needs to others, don't fall into the trap.

No matter what your spouse says, resist the urge to take any ownership of his/her affair. Your spouse made the choice; he or she fixes it.

Your Spouse Must Live Life as an Open Book

The rules have changed and life now must be an open book. Trust cannot be rebuilt *until there is transparency*.

Author David Murrow says that in most social circles, males seem to talk about exactly 4 things: sports, weather, politics, and hobbies. Men can also talk about their families, but only certain topics are permitted: how busy everyone is, their children's sports activities, and how well everything is going.

Murrow also suggests that the reason that most men do not tell their wives how they really feel is because if they did, their wives would punish or reject them for it. *Some men falsely believe that if they tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, their wives can become very upset.*

Doug had the pleasure of speaking to many men through his mentoring program and some of these men actually had decided early on in their marriages to open up and speak the absolute truth to their wives.

The result was that their wives *allegedly* over-reacted and at the very least were uncomfortable. Many women allegedly freaked out, withdrew, cried, threw tantrums – you name it. But as you and I know, there are two sides to every story.

Doug recounted to me that the men with whom Doug spoke learned early on that their wives did not want to hear the truth. These men falsely believed that the key to marital bliss was to carefully manage what they did and did not say to their wives.

I believe that when men manage what they say and do, this causes more suspicion in wives. It also lays the groundwork for a man to carry on a double life.

In Doug's companion book he said that "Women who are guilty of this need to realize that they have trained their husbands to conceal the truth from them. These men feel as though they are taking a huge risk in being honest with their wives since their reward for doing so tends to be unpleasant. Its no wonder these guys don't tell their wives the truth."

I believe that the men that Doug mentored sincerely caused Doug to believe this is true. But, because Doug was working with male, wayward spouses, I believe that we can take what these men say with a grain of salt. Also, Doug was hearing only one side of the story.

However, there is a difference between taking what wayward spouses say with a grain of salt and taking what Doug says with a grain of salt. Doug is an expert and a very talented marriage coach. Doug's observations are correct about women who over-react to the truth. No woman should overreact to the truth – PRIOR to infidelity - because it will cause a man to retreat within himself. This the more about the nature of men and how men are, rather than the fault of women.

Doug made an excellent point in his companion book: “I know women who can't tell their husbands the truth because they're afraid of them becoming angry or violent. Women suffer just as much, that is for sure.”

Indeed, women do suffer just as much as men and sometimes more. There are many emotionally abusive men out there who are unaware that their behavior even qualifies as emotional abuse.

Unfortunately, there is no manual for how to have a happy marriage. Almost every couple ends up bringing into their marriage the behavioral patterns that were modeled to them within their own families of origin.

Another concept that plays strongly into how a couple behaves has to do with the attachment patterns developed in childhood. There are several different types of attachment patterns. Unless someone is a psychologist, they may not of heard of this concept. If they have heard of it, it may not cross their mind that they and their spouse have different attachment patterns.

Here is a short summary of attachment patterns from an author, Dr. Marni Feuerman, who writes for the Gottman Institute in Seattle:

“Our view of our self and others is molded by how well these caregivers were available and responsive to meet our physical and emotional needs. In our adult relationships, our attachment system is triggered by our romantic partners.

The attachment alarm

How are we triggered? Think about the availability of your primary caregiver.

- Were they neglectful, always there for you, or inconsistent?
- Who did you go to when you had a problem?
- Was there someone there you could really count on?

You can start to identify your own attachment style by getting to know the four patterns of attachment in adults and learning how they commonly affect couples in their relating.

According to attachment theory, you have a secure attachment style if a caregiver was responsive and available to you as a child, making you feel safe and secure. Creating a secure attachment is important for dating to create a healthy relationship. In a secure relationship your partner is there for you and has your back. If you are an insecure style (and you choose someone with an insecure style), you will continually be triggered and never feel safe or secure in your relationship.

If your caregiver was unresponsive, you form an insecure attachment pattern. An insecure attachment style manifests in three main ways.

Anxious Attachment: Develops when a caregiver has been inconsistent in their responsiveness and availability, confusing the child about what to expect. As an adult, this person acts clingy at times and finds it difficult to trust their partner.

Avoidant Attachment: Develops when a caregiver is neglectful. These are the children that play by themselves and develop the belief that no one is there to meet their needs. As adults, they typically label themselves as very independent.

Disorganized Attachment: Develops from abuse, trauma, or chaos in the home. A child learns to fear the caregiver and has no real “secure base.”

All of these styles influence the way you behave in your romantic relationships and how you find a romantic partner.

So, this begs the question, can one change their attachment style to a more secure way of relating?

Changing your attachment style

The answer is yes, but it takes hard work. Often therapy can be incredibly helpful. Being aware of your attachment style and the choices you are making in a partner is crucial. A quality therapist will guide your development of the awareness necessary to discern whether you are reacting to past wounds.

We tend to recreate unhealthy relationship patterns from our childhood in our adulthood. As much as people may dislike it, the familiarity is comforting. You may even confuse the feelings of relationship chemistry with what is the familiarity of your early life experience.” (2017)

Trust and being in tune to the needs of our spouse are the foundation of a secure and healthy relationship. In many cases, people marry what they know. I cannot stress the harm that comes when someone mistakes chemistry with simply feeling comfortable with a familiar relationship dynamic.

There are many people who feel irresistibly drawn to “bad boys” and “bad girls” and they report they cannot feel attracted to a “nice guy” or a “nice girl.” This often signals that this person comes from a troubled home and needs help. Everyone knows that marrying the “bad guy” or the “bad girl” does not work out in the end.

When a couple has different attachment styles, this can set them up for friction in their marriage. When friction develops and neither partner knows how to deal with friction effectively, the groundwork can be laid for a future affair.

While affairs are always a choice, someone who already feels broken and who has very few coping mechanisms will choose an affair rather than doing the hard work of marriage recovery.

We know what a disaster such a choice made, or you would not be reading this book.

Once an affair occurs, a marriage must be rebuilt from ground up.

There is no returning to the marriage that you had before; you must construct a new marriage.

Your wayward spouse must take the lead by becoming transparent. Your wayward spouse must be transparent in his or her behavior, but he/she also needs to be transparent in their thoughts. He or she must share their thoughts and they must tell the truth.

Even if your spouse was not a communicator, he or she must share his/her deepest feelings with you. Your spouse must be emotionally vulnerable when he/she is with you. Your spouse must admit his/her faults. Your spouse must admit his/her flawed thinking patterns.

It is not appropriate for your spouse to keep you guessing. You need to know where he/she is, who he/she is with, what he/she is doing, and how he/she feels about you. Your spouse must “over communicate” for a while. He or she must realize that you are NOT a mind-reader.

Because of this, he/she has to tell you that sometimes he/she hates himself/herself for having an affair. Your spouse needs to tell you often that he/she loves you. Your spouse needs to tell you that you are handsome or beautiful. If he/she does not do these things, explain to him or her that you need these things both to repair your marriage but also for you to feel secure again.

After all, it was your spouse who chose to rip the rug out from under you. You were the one who metaphorically went flying in the air and fell to the ground due to his or her choices.

Finding a way to rebuild trust with your spouse is also important, especially if you feel like he or she is shutting you out. For example, if your spouse needs time alone in his office, he needs to tell you he needs time alone to cool off. Ask him if he is rejecting you or if he needs time to think. If he says he needs time to think, I would highly recommend that his alone time be paired with an action that builds trust. If your husband needs time alone in his home office or the den, *he needs to put his cell phone and computer away during these times*. Then, you can be assured that he is not tempted to contact the other person.

Your spouse also must be honest with you about feelings that cause him or her to experience shame. Create an atmosphere where he/she can express vulnerability. Let him or her know that if he/she feels shame, to resist covering it with anger. Covering shame with anger is a terrible strategy and your spouse needs to understand that this will drive a bigger wedge.

Stopping Disconnected Cycles

Not all news is bleak. There are ways to stop these cycles of disconnection. In an article on Psych Central by Margarita Tartakovsky she mentioned the following strategies:

“How do you stop such cycles from spinning? Exiting from the cycles usually requires some vulnerability on the part of both partners.” The ultimate goal is to empathize with your partner.

If your husband reacts defensively to your concerns, consider his feelings: “Do you feel disrespected by what I said?”

Your husband might ask for more information about why you are scared. It might seem like an obvious concept, but for either of you putting yourself in your partner’s shoes is key to breaking the disconnection.

At the very least, couples need to become in tune with their own vulnerable emotions such as sadness and fear and learn to articulate those feelings to their partners.

A good way to avoid playing the blame game is to use a communication tip from the book *Nonviolent Communication*, by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. That is, make your statements about yourself and do not mention “what the other person did to you.” For example, “I feel [emotion], because I [something about you].” It’s similar with “I” statements, which are often misinterpreted. The “I feel” in an “I” statement needs to be followed by an emotion, not a thought, he said. And again, “it’s best to keep the rest of the statement as much [about] yourself as possible.” (2018)

I have one caveat here. Sometimes you, the betrayed spouse, will have to be the one with the cool head. In my opinion, that is not exactly fair since you are the injured party.

But, since you are level-headed enough NOT to have an affair, there may come times when you have to be the level-headed person, regardless of fairness.

Generally, people who have affairs have poor boundaries, poor coping mechanisms, or they simply may be people who do not live beyond the present moment.

People who live in the present and cannot imagine how actions in the now affect the future. If this is the case, they cannot extrapolate into the future the harm that their actions have while in the moment. This is not an excuse; it is an undesirable character trait.

When Ned Flanders Has an Affair

Paradoxically, some of the best communicators and people who know themselves also have affairs, so people who have affairs come in all types. It might sting even more if you are married to the proverbial nice guy or gal who spends weekends volunteering and who would be the last person on earth to have an affair.

Most people in the world have seen at least one episode of the Simpson's and will be familiar with the character called Ned Flanders who says things like "Okeley Dokely" and who is a better Christian than the Church Pastor is.

Still, even men and women who are the proverbial nice people of the world have affairs.

I have spoken to people whose wives and husbands taught Sunday School, worked with impoverished children, and tirelessly work for the good of society. In general, these are the men and women others least expect to have an affair.

Some have asked if men and women like this were merely wolves in sheep's clothing who had fooled everyone for years. Typically, a wolf in sheep's clothing is a sociopath and sociopaths generally do what they want without concern for others.

I have noticed something about good people who have affairs and I have branded it as the “*altruistic paradox*.” You see, people who spend a good part of their lives dedicated to helping others are quite often good people who want to use their lives to make a positive difference in the world.

These folks would be able to do hundreds of volunteer jobs (if they had the time) and be outstanding citizens. These people generally are outstanding citizens.

However, there is one thing that all of the community volunteer work does NOT ask of these people: *to be faithful to their spouses*.

It's easy to spend thousands of hours on volunteer projects throughout one's life and it is even possible to have the highest level of integrity while working on volunteer projects.

But, people are not married to their volunteer projects. If they volunteer for something it is likely because they enjoy volunteering for that activity. It makes them feel good and they can also know that they are being good citizens. Others around them will perceive them as good citizens.

But, what happens when a good citizen meets another good citizen on a volunteer project and lust sparks between them?

They meet the altruistic paradox: here you have two nice people, doing nice things for others, in their spare time, and without getting paid. These people are generally considered to be altruists.

And altruists are saints, right?

WRONG.

An altruist can fight unselfishly for a cause that they feel passionate about and they can often be perceived as the community members with the most integrity.

Some altruists have integrity and others do not.

But, here is some news that is more shocking. In 2014, several studies found a direct correlation between narcissism and volunteerism. From research gate:

“Two studies investigated the extent to which narcissism was associated with volunteer motivation. Study 1 investigated a sample of United Way volunteers and Study 2 examined a sample of college student volunteers. As hypothesized, results found that narcissists tend to volunteer for self-interest rather than for humanitarian values. Results remained significant even while controlling for self-esteem (Studies 1 and 2) and empathic concern (Study 2). Discussion involves the current climate for volunteerism, which includes mandated volunteering as part of high school graduation and other requirements.”

Are all volunteers narcissists?

No.

Some of us volunteer due to deep-seated humanitarian values and we cannot look away from the suffering of our fellow human beings. Where we feel suffering, we feel a sense of duty to be a solution.

But, in many cases, the person who spends much of their time volunteering could be a narcissist in disguise who is acting in self-interest.

Note: Affairs also partially occur due to self-interest.

Some assume that the so-called “nice guys and gals” of the world do not have affairs. But, this is a logical fallacy. The things that we evaluate in order to measure a person’s affability are the very things that could predict narcissism. Where there is narcissism, there is only self-interest. Where there is self-interest, there is fertile ground for an affair.

If you are one of the men or women who is married to the “nice guy or gal” cheater, I hope this section explains “the why” of your spouse’s cheating more thoroughly.

Action Steps:

- Don't assume that there is a type of person or marriage that is safe from infidelity.
- Have your spouse think about how you can be transparent in his or her daily actions.
- Ask for access to all accounts, computers, emails, texts, etc.
- Ask your spouse to contact you frequently throughout the day
- Tell your spouse concrete ways he or she can ease your fears.
- Tell your spouse what experiences serve as triggers to you and ask him or her to consider these triggering events.
- Ask your spouse if there have been instances – prior to the affair - in your marriage when he or she feels he or she was ‘punished’ by revealing feelings.
- Discuss these instances and see if your spouse can locate the root cause of these feelings. For example, some people have very overbearing mothers. Sometimes these women are outwardly aggressive and sometimes they are passive aggressive. Your spouse may subconsciously connect your feedback with that of his or her mother. It is wrong to project that onto you and it needs to be brought to light.
- Keep a journal of your feelings.
- Join a support group. Sometimes it’s easier to share with strangers than with loved ones, especially if the strangers are also going through what you are.
- Talk with a counselor or spiritual advisor.
- Express your feelings with art, poetry or music.
- Tell your spouse concrete ways he or she can continue to gain your trust. If your spouse wants you to trust him or her without earning your trust, remind him or her that he or she must become a trustworthy person in order for you to trust him/her.

Your Spouse Must Not be Angry



Anger that is present in a wayward spouse is often based on cognitive distortions. The chart above illustrates what general cognitive distortions look like.

Anger is a secondary emotion, usually based on shame or blame, and when a wayward spouse is angry, he or she is often stuck in irrational thinking patterns.

During the affair fog, most wayward spouses will go through a phase of devaluing you. They will project faults onto you that are not there. This is a type of irrational thinking. This will lead to a cognitive distortion such as your wayward spouse believing you have caused the affair.

When your spouse has woken up from the affair fog, he or she may be very angry. He or she may be angry at you and think you have caused this anger. But, you are NOT the cause of this anger; his or her thoughts have caused this anger.

Quite often, your spouse will use anger to cover up a primary emotion, such as fear or shame.

You will probably be taken off guard when your spouse lashes out at you in anger, *especially when he or she has no right to be angry.*

In these moments, you cannot forget that your spouse is using anger as an unhealthy coping tool to prevent him or her from feeling stupid or ashamed.

Even the most laid back men can be caught off-guard when their anger is discovered. In Doug's companion book, he said this about himself:

“I'm not usually an angry person. In fact, I've always been known for being pretty laid back. However, I have never been as angry as I was at times right after my affair was discovered. I would get extremely angry due to Linda's incessant questioning – primarily asking the same questions over and over. She would also make accusations or have suspicions that were not always accurate and her insistence on bringing those up repeatedly were another source of my anger.

In a lot of cases, people use anger as a mechanism to stonewall or gaslight their spouse so they'll just drop whatever the subject is they're talking about. That may work for the cheater temporarily, but eventually it's going to backfire. Progress will halt and the hurt spouse is going to be stuck.

In our case, my anger would cause Linda to shut down (which is what I wanted). She would withdraw and stop the questioning but would then bottle her emotions and resentment inside, only to be released sometime at a later date – typically with much more volatility and emotion. I'm sure you can see how that was a recipe for failure. Something had to give.

Our simple solution came to us thanks to a conversation that Linda and I had where we discussed the reasons why I got angry and what the affects were for her. I thought about things and determined that for example, I would get defensive and angry when she would question me in an accusatory manner – especially if it was about something where her perception wasn't accurate.

Linda, in turn told me that my anger would cause her to shut down and that even though it would seem as if she were accusing me, she was just venting and that all she wanted me to do was listen, understand her feelings, let her know it's okay and comfort her.

So now if I start getting frustrated or angry when we have a conversation about something (affair related or otherwise), I simply take some deep breaths and calm myself down. I pause and think about what it is I'm saying and how I'm reacting. I remind myself about where she is coming from and what she is really trying to accomplish. I don't throw stuff (never really did); don't raise my voice; don't stomp around. I think about why she's saying the things she's saying.

I'll be honest and tell you that it does take some work, especially I would imagine, if you normally have a volatile temper. It is also something that was more of an issue for us in the early stages of our recovery while our emotions were at their peak.

It's also important to remember the difference in communication styles between women and men that we discussed earlier. Remember as well that this isn't a competition.

Also, be aware that there is an association between anger and trust. If you are trying to rebuild trust in your marriage and you are regularly displaying anger, you are breaking down that trust.

There were times when I would tell Linda: “You shouldn’t feel that way.” But if she is telling me, “I feel afraid,” or “I feel unloved,” that is something that she is truly feeling. It’s not my place to judge if she should feel that way or not. She’s just expressing her feelings to me.

It can be very difficult for a hurt spouse to build up the nerve to actually approach us about the affair – especially if anger is involved. Perhaps that is not the case with your wife, but it was with Linda.

She told me once that sometimes it would take her a week to work up the courage to bring up an affair related issue or tell me how she felt. If I would respond to her with anger, it would just shut her down.

The trust that I was trying so hard to rebuild by being transparent and doing small acts of kindness, etc. wound up getting flushed down the toilet. The love bank I had worked hard to build up would get depleted as a result of my anger. Anger did nothing but stall Linda’s healing and prolong the recovery process.

There are many books and courses that have been created to help people manage their anger. Certainly, a comprehensive tutorial on anger management is beyond the scope of this book. However, I do want to give you some anger management tips.

The following 12-step approach will help you direct your anger constructively rather than destructively. This approach to calming down is based on the ideas of Duke University’s Redford Williams, MD. The 12 steps form a comprehensive plan to get control of inappropriate and unproductive anger.

Step 1: Maintain an "Anger Log"

[Download the Anger Log worksheet](#) and use it to monitor what triggers your anger and the frequency of your anger responses. When you know what makes you angry, you will be in a much better position to develop strategies to contain it or channel it effectively.

Step 2: If You Do, Acknowledge That You Have a Problem Managing Anger

It is an observed truth that you cannot change what you don't acknowledge. So it is important to identify and accept that anger is a roadblock to your success.

Step 3: Use Your Support Network

If anger is a problem, let the important people in your life know about the changes you are trying to make. They can be a source of motivation and their support will help you when you lapse into old behavior patterns.

Step 4: Use Anger Management Techniques to Interrupt the Anger Cycle

- Pause.
- Take deep breaths.
- Tell yourself you can handle the situation.
- Stop the negative thoughts.

Step 5: Use Empathy

If another person is the source of your anger, try to see the situation from his or her perspective. Remind yourself to be objective and realize that everyone makes mistakes and it is through mistakes that people learn how to improve.

Step 6: Laugh at Yourself

Humor is often the best medicine. Learn to laugh at yourself and not take everything so seriously.

The next time you feel tempted to kick the photocopier, think about how silly you would look and see the humor in your inappropriate expressions of anger.

Step 7: Relax

Angry people are often the ones who let the little things bother them. If you learn to calm down you will realize that there is no need to get uptight and you will have fewer angry episodes.

Step 8: Build Trust

Angry people can be cynical people. They believe that others are going to do something on purpose to annoy or frustrate them even before it happens. If you can build trust in people you will be less likely to become angry with them when something does go wrong and more likely to attribute the problem to something other than a malicious intent.

Step 9: Listen

Miscommunication contributes to frustrating and mistrusting situations. The better you listen to what a person is saying, the better able you will be to find a resolution that does not involve an anger response.

Step 10: Be Assertive

Remember, the word is assertive NOT aggressive. When you are angry it is often difficult to express yourself properly. You are too caught up in the negative emotion and your physiological symptoms (beating heart, red face) to put together solid arguments or appropriate responses. If you learn to assert yourself and let other people know your expectations, boundaries, issues, and so on, you will have much more interpersonal success.

Step 11: Live Each Day as if it is Your Last

This saying may be overused, but it holds a fundamental truth. Life is short and it is much better spent positively than negatively. Realize that if you spend all your time getting angry, you will miss out on the many joys and surprises that life has to offer.

Step 12: Forgive

To ensure that the changes you are making go much deeper than the surface, you need to forgive the people in your life that have angered you. It is not easy letting go of past hurts and resentments but the only way to move past your anger is to let go of these feelings and start fresh.

(Depending on what, or who, is at the root of your anger, you may have to solicit the help of a professional to achieve this fully.)

Even if you are not at the point where you feel your anger is a problem, it is a wise idea to familiarize yourself with the processes listed. If you do not have the tools to deal with anger correctly, it has a way of building-up over time. Before you know it, you can be in a position where anger is controlling you and becoming a negative influence in your life.”

The above was originally written for wayward men. But, I think it is good to understand what anger is about, whether you have been a wayward spouse or a betrayed spouse.

All of us will have to deal with anger. And if you think about it, *betrayed spouses are really the ones entitled to anger*. The paradox is that the wayward spouse needs to understand that you are entitled to be the angry one. Still, when your wayward spouse’s anger bubbles up, at least you can understand where it might originate and why your spouse feels entitled to it.

Get Personal Counseling

Even if your spouse does not want to go to therapy, it is essential that you do.

First is secret keeping.

The next step is building up emotional walls with your spouse and choosing to confide in a person outside of your marriage instead.

After finding this person to confide in, the potential cheater begins to trash their partner and their relationship to them.

Then, whether warranted or not, the potential cheater considers their partner untrustworthy.

Finally, he or she is primed for a sexual relationship outside of their marriage.

Doug writes... “This goes hand in hand with trying to figure out why they did what they did, but let’s go a little bit beyond that.

In addition to trying to get them self all figured out, there are going to be a lot of other issues that they will have to work through. Some may be personal in nature, while others are more about the both of you and your relationship.

Many of the people who read our site have stated that they not only go to therapy as a couple but also individually. Most have indicated that the therapy sessions were helpful.

If you're having difficulties working out the issues between you and your spouse because you're finding yourself getting angry or defensive or your and your spouse’s communication skills aren’t that great, it could be very beneficial to have a third party referee, if you will, to be present to moderate things and help you to effectively move through the recovery process.

Why don’t people go to therapy? We’ve run a few surveys on our blog about therapy and we’ve found out that a lot of people don’t go to counseling because of two main reasons. One is that their spouse (who is typically the cheater) doesn’t want to, or refuses to go. The second reason is because of the cost.

Now I realize there are not too many people who look forward to talking to a therapist or anything like that, but if it’s something that your spouse wants you to do and if it’s something that deep down you think might be beneficial for yourself, then by all means go ahead and do it.

I know that oftentimes the thought of going to a counselor is a sign of weakness or failure. That’s simply not the case. They’re just there to help you become a better person.

I certainly was not fond of going to counseling and would balk at the idea. Linda knew very well how I felt but when she asked me to go not too long ago I said, “I would do this to save our marriage.” She then knew that I was serious about my commitment. And you know what? I lived through it. I benefitted from it. So can you!

As far as the cost goes...Yes, therapy can be quite expensive. However, we have found that most folk's work health insurance covers it. I know that when we've gone, we only had to pay a \$25 co-pay. You might want to check with your work HR department or call your insurance company to get the specifics and whether or not counseling is covered.

If it is not, you can always talk to your religious leader or a very trusted friend for zero cost. There are also many online counseling services that are not all that costly.

When you think about it, the cost of divorce is far greater than what it's going to cost you to go through any counseling, therapy, coaching or mentoring program. In fact, my father, who is a wiz when it comes to money issues, has told me on more than one occasion that one of the primary reasons people file for bankruptcy in the United States is...divorce.

I've been in the lending business for over 20 years and I can't tell you how many couples I've seen who have screwed up finances because of divorce. Their issues range from terrible credit scores, to collections, judgments, foreclosures and bankruptcies. So if money is important to you (and it is with most men I know) then you may want to consider that as well the next time you balk at going to therapy.

One other thing to note is that you should be very selective in the therapist that you go to. Don't just pick any Joe Blow off the street or one that is decidedly either for or against you. It's just like mechanics, doctors, lawyers or any other professional - there are good ones and there are bad ones. Choose one that is experienced in helping couples recover from infidelity.

If you do start counseling and you feel that it's not being beneficial or the therapist is not helping you, then don't hesitate at all to look for another one. Just don't use that as an excuse to quit.

Also, if you go to therapy, don't just go through the motions. The therapist will probably give you things to work on or exercises to complete. Do them.

No therapist can help save a marriage if one partner refuses to work at it.

I can honestly tell you that even though Linda and I are doing great and our marriage has never been better, our recovery process and her healing would

have proceeded much faster had we utilized some sort of counseling early on.”

Actions Steps:

- If you find that you are arguing, not communicating effectively or are otherwise not progressing, consider making an appointment with a therapist. (Initiating this on your own will mean a great deal in the eyes of your husband or wife.)
- During the wayward spouse’s contemplation about why they had their affair, they should consider whether they might benefit from individual counseling.
- For more information about how to find a therapist and questions to ask, check out these two posts from our blog: [Should You Go to Couples Counseling?](#) and [Questions to Ask a Therapist](#) .
- Be sure to check your health insurance to see if counseling is covered.

Tell your spouse what he/she needs to do on a regular basis

What this comes down to in essence, is that our needs are important and none of us are mind readers. Though we may have a fairly good idea what we should be doing or shouldn't be doing to satisfy each other's needs, we may not always be accurate in our thinking.

Make it a habit to regularly tell your spouse what you need, if you're doing okay. Really, this should be a two-way street. You both should be doing this.

Keep the lines of communications open at all times so that you guys know how you're both feeling and what the climate of your relationship is.

In Doug's book he said:

“For a very long time when I would ask Linda what she needed she couldn't tell me. I had to fly solo. Luckily, since I know Linda well, I found that sometimes I knew what she needed better than she knew herself. I would try a couple of things and would see how receptive Linda was and sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. The point is I tried.

Sometimes when I would ask her what she needed, she would say, “I don't know what I need,” or “I'm okay” but I knew very well that she was not okay. I had to step up and use my own intuition and try to give her what she needed.”

Action Steps:

- Men and women are not mind-readers. Sometimes you have to be very specific about your needs.
- Spell your needs out in great detail.
- Write your needs on a piece of paper.

A Word on Making Changes

If you haven't figured it out by now, all of the things that I have discussed to this point may be quite contrary to who you are as a person. To accomplish the work ahead of you and to ensure that your work will last, you need to make some changes.

After all, much of the changes that need to be made are the products of years and years of habits and/or actions that have been continually reinforced.

Your spouse must commit to being a lifelong student of personal growth and be willing to attempt to make the necessary changes as part of his or her own personal recovery process.

So how does one make changes to lifelong habits? Here are Doug's ideas on how to be make changes, but I believe us betrayed spouses can learn a little too.

- 1. Start by becoming aware.** Awareness is the key. It's the start. Become an observer. Start listening to your self-talk, observe what your mind says and does. Pay attention. It's happening all the time. Meditation helps with this. It helped me immensely. I also learned through sitting in silence or being alone out in nature where there is nothing to do but watch nature and listen to my mind.
- 2. Start small.** No one can make a 180-degree change overnight. You have to chunk it down and start small. For instance, if you have an anger problem, you can't expect to suddenly wish your anger away just because you think it's a good idea. You have to start slow and take it one step at a time.
- 3. I would recommend you focus on one change at a time.** It's very hard to make changes that stick, especially if you're trying to focus on more than one. In my experiments, I've found very consistently that changing multiple things at once doesn't work very well. Your focus gets spread thin, and in the long run you end up failing to stick to any of the changes. If you've tried and failed at multiple changes at once before, you'll know what I mean.

- 4. Be present and enjoy the process.** Changing doesn't have to be a dreadful experience. For instance, if you feel that you need to exercise more, take notice of the benefits while doing something you enjoy, whether it's running, walking or bowling.
- 5. Be grateful for every step you take.** As I said, making changes to lifelong habits and mindsets can be tough. Be grateful for your accomplishments regardless how small. Reward yourself often.

Backsliding

Unfortunately, backsliding can occur.

However, over the course of the healing and recovery process, your spouse should have become acutely more aware of your feelings and his or her own.

The point is to learn from history and don't let it repeat itself. You should know why the affair happened and what caused the deterioration in your relationship.

Work on a regular basis to ensure that it does not happen again.

Stick to the marital boundaries that you have established, even when it's hard.

For Doug and Linda, communication continues to be the key. They have learned that they really have to express themselves - their wants and needs - on a regular basis. They have also learned that it's OK to rock the boat over trivialities.!

Doug provided this example from his book:

“It's those times when I'm in my man-cave and acting all quiet and detached that make Linda anxious. This rarely happens but when it does it is almost always because I'm preoccupied with a work related matter, but Linda doesn't necessarily know that.

In the past I wouldn't say anything about it and Linda wouldn't bring it up and instead quietly worry. Now, she will ask me if something is the matter or I will let her know why I'm acting the way that I am. This helps to get it out in the open and alleviate any anxiety or misinterpretations.

While it's true that this whole experience has been really painful for Linda, myself and our relationship, it has been a huge learning experience. We (especially me) have learned more about ourselves, our relationship and human interactions than you can imagine.

All of this knowledge has done nothing but help make our relationship much more special. I encourage you to also learn from your past mistakes and put in the work necessary to make your marriage the best that it can possibly be.”

Doug and Linda are living proof that a marriage can be recovered and become even better than before. Doug and Linda represent most people: they did not come armed with the equipment to prevent an affair. Yet, they recovered regardless.

Conclusion

I hope that this book has helped you understand the dynamics of your spouse's affair better.

I would like for you to focus on several takeaways:

- Your spouse must be part of your healing
- Your spouse made a choice to cheat
- You did not cause or create your spouse's infidelity
- Your spouse may have had a troubled past (or not) but his or her cheating is still a choice
- As adults we own our behavior
- Your new marriage that you are creating must be fundamentally different than the marriage that came before
- Patterns and behaviors that allowed your spouse to cheat must be extinguished
- The other person has little to do with why your spouse cheated; the other person was available but so are many other men and women. Your spouse chose to take the bait of someone who made himself/herself available.
- You must get several STD testes, spaced months apart
- Talking to an attorney is always a good idea so that you can know your rights
- Finding the correct counselor will work wonders for your marriage