



## Infidelity 101



Have you heard? Not all marriages follow a monogamy rule. Unfortunately, infidelity seems to be a part of our society. Adultery and trust may be the ultimate oxymoron. The explanations for why affairs occur are not cut and dried – the causes of infidelity are complex and varied. Yet the effects are most commonly traumatic and cause heartache for everyone involved.

### **Why are we so fascinated by stories of “cheaters” in the news?**

There are several reasons we are drawn to and interested in hearing about other people’s marital mishaps. For starters, it is an easy distraction from problems in our own relationships. Talking about the trials and troubles of others takes up time from fretting over our own issues. Secondly, the stories of scandalous affairs – especially of people in high profile positions – provide some drama and soap opera-like entertainment. We then become glued to the outcome. We want to witness the wounded spouse’s reaction. We want to closely follow the personal path that leads to either destruction or to radical recovery for those in the turmoil. Also, our attention to love affairs puts us all in a position of wondering, “What would I do in that situation?” This self assessment invites conversation for relationships everywhere.

### **Why do we have affairs when they cause such sorrow?**

If there were only one main reason why adults seek intimate involvements outside their core relationship we would simple tackle that one symptom. We would be on the lookout for that single sign, and the solution for infidelity would be simplified. Yet some cheaters thrive on adventure- the thrill of the chase. But most commonly, affairs occur to meet one or many needs of the person seeking solutions outside the marriage. Those needs can reflect various emotional desires where sex may or may not be a key component. Affairs possess power, in that they often rekindle feelings within the lonely spouse that have been dormant. Both men and women can be willing to risk everything – including family and friends – to attain those missing and desperately hungry desires.

### **What are the consequences for those involved in affairs?**

For the betrayed spouse, the devastation can wound their soul to the core and shatter his or her dreams and expectations for a life forever together with that partner.

For the “other woman/man,” falling in love with a married person is a recipe for disaster. The affair has all capabilities to destroy his or her life, leaving it sucked dry emotionally, physically and mentally. Children are innocent bystanders that are vacuumed through the tornado of storms that come with infidelity. To repair their loss is another monumental task in rebuilding the family.

### **How can you detect if your partner is a cheater?**

Secrecy is the hallmark of any ongoing affair. Is your spouse’s protective or private about his routine? Some common secret behaviors may include the following: hiding the cell phone, working overtime, unexplained absences, being consumed with being online, sudden changes in behavior, and a change in sexual interest (having no interest or sudden interest in new techniques).

### **How do you survive an affair?**

An affair offers no painless escape. To rebuild the trust annihilated from an affair, it takes more than just time, more than just saying you’re “sorry” and more than love.

More at Midday March 19, 2008

**Here are some foundational tasks any couple must go through to rebuild trust and survive an affair:**

### **Breath first – think second – react later**

There will be a battlefield of emotions upon learning your spouse's betrayal. Thinking clearly can be an overwhelming task in itself. When your marriage has been tossed in the wood chopper, simply caring well for yourself and breathing is task one. This can be a huge challenge as a natural reaction is to react! Emotions of shock, anger and grief need to be dealt with – and now is only the beginning of that process. Keep in mind, it is usually counterproductive to make life-altering decisions in the throes of anger.

### **Total separation**

The affair must be over. Total separation from the “other” person is the right way to end an affair. An affair is an illusion, but it is filled with addictive power. The way to overcome any addiction is tried and proven – abstain from the object of addiction. Making a drastic break from a lover can be a very tough task. After all, they have been the perceived provider of all things good. The other person must be told it is over while leaving no room for discussion or revision. Without total separation, marital recovery is almost impossible.

### **Accept responsibility**

The cheating spouse must replace the lies with truth and start over. He or she must accept responsibility for every intimate aspect of their hidden life – whether it was a one-night stand or a decade of multiple episodes. They must be open about what happened and why. It will be “full disclosure time” once the wounded spouse is open to hearing. Then the couple can examine what went wrong in the relationship that led to infidelity.

### **Commitment through changes**

Commitment to restore the marriage requires a number of new behaviors for both partners. For the one who cheated, he or she will need to live their lives as an open book. This is the required price for any hope of becoming trustworthy again. This involves being consistent, dependable, reachable, and accountable – for time, money and activities. They must be committed to being this open and to harvesting no secrets.

### **Identify and share needs**

Everyone has core emotional needs that, when being met, bring the highest level of happiness and joy to them. When they are not being met, feelings of frustration and unhappiness occur. Here is where the unfaithful may look outside the marriage to have these needs met, as opposed to direct communication to their spouse. According to the research of \*Dr.'s Harley and Chalmers, men tend to give highest priority to: sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, physical attractiveness, domestic support, and admiration. Women, on the other hand, tend to give highest priority to: affection, conversation, honesty and openness, financial support and family commitment.

### **Allow time for healing**

The early days after learning of an affair can be incredibly painful. A complete commitment on the part of both partners to find their own road to recovery allows the process to begin. There is no set amount of time to ensure the mending of a marriage. Many couples succeed in rebuilding their love and trust for one another after affairs. While time can be a help in the healing, time can also be a breeding ground for hurtful words and feelings. It can be a very difficult process, but the pain will not go on forever.

### **Seek help**

Both spouses may need help in learning to cope with their emotions. A third party, such as a professional counselor can greatly help in the process.

For more information about how to restore your marriage, your self-esteem, and your life, contact Centerstone at (615) 460-HELP (4357).

*\*“Surviving an Affair”, Dr. Willard F. Harley, Jr. and Dr. Jennifer Harley Chalmers*

### **About Centerstone**

Centerstone ([www.centerstone.org](http://www.centerstone.org)), a not-for-profit organization, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. Serving the community for more than fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone also conducts research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Centerstone provides services to more than 50,000 individuals annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs in more than 75 facilities and 150 partnership locations throughout the region. Centerstone is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). For more information about Centerstone, please call toll free at (888) 291-4357.

### **About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS**

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.