

How to Deal with Infidelity

By Susan Gillpatrick

Athletes. Politicians. Actors. Many celebrities are making headlines these days, but not necessarily for their professional achievements. Instead, it seems like the rich and famous are becoming infamous for their marital mishaps.

We read the headlines, hear the television reports and even gush about it with our girlfriends. “I can’t believe he cheated on his wife!” we exclaim. “Will they stay together?” we wonder. “I don’t know if I could forgive a cheating spouse,” we say.

But the truth is, infidelity isn’t limited to Hollywood stars or public figures. It’s a common issue that many ordinary couples face. In fact 30-60 percent of married individuals will engage in an extramarital affair.

So, how *do* you deal with infidelity? How do you find forgiveness? How do you heal the relationship with your spouse? How do you both move forward after betrayal? 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. Here are some tips to help couples rebuild trust and survive an affair.

Breath first, think second, react later

People experience many devastating emotions when learning of a spouse’s unfaithfulness. Emotions of shock, anger and grief must be dealt with, and now is only the beginning of that process. Simply thinking clearly can be an overwhelming task. Remember to breathe and take care for yourself, as you must make yourself a priority during this difficult time. While your natural reaction is to react, don’t! Remember, it’s 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 affairs. 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 that led to infidelity in the relationship.

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 open and to harboring no secrets.

Identify and share needs

Everyone has core emotional needs that, when they are 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. Research indicates that 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. Finding the road to recovery and healing requires complete commitment from both partners. 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 help heal, 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

Individual and marital counseling can help your entire family cope with the emotional effects of infidelity. Centerstone counselors can help you restore your marriage, your self-esteem and your life. Staff members are available anytime at 888-291-4357 to connect you with the resources you need to overcome infidelity.

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