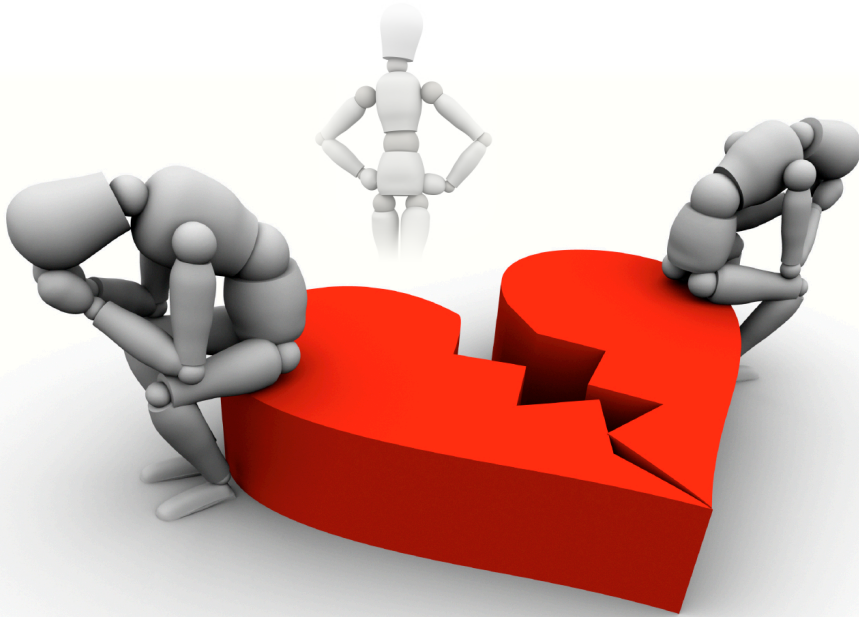


INFIDELITY

What now?

There is hope for moving forward.



Right now is a very painful time. You probably never imagined you would have to deal with this. Whether it's called infidelity, betrayal, an affair, or cheating the result is the same. It hurts. The infidelity could be only physical, only emotional or both.

Although it may not seem possible now, research shows that healing is more likely when an affair is revealed. Couples enter counseling more distressed when an infidelity is revealed, but they show greater improvement in marital satisfaction that couples where the infidelity remains a secret. So while it will be very hard in the short-term, you have a

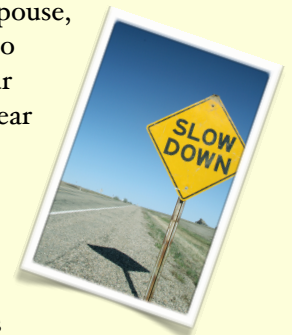
greater chance for a strong and satisfying relationship in the long-term. This is true even if the betraying spouse doesn't return.

Research varies on the frequency of infidelity in relationships. Some report occurrences as high as 70% but a good ballpark figure is 25% or less of all relationships. All this is just to say you aren't alone. Whether you're the betraying spouse, the betrayed spouse, or the affair partner discovery of the affair is a painful time as well as an opportunity for healing and growth. Do the work now so that you never have to be back in this situation again.

Is the Marriage Over?

If you've just found out about the affair, now is not the time to make major life decisions like to divorce. A divorce won't stop the pain. Divorce has a lot of consequences and doesn't necessarily end a relationship. It just changes it. It's best to sort through the feelings and understand what has happened before making major decisions about the future. You may have doubts the marriage can ever recover. However, many couples survive an infidelity and look back on it as a major turning point where long-standing issues were addressed.

Right now you are probably cycling through depression, a desire to cling to your spouse, a desire to leave your spouse, fear and extreme anger. Major life decisions should not be made while emotions are so volatile. Slow things down, attend to your feelings and understand how this happened before moving forward.



FIRST STEPS TO HEALING

You are probably having difficulty speaking with one another. If you're the Betrayed Spouse, you have a lot of questions. If you're the Returning Spouse (the one that had the affair) it is painful for you to answer those questions. Each of you has different roles at this stage of the healing process. The bedrock of an intimate marriage is trust which for you has been shattered. Trust can be rebuilt and although it may seem hopeless, that isn't the case.

If you're the Betrayed Spouse, you are probably experiencing some out-of-control thoughts (called "intrusive thoughts") that make it hard to think of anything else. Your questions are valid. How you ask your questions is extremely important for your healing and your marriage. Anger is appropriate. Blaming and shaming your spouse is not. Along with the anger and betrayal there is also sadness, fear and grief. Let your spouse know about these feelings. It's OK if you aren't ready to let your spouse comfort you. It's vulnerable to do that, but you will eventually need to for trust to grow.



If you're the Returning Spouse, you must end ALL contact with the Affair Partner. In this first stage, you must be accountable to your spouse for

where you go, who you see, and to whom you speak. Except for the graphic, gruesome details of the affair, it's important you answer your spouse's questions and be willing to comfort them to the extent they allow.

In this first stage we are addressing the trauma of the revealed affair and beginning to create an environment where the couple can rebuild the lost trust.

The next stages involve the deep healing work that examines the affair and

marriage to understand how it happened, it's meaning and how to move forward. I don't use the term "repair" when it comes to healing from infidelity. Why would you want the marriage you had before the affair? Besides, the reality is you can never go back. "Redemption" is what you're working for. Redemption means that on the other side of this pain is a marriage that is better than you've ever known.

Discussion Guidelines:

- 1) Save the "Why" questions for later. Generally speaking, these discussions aren't helpful in the beginning stage. Stick with the objective facts: the what, when, where, how, etc. In other words, the things a person would observe if they had been with the Returning Spouse and the Affair Partner during their discussions and liaisons. The questions about thoughts and feelings should be discussed in later stages.
- 2) Scheduling a time: Decide together when you will have these discussions. 1-3 hour segments are usually what's needed for productive discussions. Avoid late night discussions which lead to sleep deprivation, limiting perspective and coping.
- 3) Timeouts: Either person may request a timeout if emotions become too powerful. Timeouts should last about 30 minutes. Pick up the conversation when you reunite. If unable to discuss the matter with just the two of you, use the Couple Notebook (for couples seeing a counselor).
- 4) Couple Notebook: May be used at anytime to defer a question until the next counseling session. The one deferring the question writes it out for the questioner. The questioner confirms their question is written correctly. Bring the notebook to your next counseling session.

**ABOUT ME**

My counseling office is in Cool Springs and my approach to therapy is from a systemic perspective focusing on emotional connections and communication. I am a Christian and therefore counsel from a world view in which I believe we are created by God to be in relationships. My website includes more information about me.