

After an Affair

MOST OF US KNOW SOMEONE WHOSE MARRIAGE HAS BEEN TORN APART BY THE TRAUMA OF AN AFFAIR. WE'VE STOOD BY, NOT KNOWING QUITE WHAT TO DO OR SAY. OR MAYBE OUR OWN HEARTS HAVE BEEN RIPPED AND SHREDDED BY OUR SPOUSE'S BETRAYAL.

IN ALL THE SHOCK AND THE PAIN, HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND, EITHER FOR YOURSELF OR FOR SUPPORTING SOMEONE IN YOUR SPHERE WHO IS FACING MARITAL HEARTBREAK.



EMERGENCY SUPPORT

One of the first things to do when you discover your partner's affair is to take time out to think, pray, and take care of yourself. You might need to stay with a trusted and confidential friend until the initial pain subsides. Knowing that your husband or wife is having an intimate relationship with someone else is one of the most traumatic emotional experiences that humans can encounter. It may also be a good idea to arrange for a few days off work.

If you have children, it's especially important to do your best to stay together and rebuild your relationship (if it's safe to do so) because a separation and divorce can be deeply troubling for them, sometimes throughout their entire lives.

LEAVE YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

Plan your responses carefully. It's natural to be angry and yell at your guilty spouse, but this may cause even more damage to your relationship.

Think about your future hopes for your relationship. Write these hopes down and use them as your guideposts. If your goal is to *keep*

your partner and build a *stronger* relationship, then choose to respond in ways that are more likely to attract them, while avoiding behavior that may push them away.

It's important for you to tell your partner exactly how they've hurt you, but you can choose to do so in a calm, honest, and simple way (see ideas below). By behaving in ways that your partner will find attractive, wise, considerate, and respectful, you may help them to decide that you're the best person for their happiness after all.

EXPLAINING YOUR PAINFUL EMOTIONS

It may be helpful to write down what you want to say and then read it aloud to your partner. This helps you to stay calm and in control so that your anger doesn't cause further damage to the relationship. Use these as possible sentence starters:

- I am committed to staying with you if you want to stay with me.
- But I feel sad because . . .
- I feel hurt because . . .
- I feel angry because . . .
- I feel betrayed because . . .
- I am afraid that . . .
- I would like to learn how I can build a closer relationship with you.
- Some goals I have for our relationships are . . .
- What would you like from our relationship?
- Some things I would like from our relationship are . . .
- Some things you could do to help me rebuild trust in you are . . .

After you've expressed yourself calmly, give your partner a chance to think about what you've said. Say something like, "I'll give you some space to think about this and get back to me."

BE CAREFUL WHOM YOU TELL

What are your long-term goals for your relationship? Use these to guide you as you make careful choices about what to say and whom to tell. Your friends and relatives might put pressure on you to end the relationship even though you want to stay, or they might turn against your partner.

Or your spouse could be so embarrassed by the things you've told other people that it's easier to leave you than to deal with all those difficult relationships and conversations.

TOO MUCH INFORMATION?

How much do you really need to know about the affair? Too much information can be a dangerous thing. Instead of helping to heal the relationship, the details can fuel your imagination and cause even more pain.

Whenever your thoughts start to dwell on the painful thoughts and imaginings,

replace them with something peaceful, happy, and positive, such as comforting Bible verses or prayer.

IF YOU'RE THE PARTNER WHO'S HAD AN AFFAIR . . .

- Take time to listen to how much you have hurt your partner and know that what you have done has hurt God even more. Spend time in prayer. Experience God's compassion for your partner and let that break your heart. Focus on Psalm 51 and travel with David along the pathway of repentance and forgiveness.
- Don't expect your partner to forgive you quickly and move on, even though you'd like them to. You've hurt them deeply, so expect your partner to be very distressed. They will have good days and bad days. Ask how you can comfort and reassure them, and then do whatever they say.
- How did the affair start, and how could it have been prevented? Were you stressed out or lonely? Did you find the affair comforting during a difficult period in your life? Was something missing from your marriage? Identify a root cause and deal with it effectively. Talking with your partner, having counseling, and reading useful books can protect your marriage from future affairs.
- Do anything that rebuilds your partner's trust. It may be really frustrating to keep having your e-mails and mobile phone checked regularly. But this may be the only way to create a secure foundation for your relationship.
- Work very hard to help your partner feel loved and special again.
- Imagine you're having a new romance with your husband or wife! Invest the energy, money, time, fun, and careful planning that you put into your affair back into your marriage.



REBUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Good relationships don't just happen. Be prepared to invest time and effort in your marriage. Read books, search for help on the Internet, etc. Try these resources:
www.divorcebusting.com
www.2-in-2-1.co.uk
www.marriagepartnership.com

Remember a few other things that can make a very big difference:


- Avoid being alone with someone you find attractive.
- If you find yourself attracted to someone else, imagine they have a contagious terminal illness.
- Listen to each other and be interested in your spouse's life.
- Soothe each other when life is stressful, sad, or painful.
- Talk positively about your partner and your relationship as often as you can.
- Strengthen your relationship by having fun together, listening to each other's hopes and dreams, and doing what helps the other person to feel special and loved. **7**


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