
Coping with Infidelity.

A LIFE EFFECTIVENESS GUIDE

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All Case Histories in this text are presented as examples only
and any comparison which might be made with persons either
living or dead is purely coincidental

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Definition

What exactly defines infidelity? Most of us believe that infidelity is the act of intercourse occurring with an external person outside a relationship. Interestingly, feelings of hurt and betrayal can be equally intense on discovering that your partner has been having secret regular coffee dates with a work colleague. People Magazine asked readers to define an extra-marital affair, with this result.

- | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| 21% | thinking about an involvement |
| 21% | dinner and drinks |
| 24% | kissing and petting |
| 26% | sexual intercourse |
| 8% | n/a |

Whilst the definition of infidelity varies, many people describe the aftermath as worse than losing their partner through death. This is because relationships survive after death, but do not always survive after infidelity. When a partner dies, he or she is remembered fondly and despite sadness and loneliness, love continues through memories and photographs. After infidelity, the relationship becomes unstable, and research shows that one of three things occur.

1. The affair is ignored and may continue or is repeated but nothing changes in the relationship.
2. The relationship ends.
3. The affair stops. The old relationship discontinues and a new relationship begins.

Before we examine what may lie in the future, let's look at where you are now. The discovery of an affair can sometimes be catastrophic. Feelings such as denial, anger and betrayal can trigger behaviours such as excessive drinking, eating and smoking

which can affect our thought processes, sleeping patterns and general functioning.

Take a moment to examine how much support you have. On the next page is a short exercise which can help to identify the areas where support is or is not evident.

Social Support Network Exercise

NETWORK SUPPORT

Belonging to a group, recreation, social activities, church group

-
-

INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

Offering advice or guidance e.g.
Child Health Nurse, Doctor,
Counsellor

-

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Can ring or visit for a talk when stressed:

-
-

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

People who can trigger anger and frustration

-
-

PHYSICAL SUPPORT

When you need to move house or get to the doctor quickly

-
-

SOCIAL SUPPORT

ESTEEM SUPPORT

Those people who boost your confidence

-
-

EMERGENCY SUPPORT

Can use 24 hours a day without fear of inconvenience

-
-

Pay particular attention to the people who give you emotional and esteem support and utilise these friends when needed. Be careful not to be around those who trigger negative reactions. Notice areas where support is missing and make a mental note to fill these areas. It is extremely important to be able to identify if your level of functioning has deteriorated dramatically and if so, professional help must be sought. At the conclusion of this paper, you will find some helpful reading material and referral information to counselling websites.

Other Losses

Whether the relationship ends or not, some serious losses are felt. Losses can be physical or symbolic and may include:-

- Loss of trust
- Loss of security
- Loss of hope/dreams
- Loss of faith
- Loss of intimacy and affection
- Loss of self esteem

The obvious **loss is that of trust** in the other partner. Trust is crucial to all relationships and is usually earned. Whether one is able to trust his/her partner after the discovery of an affair is dependent on many things including one's individual values, his/her ability to forgive and whether the person who had the affair is willing to re-earn that trust.

Loss of security for many can be twofold. A sense of security can mean feeling safe and comfortable in the knowledge that all is good around them. It can also mean for some, that the discovery of an affair may result in the relationship breaking down which in turn means division of property and changes in lifestyle.

An affair can damage or destroy one's **hopes and dreams**, particularly if trust cannot be restored and the relationship ends. Many people have dreams such as raising their children in an "in-tact" family, owning their home, or travelling together in their twilight years. Losing hopes and dreams can be devastating until such hopes and dreams can be replaced with others.

Many people like to “blame” someone or something for an affair, and quite often people **lose their faith** either temporarily or permanently. Statements like “why would God do this to me?” or “life just isn’t worth living” are indicative of someone who has lost either their spiritual faith or their faith in life.

The loss of intimacy and affection leads to loneliness which can lead to poor or hasty decisions in subsequent partnerships. Whilst some relationships may have noticed the absence of intimacy and affection many months prior to the discovery of the affair, many relationships manage to retain their closeness, and the affair shocks the discoverer who is placed in turmoil. All of a sudden they are eating, sleeping and talking with no one.

Probably the most common loss suffered after the discovery of an affair, is the **loss of self esteem**. This sometimes occurs when the blame is self directed with statements such as “maybe if I had looked after myself better” and “if only I had paid more attention to her instead of my work”. Some also take the view that their partner “chose” someone else over and above them because of the way they look, act, work which assists poor self esteem.

Feelings

Feeling a loss is very individual and the above losses are examples only. Because loss is so individual, the list may be exhaustive. Now, examine for a moment what losses you feel. It is useful to take the time to identify and acknowledge these losses in order to understand your emotions and fears.

Using the table below, list your losses in relation to the infidelity in your relationship, and beside each loss, try to attach a "feeling" to each one. An example is provided on the top line. Feel free to use examples from above, or identify new losses, individual to you.

Type of Loss	This makes me feel
Loss of security	I feel frightened because I do not know what is ahead for me and my children

Now that you have started to reflect on what you are feeling, it is time to understand that all these feelings are normal, and neither right or wrong. Denying your feelings is more harmful than getting to know your feelings. If your feelings are overwhelming and you are having physical reactions when reminded of the infidelity, it might be best to consult your doctor as a priority.

Do's And Don'ts

So far we have identified your support networks, the various losses associated with the infidelity and the various feelings which are individual to you at this time. Don't expect these feelings to disappear overnight. Below are some Do's and Don'ts that you might like to consider:-

1. **DON'T** make any major decisions right now. This is not the time to end your relationship or sell the family home. It could however, be a good time to reflect on your relationship and see what issues brought you both to this. These issues could possibly be dealt with in counselling and assist with a brighter more rewarding relationship in the long run.
2. **DO** look after yourself. You may be experiencing some physical reactions as a result of the infidelity such as sleep problems, losing weight or lack of concentration. Pay attention to these reactions and visit your GP if they persist.
3. **DO** experience emotions. Recognise that each day will be different and so will your moods. Enjoy laughter when it comes and surround yourself with people you enjoy and who make you laugh. It's OK to cry too. Sometimes people hold their emotions inside, thinking it wrong to show them outwardly. If tears don't come naturally, try encouraging them with family photo albums and favourite songs.
4. **DO** speak with your partner about the infidelity. You have a right to the information you need in order to make decisions, but recognise that knowledge and details may not be useful. Understand that your partner may not always have the answers or reasons for the infidelity occurring in the first place.
5. **DO** start writing a journal of your feelings and emotions. Writing is one of the most common therapeutic tools used because it helps to get rid of unwanted bitterness and resentment.
6. **DO** tell your children that you will be okay. **DON'T** weigh them down with details and **DON'T** discredit your partner to the children. At the end of the day,

you want your children to know and love both parents, despite mistakes and misdemeanors.

7. **DON'T** play the blaming game over who caused the infidelity. It is just wasted energy and won't change anything. In most cases there are two sides to every story and it takes two people to fall in and out of love. This includes blaming of the other partner, the third party, and yourself.
8. **DO** think twice before telling others. Some people, including family members can be unforgiving and may hold grudges for a long time, long after you do.
9. **DON'T** try to get through this time alone. Surround yourself with positive people and seek the support of a counsellor if required.
10. **DON'T** get into a retaliatory affair or relationship too quickly. Recognise your vulnerabilities and safeguard your emotions.

But Why?

There is no simple answer to why someone becomes unfaithful. It could be a symptom of other problems in the relationship or it could relate to something in your partner's past. You may never truly know why it happened. Some believe that in order to reduce anxiety in relationships, we focus on a third party to whom we unconsciously pull into the situation. This is called "triangular relationships" which serve to keep the issues evident in the marital or original relationship, underground. Usually there are three forces that can play a part. These are the forces within an individual that *pull* them toward affairs, the forces within an individual that *push* them toward affairs, and lastly societal factors. We will go through these individually.

Forces which *pull* people toward affairs include attraction to others for reasons of power, admiration, companionship and sexual attraction. Excitement, risk, curiosity and falling in love are other forces that can be described as *pull* forces.

Forces within the individual which *push* them toward affairs include having a desire to escape or fill the gaps in a relationship, boredom or the need for punishment. Having the need to prove one's attractiveness or self worth, or a desire for attention are other *push* forces.

Societal factors include movies, TV shows and romantic novels which tell the tale of glamorous love affairs. The general public is fascinated with headline news stories of public figures that have had affairs. Promotional marketing campaigns parade attractive, near naked models because "sex sells".

The bottom line is that there is probably no ONE single reason for a person having an affair. There are usually many reasons including *pull* and *push* forces together with the influence of societal factors.

Types of Affairs

Knowing the type of infidelity sometimes makes understanding it a little easier. Was it a one night stand or a long term affair? Was it due to mid life crisis or an act of retaliation? Is there a sexual addiction or did he/she want the marriage to end?

There are several types of affairs which include:-

1. The curiosity affair – where one is bored and curious about the excitement of having an external relationship.
2. The unintended affair – a simultaneous attraction occurs in an environment outside the relationship
3. The compulsive affair – often initiated by one with a risk taking and adventurous personality
4. The retaliative affair – is motivated by revenge and serves the purpose of equalising the wrongs. But do two wrongs equal a right?
5. The split self affair – this happens when the needs of others are put before those of oneself, and the deprivation catches up. Usually a long term affair because decisions are avoided.
6. The distance regulator – the relationship is usually over but tolerated for reasons which may include the children and security.
7. Out the door affair – an “excuse” for leaving the relationship. This occurs when the relationship is over for the betrayer but wants a quick way out. Often clues are left for a quick discovery.
8. Empty nest affairs – where couples have lived their lives around the children and have found that the empty nest is too empty and lonely.
9. Sexual addiction – when the couple’s sexual drive is not equalised and the betrayer goes in search of sexual satisfaction outside the relationship.
10. Intimacy avoiders - being intimate with someone outside the relationship helps retain distance from your partner. Is a means to staying absent.
11. Conflict avoidance – an affair to control and diffuse anger, and avoid arguments and difference of opinion.

Who Has Affairs?

How many times have you heard people say "it will never happen to us". Maybe you have even said it yourself. It is widely thought that affairs only occur in bad or unhealthy relationships, but that too is a myth. Sadly, no one is immune to infidelity. Monogamous relationships are what most people say they believe in and look for partners with the same beliefs and values. But having these beliefs and values does not prevent large numbers of people from having extramarital affairs, because many people don't intend to have the affair in the first place.

Research has shown that affairs happen:-

- in both healthy and unhealthy relationships
- more so in couples who had brief courtships
- more so in ages 20's and 40's
- when one or both partners work long hours
- with co-workers in the workplace
- with a friend or family member

It therefore appears that even the most unlikely couple is not immune from infidelity occurring in their relationship and the subsequent disruption to their lives and the lives of those they care about. Affairs happen to all kinds of people, in all walks of life.

How Common Are Affairs?

Conservative estimates are that 60 percent of men and 40 percent of women will have an extramarital affair. Taking into account that affairs happen not only in marital relationships but “committed” relationships as well, there is compelling evidence that the incidence of infidelity is increasing.

Understanding the prevalence of affairs within our society helps gives us a more realistic perspective when trying to understand why our partner has strayed. Having an understanding of just how many others are in or have been in the same situation can sometimes alleviate feelings of isolation or failure.

The Consequences

With infidelity come consequences. Many people are impacted. If we were to step outside and look in for a moment, we may be able to see just how many people are affected.

Firstly there is the betrayer. He/she has learnt to be an actor in order to not be suspected. After being found out, feelings of shame, guilt, despair and confusion are evident. In most cases, the betrayer is forced into making a quick decision between two relationships. With that choice come huge impacts for the betrayer, including many of the losses described by the person betrayed. Sometimes the power and control is immediately reversed in the relationship and the betrayer is denied choices. He/she finds themselves being punished by sleeping on the couch or not having access to the children.

The lover sometimes wins and sometimes loses. 50% of romantic affairs end in divorce or separation with 25% of romantic affairs resulting in marriage to the lover. 75% of these marriages end in divorce. This means that quite often, the lover often loses out, and quite often suffers in silence because the relationship was hidden or undisclosed in the first place.

If there are children involved, their young lives are instantly changed resulting in emotional and behavioural reactions. It is rare for the children not to become involved either indirectly or directly and in the case of subsequent separation, it is the beginning of a totally new lifestyle and environment for the child to encounter.

Lastly, there is the person who has been betrayed. The betrayed usually experiences several stages, which are called the stages of grieving. The process can take anything from several weeks to several years. Let's look at these stages to determine where you

are at, but remember they do not have to come in any particular order and if any stage is unfamiliar, that's quite okay.

Stages of Grief

Denial

On discovery of the affair, there is an initial period of shock and maybe denial. This may include making excuses for the betrayer or believing only what you want to hear. This is a perfectly normal reaction except where the denial extends beyond a feasible time. In cases where denial extends years and years, the betrayed person most likely has inwardly experienced all stages of grief silently and reached acceptance, but chosen to live a lie.

Anger

When the full impact of infidelity hits home, pure rage sets in. Anger can be directed to the betrayer or displaced incorrectly to others including the children, work colleagues or even God. This stage is a difficult one to pass through, and often violence becomes evident in what was a non-violent relationship.

Bargaining

Bargaining is the beginning of the decision making process where one or both parties look at offering negotiations. These bargains can be made with each other, with self or with a higher being and may include statements like "if she takes me back, I will never do that again" or "if you tell me where you are going, I might be able to trust you again".

Depression

With the reality of the affair comes the knowledge of problems within the relationship that either can or can't be worked out. Either way, one grieves for the relationship that once was which was less complicated and affair free. Depression has been described as a heavy cloud over your head which makes it difficult to function, enjoy life and even

get up in the morning. Depression should be carefully monitored and addressed by professionals if needed.

Acceptance

The final stage is that of acceptance. True acceptance comes when functioning has returned and having acknowledged the incident in its entirety. Many people reach acceptance by being able to forgive all parties including self. Forgiveness is like freeing oneself from all the negative feelings associated with the infidelity and being able to move forward either within the relationship or external to the relationship. Forgiving is a difficult challenge for some and acceptance is not dependent on the ability to forgive.

Getting Through It

Let's look at some ways to help you get through this. You will notice that some days are better than others and you may even recognise that you have passed through or are "stuck" in one of the stages referred to previously. This may or may not be obvious, but if you are able to identify where you are at, it can be helpful to gauge where you are now compared to where you want to be.

Below are some helpful suggestions and techniques for alleviating the stress associated with the shock of infidelity. Please be reminded that if your bad days outnumber the good ones, your best option would be to seek professional assistance.

Journal Writing

First, we are going to learn to "*journal*". Writing our feelings does not always come easy however; once you start you will soon learn the benefits of getting words down and completely out of your system. Practice writing about the stages you have experienced, and if useful, allow it to be the start of your journal of feelings throughout this time in your life. Every time you identify feelings such as anger, fear or sadness, go to your journal and write. After each entry, your feelings will have a lesser impact on your daily life.

For example, if you are feeling angry and are able to write about that anger and what made you angry in the first place, you are less likely to behave angrily toward those who do not deserve that anger.

Shock/Denial

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Anger

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Bargaining

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Depression

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Acceptance

Thought stopping

Thought stopping is a process of interrupting obsessive thoughts as a means of blocking them from one's consciousness. It works much like when a child puts their hands over their ears and sings loudly to block out what they do not want to hear. It can also act as a way of deliberately turning negatives cues into positive ones. Below are three thought stopping techniques for you to practice.

1. Thought replacement
2. When an unwanted thought enters, immediately replace the thought with a healthy, rational one.
3. Yelling "stop"
4. When the unwanted thought enters, immediately yell "STOP". The yell can either be out loud or in the mind. Continue yelling STOP until the unwanted thought goes away.
5. Visual image
6. If you tend to visualise negative images, replace that image with something positive and healthy.

Now let's see if this technique works for you. You no doubt are repeatedly thinking about the affair, your partner's lover, or other details which upset you. Depending on whether this thought occurs visually or cognitively (thinking only), consciously replace it with an image or thought that automatically brings a smile to your face. For example, if you were to think repeatedly about the other person and their face often comes to mind, learn to automatically replace it with a "snap-shot" of your children at their happiest.

Relaxation

It is extremely difficult to be "relaxed" after the discovery of your partner's affair; however it is equally important to get adequate sleep and rest in order to function well. There are numerous relaxation techniques readily available from bookstores and internet sites but we will go through an easy to remember technique useful for people finding it hard to get to sleep.

1. Make sure your clothing is comfortable and lie in a straight position.
2. Tighten the muscles in your toes, and hold for a count of 10.
3. Relax your toes and enjoy the sensation of releasing the tension from them.
4. Flex the muscles in your feet, and hold for a count of 10.
5. Relax your feet.
6. Continue to flex and relax each muscle group as you move slowly up through your entire body, eg your legs, abdomen, back, arms, neck and face.
7. Breathe slowly and deeply, and sleep will come.

Making a Decision

As discussed earlier, one of three events occur after the discovery of an affair. For some, nothing changes in the relationship and the affair is either ignored, denied, repeated, or continued. The affair can unfortunately also end a relationship depending on the intensity and length of the affair and the values of the parties involved. For others, the occurrence of an affair can signal a reassessment of the existing relationship and provides an opportunity for change, growth and a more improved relationship. Let's take a closer look at these options before going any further.

Option 1 – Ignore the Affair

For many, an affair can simply rock the world we live in. To contemplate leaving the family home and/or one's partner would be inconceivable and it is simply easier to put the affair at the back of your mind and lock it away.

The decision to do nothing quite often happens in older couples and couples with children, who decide to stay in a marriage for the children only. Unfortunately, the action of "no action" or doing nothing doesn't promote self growth much less assist the relationship. The betrayer sometimes has repeated affairs to satisfy his/her needs for closeness and intimacy, and other times boxes him/herself within an unsatisfying relationship filled with guilt and shame. The betrayed deals with the affair privately but can overtly or covertly 'punish' the betrayer for the duration of the relationship. Quite often in these cases, there is a shift in who controls the relationship, where the betrayed now holds the power.

The people who chose to do nothing after the discovery of their partner's affair will most likely not be reading this or looking for assistance. Fortunately though there are other choices and the discovery of an affair usually is a catalyst for change.

Option 2 – The Relationship Ends

34% of relationships end after the discovery of an affair. Sometimes the decision is owned entirely by the betrayer, when he/she decides to end the existing relationship and progress the relationship with his/her lover. The affair was simply a means to leave the relationship which leaves the betrayed with no choice but to grieve and go on with life. On other occasions, the person who has been betrayed ends the relationship based on his/her beliefs and values.

Our beliefs and values are a set of guidelines or rules by which we live. They are ingrained in us by things we learnt from our family of origin and special people like teachers and neighbours. Our values can include beliefs in things like marriage, fidelity, sexuality, religion and even dress code. For example, some people would never get a tattoo anywhere on their body at any given time of their life. However, others proudly display numerous tattoos; hence values are different from person to person. It is for this reason that some people are more accepting and forgiving of infidelity and others are not.

Your decision whether to end a relationship after an affair may require some examination of your values and beliefs. Below is a short exercise to help you look closely at where your feelings about infidelity originated. Take some time to think carefully before answering these questions because it is most likely that your values have been formed unconsciously based on situations you have experienced in your life.

Were your parents faithful to each other during their marital life?

Yes No

Have you ever been close to anyone who has experienced infidelity?

Yes No

If you answered "yes" to either of the above two questions,

1. *write a few lines about how the people involved reacted to the infidelity.*

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.....

2. *write a few lines about how you were affected by what happened in this relationship.*

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If you answered "no" to both of the above questions, there is a good chance that the knowledge of your partner's affair has shocked you, as the situation is unfamiliar to anything you have ever experienced before. It is more than likely you would like to replicate the relationships of family and friends and you have firm values about infidelity. If you answered "yes" to either of the above questions, your values concerning infidelity may or may not be flexible. Witnessing the repercussions of an affair would have a direct influence on your values and would depend entirely on whether the experience and outcome was negative or positive.

Of course other things other than our family and friends and their experiences will influence our values. By reflecting on these questions, you may now have an

understanding about where your values have originated. It may now be useful to answer the questions again on your partner's behalf to try to gain an understanding of his / her values. Now, try to put yourself in your partner's shoes. If you know the answers for your partner, it could be useful to compare the two sets of answers. Deciding to end or stay in a relationship after infidelity has been present, is a huge decision. Values play a big part as discussed above, but there are also other factors. Choosing to stay will be discussed in option 3. For now we will look at what happens when the relationship ends. Regardless of who makes the decision to end the relationship, a person's life is generally turned upside-down at this point. We will now look at some common problems after the termination of a relationship.

1. How do you "turn off" your love?

Right now, after finding out about the affair, you most likely think you hate your partner. But look closely at the reasons for feeling angry, betrayed, lonely and scared. You are shattered because your partner, the one you love, has looked to another for comfort, intimacy and all the other things you once shared. The easy way to stop loving them is to hate them, but this is destructive and soul crushing.

Understand that it is their behaviour you dislike, and right now everything they are doing and saying is inconsistent with the person you love. If the affair is continued, then it is likely that behaviours and actions which you do not agree with will also continue, and day by day, you will notice that the person you once loved no longer exists in the same human being. He or she has changed because of some internal drives or desires that are unfamiliar to you.

Learning to fall out of love with your partner is probably more difficult when you chose to go your separate ways, without a third party. This is because the unexplainable and bad behaviours have ceased and he or she has resumed being the person they once were. Putting some distance between you both may make life easier, and perhaps a good friendship may be the outcome.

2. Sole parenting

Hopefully the incidence of an affair will not end the relationship between the children and either of their parents. Remember that all children deserve to know both parents, despite their mistakes, and denying kids that privilege is extremely harmful.

Once things settle down a little, there will be huge changes in lifestyle for all concerned and the kids must learn to adjust to two homes, two sets of rules and two individual parents. For the residential parent (who lives with the kids), it is a difficult task to cope with not only their own emotions but those of the children. Understandably, children feel the effects of separation which in turn can result in behavioural problems.

The last thing a sole parent needs when coming to terms with a separation, is the burden of naughty children. Some sole parents describe the period of separation as operating on “auto pilot” where they just function on a day to day basis, going from here to there as best as possible. Be kind to yourself and allow yourself to make mistakes and miss appointments. If you were to remember one important thing, try not to involve your children too much in the separation, and only give them enough information for them to understand that both parents still love them and will continue to love them forever. Understand that their behavioural problems are temporary and are a reaction to the changes in their young lives.

As difficult as it may seem, the ideal outcome for a child, would be to continue having loving parents, despite the relationship ending. This can be achieved by being sensible adults and putting the needs of the children first. If at all possible, continue to be parents and share roles and responsibilities equally.

Sometimes, the other parent is negligent in his/her duties which make sole parenting even more difficult. To best deal with this scenario is to *reframe* this situation by turning the negative into a positive. For example the fact that the other parent has little time with the children, means that you are the more fortunate one who will witness the wonderful milestones that raising children brings with it.

Many community agencies offer support for sole parents in areas such as group workshops, child minding, counselling for the children and household / gardening assistance.

1. Changing roles

When a relationship ends, we sometimes find that our role changes. This usually happens because a separation forces the equity from the relationship to be divided, and when one property has to be shared into two parts; both parties end up with heavier financial burdens. This usually results in both parties needing to be employed. Where children are involved, women can be forced back into the workforce, and the role of mother is stretched to include a “provider” role as well. When dads are sharing in the caring role of the children, their role is one which includes a “nurturing” component.

Despite recent trends for both parties to work, many individuals must adjust to the extra demands of wearing several hats, loss of dual incomes, and having no help around the home.

2. Loneliness

The longer the relationship, the potential for loneliness is greater. It doesn’t matter how positive you are, how amicable the split may be, or how many friends you have, you will have periods of loneliness. Sometimes it is helpful to sit in the dark, listen to sad music and cry your eyes out. Forgive yourself for the occasional gloomy day, but there is a big beautiful world out there, and believe it or not, other fish in the sea. Don’t go fishing too soon though! There is no magical cure for loneliness except to surround yourself with friends, keep busy, join clubs and get fit. Be determined to learn and grow from this experience.

Option 3 – The Relationship is Reassessed and Resumed

Infidelity doesn’t have to end the relationship. But it is a big wake up call that something is seriously wrong. If the couple can identify the problems in the relationship

and develop skills to deal with these problems, they have a good chance of surviving the ordeal.

Both parties have a lot of work to do in order to restore trust, and to begin it is imperative that *both* parties are committed to work on the relationship. This means that the romantic affair is ended, talked about, changes made within the relationship and dealt with.

Healing the relationship initially involves both parties working individually on themselves. The betrayer needs to examine the motivations for having had the affair in the first place. By this, he/she needs to look for answers to emotional issues happening within him/herself and not external circumstances like intoxication, close friendships, business trips etc. The same goes for the person who has been betrayed, who needs to look at his/her emotional needs, also being mindful of what part they played. For example, be really honest about whether you were too busy with work, too tired to talk or too disinterested in what was going on. While this process appears to be seeking who is to blame, it is more like both people being honest enough to acknowledge their shortcomings and forthright enough to ask to have their needs met.

Many people do not have the skills necessary to work through the aftermath of infidelity without getting sucked into negative discussion and destroying any positive groundwork they have built. It is vitally important to develop healthy conversation in the relationship, and learn to see things from the other person's perspective. The best way to do this is to set aside time regularly to talk *and listen*. Remember that to be committed, you need to talk and listen. What is also important is to decide when you should talk about the affair and how to develop ways to protect your relationship from further harm.

Once communication is flowing, a renewed relationship should be negotiated. This involves setting in place some relationship rules like keeping each other informed of each other's movements and allowing each other permission to remind the other if

things get forgotten. Of course, your rules may include the time you spend with each other and can stipulate weekly outings and annual holidays as well.

Below is a checklist of the process:-

1. **Acknowledge the infidelity** – no matter how much you want to ignore it, forget it and get on with life, it happened and must be dealt with.
2. **End the affair** – in order to rebuild the relationship, the unfaithful partner must end the relationship once and for all. Any contact with the former lover will cause further unnecessary pain. This may even involve relocating the family or changing jobs.
3. **Talk about each other's emotional needs** – it's obvious that the offending party's emotional needs were not getting met, and in order for affairs not to be repeated, these needs have to be identified. Of course the person who has been betrayed will have unmet emotional needs, *together with* the need for assurance that the affair will not be repeated.
4. **Give of yourself** – having identified each others' needs, work hard at actioning behaviour changes. Be creative in showing each other that they are valued and respected.
5. **Restore trust** – in order to restore trust, be mindful of letting your partner know where you are, if you will be late, and of future business meetings and trips ahead of time.
6. **Make some changes** – it's so easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of life which is probably one of the reasons for the affair in the first place. Let go of obligations which burden you and take up more pleasurable hobbies together.
7. **Reconnect** – talk, talk and talk some more. Reminisce about your first meeting, the birth of the children, old friends. Make plans for future holidays and build a wonderful exciting future together.
8. **Forgive** – It is unhealthy to hold onto resentment. Forgiveness requires generosity but is merely a decision. A decision which can free you from the

burden of the resentment you have been carrying and help you to move ahead in your life.

The last item above mentions *forgiveness*. We all know that when we don't forgive someone, it can "eat us up". If you have read this far in this paper and your relationship stands a chance at surviving after infidelity, then you need to read this section on forgiveness to not only *maintain* your relationship, but to *sustain it* and have a better relationship than before.

The next exercise is an illustration of forgiveness where we "forgive" an outstanding monetary debt. What you need to do, is to fill in the blanks honestly, but relate it to forgiving your partner for the affair. This will help you to understand whether you are ready to forgive and give you some insight into the benefits of forgiving.

*Now let's imagine you lent someone twenty dollars, and for whatever reason, you decided you didn't want it back. You forgive the debt, and eliminated their obligation to pay it back. Aligning this scenario alongside an affair would mean that the affair happened and it was forgiven without the need for any "pay back" or compensation. Is that a good thing? (**It may work – but has the betrayer learnt anything?**)*

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*Now going back to the twenty dollars, would it not be better to have him / her pay it back in order to teach them to be responsible with money? In other words, by asking for compensation, isn't the betrayer getting the opportunity to learn and avoid repeats of this behaviour? (**Maybe, but it depends on what the compensation is, and how long he/she has to pay it back.**)*

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What if half the money is paid back and both halves are invested? In other words, what if we both agree to put in some effort and both make compensations in this relationship?

(Now we are talking)

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Conclusion

We all agree that the impact of infidelity is huge, and takes us on an unfamiliar journey through many losses, painful feelings, stages of grief and making difficult decisions. We have talked about the types and prevalence of affairs and the consequences on all involved with the hope of gaining meaning and understanding of why the event occurred in the first place. We have identified strategies for alleviating the stresses associated with the aftermath and looked at who can support us through this journey. It is a journey we would not wish on our worst enemy, but the good news is that we *can* recover.

On the following page is a list of recommended readings and resources which may be useful as you embark on becoming everything you want to be. Good luck!

Further Reading

Glass, S.P. (2004). *Not just friends: Rebuilding trust and recovering your sanity.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying.* New York: MacMillan.

Lusterman, D. (1998). *Infidelity: A survival guide.* California USA: New Harbinger Publications Inc.

Subotnik, R. & Harris, G.G. (1999). *Surviving infidelity: Making decisions, recovering from the pain.* (2nd ed). Toronto: Adams Media.

Support Agencies:

Lifeline (24 hours) ☎ 13 11 14 <http://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Centacare ☎ 3252 4371 <http://www.centacare.org.au/>

Relationships Australia ☎ 1300 364 277 <http://www.relationships.com.au/>