

Thriving

IN YOUR MARRIAGE
DESPITE INFIDELITY

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YOU JUST FOUND OUT

YOUR PARTNER IS HAVING AN AFFAIR

You need to shout and rail at your partner. You just learned that he/she has been having sex with someone other than you. Nothing could be worse than this—your world is falling down around you. Your life has been a lie. You feel like an idiot and feel betrayed. The thing that keeps running through your head is, “How could I not have known?” Then, at the same time, you worry about your health: HIV, chlamydia, and every other possible sexual disease. What do you do?

After your health, you think, “Oh my God, my marriage.” You think, “I need to dump that *&^%,” ... but what about your life...? You are on the roller coaster ride from hell. The thing that is driving you mad more than anything is that you still love your partner. “What’s wrong with me?!”

The answer to that question is “Nothing.” I want to let you know there is a road back and the following tips will allow you to have a marriage that once again can bring you joy and satisfaction.



DESPAIR TO LOVE

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Here is a list of things that can take you from the point of despair to having the feeling of being loved and important to your partner. These suggestions are in no order of importance because all of them are required to truly have the kind of marriage you need to feel secure once again. They can help you find what you need to recuperate, to repair your marriage, and to get up and go on with your life, happy and with a sense of security and stability in your marriage.

MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

Find a marriage counselor skilled in working with couples with an attachment perspective. A counselor who is not trained in this will get caught up just talking about the betrayal. You need someone who can aid the two of you in looking for the real reasons the affair happened. The excuses—of not spending enough time...stressed...it just happened—are all nonsense. There has been an unmet need that goes beyond the physical relationship. Unless a counselor knows how to figure that out, you will never truly be secure. **Don't see a counselor who doesn't see 80% of their clients as couples and who doesn't have advanced training in couples counseling.**



THE WHOLE TRUTH

Stay away from disclosing a bit at a time (the “trickle truth”). It will be like a leaky faucet—things might be quiet for a while, but soon it will make everyone so crazy so they just want to throw out the faucet. The revelation of an affair or sexual addiction is a frightening process, but one of the worst mistakes is trying to hold back the whole truth.



DON'T “SPIN” IT

Similarly, don't “spin” the truth so your mate won't be so upset; it is just as damaging. I know why most former cheaters are reluctant to be 100% candid—fear. They are already under assault and trying to save their marriage. Do complete disclosure with the marriage counselor so that it is thorough and complete.

ASK QUESTIONS

Ask about the things you need to know, but do not talk about the sexual experiences they had with the other person. This will not help you move on and it will become the thing that keeps you up at night with intrusive thoughts. Keep the focus on your relationship, not the affair partner.

NO DIVORCE TALK

Do not talk about getting a divorce. If you don't want out of the marriage, talking about a divorce with your spouse makes no sense, it's blackmail. If you can't continue in the marriage as a result of his/her indiscretions, file for a divorce. If you are confused and unsure what you want, then let your partner know about your confusion, but don't talk about it. These discussions have to be with someone other than your spouse. Keep a private journal to write down your thoughts and evaluate your relationship.

LIMIT AFFAIR TALK

Set a time limit on affair talk. No more than once or twice per week. Schedule it and keep to the schedule. During these dialogues, focus more on what you need to feel safe and secure, and identify areas in the relationship that are problematic for both of you. Don't sugarcoat the issues; be respectful and kind in the dialogues—but don't withhold things you need, so that both of you feel content in the relationship.

RECOMMIT

Recommit yourself to the relationship and announce verbally to one another that you want to stay together as soon as you know the outcome. If you are staying together, if possible, be intimate with one another. If that is not an option, be affectionate and be present in the relationship.

HEALING TOGETHER

Healing together is the key if one individual has their foot out the door. In the event that you have decided to stay together, act like it. Do not make jokes out of what happened. The betrayed partner is going to feel hurt, irate, and further betrayed, even if it seems that they are laughing along with you. The spouse who strayed must be incredibly sensitive to how fragile your relationship is at this point.

AVOID NAYSAYERS

Avoid talking to others who are negative about the two of you, including family if necessary. You must keep a positive perspective on your relationship.

RECONSTRUCT TRUST

Reconstruct trust. Be genuine with one another and let each other talk (on a regular basis) about how you are doing. Repairing this relationship could take years. Both of you need to talk about what you need to feel more comfortable with one another, and anything that is reasonable should be acceptable and agreed to.



FIGHT FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

If you say, “I want our marriage,” then stop all contact with the affair partner. There is nothing worse for your partner than to find out you are not being honest. It is very important to have your behavior match up with your words. If you say you love your spouse, back it up with your actions. Your words and actions must be consistent.



GET OUT OF DENIAL

The person who committed infidelity has to openly admit their wrongdoings. But, you also have to acknowledge that the two of you are in trouble and things will need to change. Do not wish for the relationship you had—that’s the one that had an affair in it.

SINCERE APOLOGY

Any apology must be sincere, and any statement of regret must be real. This must be done vulnerably and quickly (but not too soon). It must be done once a commitment has been made by both of you that you want to be together. However, if you wait too long, the relationship can be permanently scarred with no turning back.

YOUR MARRIAGE CAN SURVIVE

IT IS HARD WORK

Your marriage can survive this issue. Recuperating from betrayal is hard, excruciating work; both of you must be focused on repairing the harm, remaking trust, and reconnecting. The unfaithful life partner must be willing to stop the affair, give all information sincerely and totally, and make the strides important to demonstrate his or her reliability. The betrayed partner must accept the regret without minimizing the effort of healing. In the event that you both make a commitment to the relationship, it has to be with your entire heart. Doing this will allow your marriage to have a decent chance of surviving and even coming out stronger.



SHARE WHY

The unfaithful spouse must share their thoughts and feelings that led to the affair. This is critical because unless an honest disclosure occurs, no true healing can happen and security will never be present. Doing this helps you both understand the underlying problems you face.

ACKNOWLEDGE

The injured spouse can also acknowledge his or her contribution in creating the circumstances that led to the infidelity. This is very hard, but it's one of the more essential ingredients if surviving this will lead to an experience of thriving in the marriage.

THE LOSS

Acknowledge the loss and change that is going to be present in the marriage forever. Regardless of the positive change that may come from this, something has been hopelessly lost. It's a sad thing. Whatever you take from here will be different—hopefully better—but still a change.



SURRENDER

Surrender your dream of the marriage you had and make peace with it by looking forward to the future.

BEGIN AGAIN

Begin again as if it is a new relationship, courting one another and establishing new rules for the relationship. This should include cards, gifts, flowers, love notes, and making sure both of you know how you feel. Be extremely kind, caring, and considerate, and learn new things about one another.

THE FUTURE

The key to having a better and more secure relationship in the future is giving to one another and making it a priority to have your partner feel happy and satisfied in spite of the past. Talk-up your relationship to everyone and let each other know how much you appreciate efforts by the betrayed partner to be willing to give the relationship a chance, and allow the person who committed the adultery to recommit to the other once again by putting their partner first.



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Stuart Fensterheim, LCSW helps couples to overcome the disconnection in their relationships. As an author, blogger and podcaster, Stuart has helped couples around the world to experience a unique relationship in which they can feel special and important, confident in knowing they are loved deeply and that their presence matters.

His weekend workshop, Two Days: Seven Conversations has become a popular venue for many to set off on their journey of connectedness. The Couples Expert Podcast consists of weekly provocative conversations offering the perspectives and insight of experts from a variety of relationship related fields. Stuart also offers daily relationship video tips on The Couples Expert YouTube channel and by subscription in Stuart's Daily Notes. Stuart is happily married and a devoted father of 2 daughters. His office practice serves the greater Phoenix, Arizona area including the cities of Scottsdale, Chandler, Tempe, and Mesa.

