THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Working through an affair is tough, it takes tremendous energy and vulnerability on both sides. We have provided the guide below to provide support as you repair your relationship.

TYPES OF TRUST BREACHES

- **Sexual infidelity:** Sexual activity outside of the relationship that is not agreed upon (can include pornography use)
- **Emotional infidelity:** Relationships or exchanges that involve intimacies typically reserved for a romantic relationship. Often, the information being shared would not be liked or accepted by the partner (e.g., sharing intimate details of your relationship and personal with outside parties)[1]
- **Competing attachments:** Outside influences that weaken or threaten the relationship bond. May include excessive working, leisure time, or prioritizing family of origin over your partner. The partner feels last on the list of importance.
- **Financial infidelity:** Financial activity not known and agreed upon to by both partners (e.g., withholding info about excessive spending)
- **Unreliability:** Broken promises, not able to access partner by phone, not following-through on tasks, lateness, forgetfulness
- **Lying:** Purposeful withholding, distortion, or omission of information, minimizing, gas lighting (denying the partner's reality and suspicions)
- **Abuse:** Name calling, insults, threats to safety, destroying property, yelling, pushing, hitting, controlling finances, mocking, forcing sexual contact, humiliation
- **Abandonment** of a partner in a time of intense need (attachment injury)
- **Relationship insecurity:** Regular threats to end the relationship, continual "auditioning" of partner, ambivalent about commitment

[1] Information adapted from Debra Kaplan

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

GETTING STARTED (30-90 DAYS)

1. **Coping with the crisis of trust (damage control)**
   - Avoid making decisions about ending the relationship
   - Limit any abusive or damaging interactions (time outs can be helpful)
   - Understand your reaction to what has happened
   - Provide support to the hurt partner

2. **Developing self-care**
   - Complete the trigger action plan for hurt partner (pg. 10 of this guide)
   - Obtain an STD test (if applicable)
   - Focus on sleep, healthy eating, exercise, spirituality
   - See a physician

3. **Create a recovery plan**
   - Access professional support
   - Make an interim plan for relationship (deciding on contact, house tasks, parenting, finances, and sleeping arrangements)
   - Understand trust building and betrayal recovery (see resources)
   - Tell one trusted friend or family member about your situation (if they support your relationship)

COPING WITH REACTIONS (HURT PARTNER)

"A **trauma** is a major negative event or set of events that Destroys Important assumptions or fundamental beliefs about the world or specific people- in this case, your partner and your relationship. Traumatic events disrupt all parts of your life – your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors."[2]

Common Symptoms

- Strong, overwhelming feelings that fluctuate throughout the day
- Hyperarousal: Feeling overwhelmed emotionally (fight or flight)
- Hypervigilance: Heightened state of awareness and feeling "on edge" (impending sense of doom)

- Intrusive thoughts: Compulsively repeating thoughts or questions
- Re-experiencing: Getting drawn back into the experience as though it's happening again (often brought on by triggers)
- Sensitivity to partner's words and actions ("what did he mean?")
- Disorientation: Staring off or feeling lost
- Questioning spiritual faith and basic human goodness
- Loss of identity in relationship
- Loss of feeling important or special
- Adopting extreme negative views of partner
- Confusion (torn about ending the relationship)
- Difficulty concentrating and functioning (sleep is often impacted)
- Shame and embarrassment ("how could I be so stupid!")
- Hopelessness (doubt and uncertainty about your future)
- Exhaustion
- Tearfulness
- Lack of trust
- Nightmares
- Rage
- Depression
- Helplessness

[2] From Getting Past the Affair by Snyder, Baucom, & Coop Gordon (p. 10)

Behaviors to Avoid

- Verbal insults
- Physical abuse
- Constant monitoring or checking (however, access to your partner's electronics is often part of rebuilding trust)
- Searching for specific details about the trust breach
- Searching for information about affair partners (e.g., Facebook)
- Making hostile threats to leave partner
- Trying to control your partner's behavior
- Inappropriate disclosures to family and friends
- Self-harming behavior (e.g., cutting, binge eating, consuming alcohol)

Strategies

- Grounding exercises e.g., meditation, breathing
- Practicing mindfulness – becoming a curious observer to your experience with non-judgment
- Deep breathing: Take 6 deep breaths and focus on relaxing muscle tension (especially in your jaw and shoulders)
- Calling a friend (if they are supportive of your relationship)
- Guided imagery
- Exercise
- Prayer
- Time out: 20–30-minute time out with healthy, soothing distraction
- Journaling
- Understanding your thoughts and feelings about the trust breach
- Expressing your thoughts and feelings to your partner (if emotionally safe)
- Practicing gentle start-ups (e.g., "When I saw/heard you _, I felt/thought _____. In the future, I would like _____").
- Strengthening self-compassion and self-worth
- Being able to know and express your beliefs, feelings, and reality
- Focusing on what you can control
- Developing wisdom and spirituality

Remember: *Triggers and trauma symptoms often come in waves. If we can learn to surf the waves with compassion, we develop a greater ability to handle these emotions over time. How you react is natural and nothing to be ashamed of.*

Supporting a Partner Through Triggers (For the Betraying partner)

- *Express concern.* Stop what you are doing and give your partner your undivided attention.
- *Acknowledge that your partner is upset* and ask them to describe their emotions and thoughts: "You look upset right now. How are you feeling? What is going through your mind?"
- *Validate your partner's emotions* by saying: "I can understand why you are feeling upset right now. It makes a lot of sense that seeing [the trigger] would have brought up memories of the past and what I did to you."
- *Express regret.* "I am so sorry that I have hurt you."
- *Ask your partner for what they need.* "What do you need right now?"

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Supporting Your Partner (Continued)

Avoid saying: [3]	**Try Instead:**	**Overall tips**
I thought you were over this already! (invalidation)	I will do whatever it takes to make it up to you	Apologize often without making excuses (especially in the first two years)
I've said I'm sorry and I don't know what else you want me to say (defensiveness)	I was wrong and I deeply regret hurting you	End all ties with affair partners and set boundaries with competing attachments
Don't you think you're overreacting? (minimization)	I don't blame you for how you're feeling	Be open and honest in a non-defensive manner
You've hurt me too! (defensiveness)	I feel horrible for how badly I've hurt you	It may be tempting to leave the situation, but moving toward them and offering physical comfort can be very healing. If your partner asks for space, honor their request, but check in with him/her after 10-15 Minutes
If you can't get over this then maybe we shouldn't be together (threats to relationship safety)	I love you and I never want you to be hurt like that again	Share information with partner that could be seen as threatening (e.g., unsolicited texts from affair partner)
*I'm sorry **if** I hurt you/for whatever I did (insincere apology)*	Let me try to understand the hurt I've caused you. Can you tell me what it's been like for you?	Try to let of any verbal attacks and focus on your partner's feelings. Often the betrayed partner is very hurt, and anger is an expression of that hurt

Material from this page adapted from Linda MacDonald (2011)

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

The Gottman's Trust Revival Method[4]

Phase 1: Atone

1. **Continual expressions of remorse.** The betrayer must remain patient and accept responsibility. Understand that this breach of trust has impacted every part of your partner's relationship house and possibly led to the development of trauma symptoms.

2. **Atonement cannot occur if the betrayer insists that the victim take partial blame.** Comments like "you did not pay much attention to me" are only going to make this worse. Yes, there is always a context, but this is not the time to discuss it. It may seem unfair for you to take all the blame. But it is important if you want to move forward. Healing requires the betrayer to hear the others' pain and understand what they are going through. Eventually the two of you will come together to create a new relationship.

3. **The betrayed partner works at keeping the door to forgiveness open.** The wounded partner agrees to cooperate as long as the betrayer is making some effort.

4. **Atonement is a painful process, but the couple will emerge with new understanding, acceptance, budding forgiveness and hope.**

According to Gottman Research, when the betrayer agreed to answer questions, the couple stayed together 86% of the time. If the betrayer refused to answer questions, the relationship's survival rate was only 59%.

Key Elements:

1. **Clarification and information sharing:** unless there is a thorough airing of the misdeeds, mistrust will remain a perpetual issue. Most people would rather know the truth even though it may be painful. In the presence of your therapist the betrayer must provide candid answers to questions about the other party and events surrounding the incidents.
   - How did this happen? When did it start and finish?
   - Why did it continue?
   - Was there sexual contact? (kissing, hugging, hand holding or sexual talk)
   - How was it carried out, including details of where and when liaisons took place?
   - How often did you communicate and in which ways?
   - Has it stopped?

2. **Important exceptions to this tell all approach.** If the betrayal was sexual, it is not good to describe specific details of the sexual activity (e.g., "what was she wearing?"). Knowing what happened behind the bedroom door can lead the betrayed partner to obsessive ruminations that retrigger or exacerbate the trauma symptoms. It is a normal urge to want to know the lurid details, but please know that it may not be as helpful as you imagine.

3. **Behavioral Change, Transparency, and Verification.** A commitment to continued scrutiny is important to build trust.
    a. **Create proof you are no longer engaging in betraying behavior.** Giving access to your electronics and finances can be a helpful way to rebuild trust. This invasion of privacy may seem unfair but is necessary. Trust will not return without ongoing evidence of transparency.
    b. **Verification: Keep to your promises and create a way to verify this.** This means doing as promised and arriving home at predetermined times may be necessary. The betrayer must restrict activities and relationships that were connected with the trust breach. It also needs to be explored about what was said to others about the betrayed party. If the betrayer put down the partner to family and friends, this needs to be rectified. Were these people rooting for the demise of the relationship or complicit? If so, the betrayer must sever those friendships.

4. **Understand what went wrong.** Both parties need to grasp what went wrong in their relationship.
    a. Why did the betrayer turn away, engage in negative comparisons, invest less in the relationship and become less dependent on getting needs met through the relationship?
    b. Likewise, why did that partner engage in thoughts unfavorable to the others character, blame him or her for the unhappiness, stay open to or even encourage flirtation, and give oneself permission to cross that boundary?
    c. The betraying partner must avoid accusing the betrayed partner. The goal is to understand what went wrong, not to shift blame.
    d. We are the masters of our actions. Accepting responsibility is part of the healing.
    e. All of this should lead to more vulnerability related to feeling needed and wanted as well as loneliness and feeling abandoned.

5. **Explore the betrayer's reasons for returning.** Why do they want back in? What is compelling him or her to rebuild the relationship? The key is often in the betrayer's longing to feel necessary and wanted.
6. **Expect a high cost for future breaches of trust.** The betrayer must accept that any future betrayal may mean the permanent end of the relationship. The betrayer needs to know the catastrophic cost to any subsequent deceit.
7. **Begin to forgive.** This is the last step of atonement. The hurt party accepts the apology and begins to pardon him or her.

    a. **Forgiveness does not mean absolving the erring partner.** Forgiveness means the deceived partner is willing to cooperate and trust, even in the face of uncertainty and the atoning partner's occasional slip ups. An "acceptable" slipup is not the return to betraying behavior or new indiscretion, but an invasion of the past that produces a regrettable incident. For example, buying flowers from the same store he bought flowers for the other party, or lover. Part of forgiveness is acknowledging that anyone can be untrustworthy at times.

Phase 2: Attune

1. **Tentative forgiveness.** After atonement, you should now have tentative forgiveness in place to build a new relationship. The old one did not meet either of your needs, and the betrayed partner should not be blamed for this past deficiency, but rather work cooperatively to construct a new one.

2. **Building friendship.** This means working on the friendship part of your relationship, which has been shattered. You really do not feel like you know each other at this stage, and you both must rebuild this love map of each other's world. This means asking curious questions like you used to when courting, and updating current information about who you are today. This also means being more vulnerable about your current feelings of sadness, stress and worries. This would also include going into the darker areas of your background that still affect you today. This takes a lot of courage but sharing these 'enduring vulnerabilities' is key to getting closer.

3. **Managing conflict.** Learn to handle conflict better so it does not overwhelm you and create distance. Conflict is simply an opportunity to get closer and have conversations rather than fights about past and current hurts. Use the tools you

have learned from your counsellor to help with this phase.

4. **Presenting a united front to friends and family.** Finally, remember to go public with the "new normal" of your relationship. Alert the people closest to you such as children, in-laws and close friends that you have recommitted and are working towards rebuilding trust. According to the Gottman research, this idea of getting the word out helps establish this new relationship as "real" and garners support from those closest to you.

Phase 3: Attach

1. Development of sexual intimacy. At this point, it is imperative to talk about sex, which is normally a topic many couples neglect to discuss. The following excerpt from the book *What Makes Love Last?* by John Gottman and Nan Silver (2012).

"In the Aftermath of betrayal, the victim often does not want to risk physical intimacy with the straying partner. There is too much fear, anger, and vulnerability. But if the couple is determined to stay together, the ability to attune has to reach the bedroom as well. Without the presence of sexual intimacy that is pleasurable to both, the relationship can't begin again. In a long-term love, sexual intimacy is founded on a healthy interdependency that satisfies the longing for connection… The keystone to this pleasurable and meaningful sex life is a steady diet of intimate conversations as presented in chapter 7. Learning to communicate about sex is not just for couples healing from sexual disloyalty. It is crucial for couples recovering from all forms of betrayal."

Trust building is a process with many ups and downs. As stressful as this process is, it can be an opportunity to build a stronger relationship and connection.

For the erring partner, being open and accountable are opportunities to build trust with your partner. Trust is built in small increments where your partner can build faith that you will be there for them when they need you.

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Action Plan for Triggers (Hurt Partner)

Trigger = a reminder of trust breach often accompanied by intense emotion and traumatic reaction (e.g., intrusive thoughts)

Specific Triggers	**How does this apply to your situation?**	**Action plan**
Seeing attractive people (with or without partner)	○ ○ ○	○ Hold your partner's hand if in public. ○ ○
Sex scenes in movies + TV	○ ○ ○ ○	○ Change the channel. ○ Research programs before watching. ○
Inconsistency/unreliability of partner (e.g., being late)	○ ○ ○	○ Express concerns to partner gently. ○ ○
Times of day Days of the week (e.g., weekends, late nights)	○ ○ ○	○ Plan ahead to do something relaxing. ○ ○
Other:	○	○

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

General Triggers / Beh	How does this apply to your situation?	Action Plan
Partner's travel (or being away)	○ ○ ○	○ Schedule times to communicate ○ Engage in healthy distraction and self-care while they are away ○
Lack of contact with partner (e.g., partner is not answering phone)	○ ○ ○	○ Agree to a plan for contact ○ ○
Lack of self-care	○ ○ ○	○ Daily exercise 30 min. ○ See physician if not sleeping well for over 3 weeks ○
Sleep troubles	○ ○ ○	○ Go to bed at the same time daily ○ Avoid electronics 1-2 hours before bed ○
Excessive checking up/monitoring	○ ○	○ Engage in healthy distraction ○ ○

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Emotional Triggers	**How does this apply to your situation?**	**Action Plan**
Loneliness / isolation	○ ○ ○	○ Reach out to one person per day ○ Schedule one social outing per week ○
Anxiety or rumination (e.g., "I wonder what he's doing right now?")	○ ○ ○	○ Healthy distraction ○ Practice meditation or yoga ○
Rejection or disappointment	○ ○ ○	○ Journal ○ Talk to a trusted friend ○
Confusion (e.g., "can I trust him again?")	○ ○	○ Debrief with a trusted friend (who supports your relationship) ○ Understand sex addiction recovery ○
Anger	○ ○ ○ ○	○ Deep breathing ○ Grounding Techniques ○

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Thought Triggers	**How does this apply to your situation?**	**Action Plan**
Comparison (e.g., "those women are better looking than me")	○ ○ ○	○ Remind yourself that your partner's behavior is due to their own issues, not your worthiness ○
Fortune telling (e.g., "my partner is never going to change")	○ ○ ○	○ Focus on realistic expectations of partner and self ○ Look for positive movement while maintaining boundaries
All or nothing thinking (e.g., "our whole relationship was a joke")	○ ○ ○	○ Validate your reactions and engage in self-care ○
Jumping to conclusions (e.g., "he's been looking at his phone, so he must doing something shady")	○ ○ ○	○ Check-in with partner ○
Entitlement (e.g., "he deserves to suffer like I have")	○ ○ ○	○ Learn about your cycle and identify your role in the cycle ○

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Daily Recovery Script for Couples

Betraying spouse:

1. Today I've been feeling (e.g., sad, anxious, ashamed, happy):

2. Some challenges I encountered were (triggers):

3. Coping skills I've been using:

4. One thing I have learned about myself is:

5. I'm grateful for:

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Betrayed Spouse:

1. Today I've been feeling:

2. Some challenges I've encountered were (triggers):

3. Self-care or coping I've been utilizing:

4. One way that you could help me would be to:

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Resources

Websites and Blogs

Greater Good Article on Trust & Betrayal on the Gottman method for trust revival

Bloom for Women – Betrayal Trauma course

Betrayal Trauma for Men - Course

Books:

- *Not "Just Friends"* – Shirley Glass
- *Living and Loving After a Betrayal* – Stephen Stosny
- *Intimate Betrayal* – Michael Don Howard
- *Getting Past the Affair* – Douglas K. Snyder, Donald H Baumcom, & Christina Coop Gordon
- *What Makes Love Last?* – John Gottman and Nan Silver
- *How to Help your Spouse Heal from Your Affair* – Linda MacDonald
- *The Book of Forgiving* – Desmond Tutu

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Affair Recovery Checklist (Initial Tasks)

Betraying Partner

- Ending of contact with affair partner (proof)
- Negotiating of access to technology
- Answer all unanswered questions (question format or disclosure). Betrayed partners often have to ask questions repeatedly until they no longer feel the need, and this is an acceptable part of the process and should not be rushed over
- Continual expression of remorse
- Discuss triggers and how to manage them
- Boundaries with affair partner for future contact
- Immediate honesty if betraying partner has contact with affair partner

Betrayed Partner

- Trauma education for partner and betraying spouse
- Individual support for spouse
- Develop self-soothing and boundaries
- Request ending of contact and proof
- Write down a list of questions to be answered
- STD test
- Have access to technology ongoing

Initial Resources

- The book - Not Just Friends by Shirley Glass

THE LOVE SEAT
Counseling & Life Coaching

AFFAIR RECOVERY GUIDE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How setbacks will be handled if they occur?

- Immediate honesty with partner
- Creation of a new or more intensive boundary and treatment plan

2. What about sexual activity?

- Most couples take a break from sexual activity to focus on establishing trust and safety in their relationship. This is negotiated between the couple, but it is not uncommon for couples to cease sexual activity for at least a few months
- **Sexually transmitted infection test is recommended for both partners if there has been infidelity**

3. Who do we tell?

- Select individuals you both agree on, and the level of information to be discussed
- Confidants are trustworthy and supportive of the relationship
- Avoid telling people out of revenge or to hurt the betraying partner, as those individuals may not be supportive if you decide to stay together

4. How often do we communicate about the betrayal?

- An agreed-upon format and ritual can be helpful (e.g., brief check-in daily)
- Avoidance of specific details, as these can trigger trauma reactions for the betrayed partner
- If there is conflict or intense emotion between the couple save the discussion for couple's therapy
- If the conversation is productive still be sure to set some limits or breaks around the conversation to engage in self-care
- Avoid name calling and yelling

5. How do we handle certain questions about the betrayal?

- Avoid asking specific sexual details as these can be traumatizing (e.g., what clothing was s/he wearing?)

6. What will help us to rebuild trust?

Trust is built in small increments of turning toward your partner and being there for them

- Accountability and monitoring (therapy, internet blocker)
- Disclosure
- Responding non-defensively to emotion and anger
- Betraying partner vocalizing the impact s/he has had on their partner
- Taking concrete steps toward change and communicating about these
- Managing triggers for both parties
- Reliability (doing what you say you are going to do, even with tasks unrelated to the betrayal)
- See Brene Brown's BRAVING acronym