

HOW TO COPE WITH AN AFFAIR

By

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When most of us think of an affair, we think of one person cheating on another and our sympathies immediately go to the partner who has been betrayed. However, affairs can be traumatic for both parties. The person who has had the affair often feels guilty and foolish and regrets what he or she has done. While the partner feels hurt and angry and wonders if the person can ever be trusted again.

Affairs don't just '*happen*' out of the blue unless the person is a serial adulterer and has a history of being unfaithful to their partners. In 99% of cases there are many circumstances that contribute to the affair and which both parties may have ignored. One person may feel neglected, unattractive or undesirable and the relationship may have problems, which neither party has addressed – for example, a lack of affection, sexual frustration or poor communication.

In some cases people have found that relationships can recover from an affair and even go on to become stronger than before.

The sooner you spot that your partner is having an affair the sooner you can get to grips with saving your relationship - so

What are the telltale signs of an affair?

Look for changes in partner's behaviour – perhaps your lover begins to neglect you, becomes secretive and starts spending time away while being elusive to get hold of on the phone. These are the most common giveaway signs that someone is having or thinking about having an affair.

In some cases, a partner may become more attentive bringing home presents and suggesting meals out and it is even possible for the sexual side of the relationship to improve. In such cases these changes can be fuelled by the excitement of an illicit affair or by the associated feelings of guilt.

However, it is important not to automatically assume that your partner is having an affair as stress may make someone appear distant or uncommunicative. The important thing is to ask your partner what is happening in a supportive rather than confrontational manner.

So, what do you do if you think your partner is having an affair?

Firstly, be clear and sure about your evidence and then speak to a trusted friend or family member. Remember that you could do great damage to your relationship if you accuse your partner of having an affair when there is a perfectly simple explanation. Look for physical evidence of your partner's affair – credit card bills, cinema tickets, evidence of meals in restaurants as well as different smells on personal items of clothing. In addition, email and text messages often provide such evidence. However, you need to be really concerned that an affair is at the root of your difficulties before resorting to looking for physical evidence – after all, think how would you feel if your partner was snooping around your personal items?

Talk to your partner as soon as you believe you have enough evidence to backup your concerns. Some people think that if they say nothing the affair will stop and everything will get back to normal. In some cases this is true – however, you have to be a pretty emotionally robust person to keep your feelings to yourself. In addition, even if your partner does end

an affair without sorting out the reasons behind why it happened, it only leaves the field open for it to happen again.

When speaking to your partner, approach the subject as calmly as you can – going on the offensive is likely to make the other person withdraw or become defensive rather than get to grips with the reality of the situation. Remember you could be wrong!

Even if your fears prove unfounded, it is worth thinking about why you believed your partner was having an affair? Could it be that that you are insecure and see a threat where none exists? Could it be that you have known that things have not been quite right between you for a while but have not admitted it?

The following tips are aimed at helping you overcome the effects of an affair whether you are the instigator or the one who has found out about it.

What to do if your partner has had the affair

Remember your feelings are normal!

You are likely to feel hurt, angry, sad, depressed, full of disbelief and even somewhat unreal about what you have found out or been told. You may want to interrogate your partner about the other person and feel that you can never trust him or her again. It is often a natural response to want to punish your partner and you may want him or her to leave the house. Many people wonder if the affair happened due to some personal inadequacy, believing that this is the reason behind the affair. In some rare cases you may even feel relieved as you have wanted a way out of the relationship for a long time.

How to heal yourself and your relationship

Start the healing process by expressing your feelings and asking your partner why the affair happened. Remember that an affair is often a sign of a relationship with problems – it is too easy to see the affair as the problem when it is actually the symptom of an ailing relationship. Perhaps there was something lacking in your relationship and this

contributed to what happened? Although this does not excuse your partner's behaviour, it may go some way to explaining it. Take time to discuss whether your relationship can survive and, if so, what needs to change, if anything, to make it work.

You need to give yourself time to come to terms with what has happened and you need to recognise that your desires to punish your partner are quite normal. However, such behaviour could hurt your relationship even more. Find a close friend to confide in and consider whether you need to professional help to enable you, your partner and your relationship to heal.

If your relationship is to survive, you need to forgive your partner. Forgiveness does not happen overnight. However if you are unable to forgive then it is best to end the relationship.

What to do if you are the person who has had the affair

You are the one who has strayed and you may well feel guilty about what you have done. You could also feel confused and may not even be sure why you had the affair. Avoid becoming defensive as a way of avoiding your partner's negative feelings as this will only lead to more

misunderstandings and pain for both of you. Recognise that saying sorry does not mean that your partner will forgive you quickly. You may feel foolish and scared that you have blown your relationship, realising you could lose someone you truly care about. You may come to realise that your partner is not right for you and yet be frightened of the practical and emotional problems that ending a relationship can bring.

How to start the healing process and get your relationship back on track

Regardless of how sorry you are, you have to recognise that your partner needs to come to terms with his or her feelings in their own time.

Although you feel guilty, relationships are healed through action and not through guilt. Show your partner how much he or she means to you by what you do. Be prepared to talk about what happened and try to answer your partner's questions as honestly as possible. Examine your reasons for the affair, take action to correct the cause and work with your partner to create a stronger relationship. Expect your partner to be more possessive for a while. Be honest - if you do not love your partner then work towards as amicable an ending as possible. Interestingly, RELATE the major national relationship counselling service, finds that a significant

amount of their work is in helping couples whose relationships cannot be salvaged to part as amicably as possible.

Professional Help

You might realise that you need professional help. If this is the case, make an appointment to see a couple's counsellor or a relationship coach who can help you explore your difficult feelings and find better ways of being together.

Useful Organisations

If you need further help contact:

BACP (British Association for Counselling and
Psychotherapy)

Tel: 0870 443 5252

Website: www.counselling.co.uk

BABCP (British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive
Psychotherapies)

Website: www.babcp.com

RELATE

Tel: 0870 601 2121

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Association for Coaching

Tel: 020 8566 2400

www.associationforcoaching.com

You may also find it helpful to read 'After the Affair: How to build trust and love again', Julia Cole, Vermillion, £9.99 and Relationship Rescue: Don't Make Excuses! Start Repairing Your Relationship Today, Phillip McGraw, Virgin Books, £5.60.

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