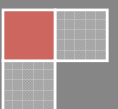




# The **Shocking** Truth About Trust

The Affair Recovery Center



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## The Shocking Truth About Trust

In a recent survey of betrayed spouses, conducted by the Affair Recovery Center, the concept of trust and how to recapture that scarce commodity was by far the most-asked question. In fact, the issue of trust was raised almost twice as much as any other question or issue. Why is that?

Infidelity has a profound impact on unsuspecting mates. Not only does it destroy the essence of their reality, but it also shatters all they hold dear. As human beings, we need others in our lives. Contrary to many current theories, we are not stand-alone beings. Life is not about individuation or differentiation; it's about interdependent relationships. The need for others in our lives is written into the code of our DNA. The truth of this reality is plainly seen in how we administer punishment. What is the most severe punishment we can give a human being? Solitary confinement. Without human contact we simply go insane and die. Little children are placed in time-out and deprived of human contact, because this consequence takes away the fulfillment of their deepest desire. Isolation is a powerful force for altering human behavior. We are meant to be connected.

John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, first confirmed the human need for attachment.<sup>1</sup> This need is apparent in the young child pitching a fit as a parent leaves them in an unfamiliar situation. For this child, life isn't okay unless they can see and feel that secure attachment. They need to know a familiar person is with them. As late as the 1960s, psychological development theory viewed this reaction as a sign of immaturity and weakness and theorized that children outgrew this need and moved into a more mature stage characterized by independence. But in the 90s, research began to dispel this "independence" belief. The same need for attachment displayed by children was just as evident in grown adults. We all are driven to need some form of attachment simply to survive.

Which brings us to the topic of trust. One aspect of a secure attachment is this commodity called *trust*. We need to know the person with whom we share this primary attachment—this trust—is there for us. We need to know that we matter to them. We need to trust that they will respond to us in times of need. We need to know that they care

and will engage with us in our everyday lives. For most adults, this secure attachment is found in our mates—the ones committed to us. The ones who vowed to be there for us in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better and for worse. They promised to be available and connected to us. They promised to put us first in their life, forsaking all others.

Betrayal by the mates who made those vows reveals an ugly reality about our trust: “I wasn’t first in your life. I didn’t matter. You’re not there for me. *You can’t be trusted.*” When the one who vowed to be our secure attachment deceives us and chooses someone (or something) else instead of us, what happens to that deep trust we depended on? What happens to that attachment? What do we do?

## **Harsh Reality and Loss of Trust**

Those on the receiving end of marital infidelity are dealing with a harsh reality. One thing’s for certain—no matter how they may initially respond, they aren’t crazy. They may be extremely wounded and their world shattered, but whatever their reaction to this abandonment, it’s normal. Like a child exploding with pain, when a secure attachment dissolves, the betrayed spouse is rocked with pain and copes as best as he or she knows how in the moment of despair. For many, the greatest hurt is the loss of stability, security, and identity. The pain is overwhelming, leaving the hurt spouse with limited alternatives as to where to turn. Loyalty bonds only complicate their circumstances. Not wanting to respond to their mate’s betrayal in like kind, they may struggle with whom to tell in their attempt to protect those they’ve committed to (even though that person has failed in their loyalty to them). Where does one turn?

The damage done can even extend beyond the current relationship. The hurt can go so deep it prevents the injured spouse from feeling they can ever trust anyone again. Who in their right mind would ever want to go through that type of trauma? Ironically, only the healthy ones—those who were capable and willing to attach to someone—can even feel the pain. People who were never able to attach in the first place rarely feel the pain from infidelity. They have no loss at the point of betrayal because they never had anything invested to lose. Only those who know how to love and how to connect can experience the pain, but then the intensity of that pain discourages them from ever

wanting to love again—and not just their mate; they may not want to ever trust again, period. They recoil at the very thought of vulnerability and the risk of hurting this way ever again.

## **The Three Steps to Trust**

For the betrayed spouse, there are three critical considerations when trust in the relationship is broken. Before they can even consider re-establishing trust, their most immediate needs are:

1. Discover how to deal with the immediate pain and stress caused by the betrayal.
2. Develop a belief that your mate is fully committed to the relationship
3. Determine the probabilities of the betrayal ever happening again.

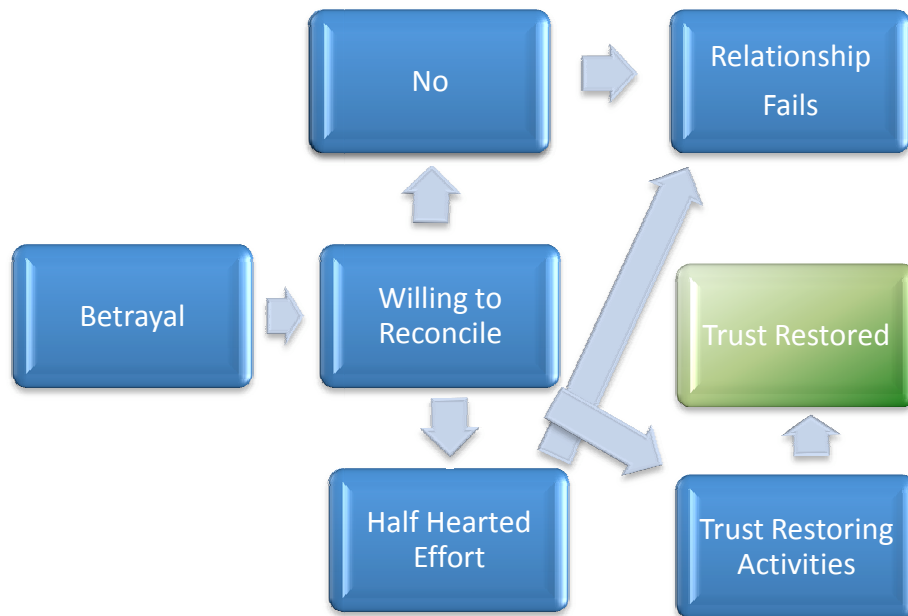
Whether or not the hurt spouse is even willing to consider reconciliation and trusting again will depend on the answer to this second question. If the unfaithful spouse seems unwilling to make the necessary efforts to right the wrong and work at minimizing future violations, then the hurt spouse will find little incentive to attempt reconciliation and restore trust.

Trust and forgiveness are not the same. I can forgive someone but still not consider him or her safe enough to trust. In the case of infidelity, before I'll trust, I need to know that I matter to you, that you'll be responsive to me, and that you want to be there for me. Without these conditions in place, there is little on which to base trust. Before we willingly move toward a reconciliation of hearts, we want to know that the person who broke their commitment to us is again trustworthy and safe. We need to see our mate actively taking the steps necessary to restore trust.

This report will help both partners begin to discover what must happen between them now that the infidelity has been disclosed. The following pages spell out what needs to be accomplished for trust to be restored. This document has three sections: (1) advice for the hurt spouse on how to trust again, (2) advice for the unfaithful spouse on what to do to help your partner redevelop trust in you, and (3) a brief summary on additional help available for both spouses. All I ask is, stay on your side of the street. Don't go telling your mate what they need to do. At most, just ask them to read their part of this report.

In the graphic below, you will see how the process of re-establishing trust after betrayal can work. Along the way, there are crucial decisions each of you must make: "Am I willing to try to reconcile?" If so, "Am I willing to put the time and effort into the trust-restoring

activities spelled out in this report?” You can see where the answers to these decisions will take you.



# Chapter 1

## Advice for the Betrayed Spouse

*It's not time that heals, rather it's how you choose to spend that time that matters.*

—Leslie Hardie

How do you restore a broken trust? Even more, why try once your trust is betrayed? For the sake of brevity, I'm only going to address how it's done and how to tell if the relationship is safe enough to trust. Much more could be said about motivation, but I'll leave that for a future report.

As mentioned earlier, there are three primary issues you have to settle before you can trust your unfaithful partner again: (1) discover how to deal with the immediate pain caused by the betrayal and (2) Develop a believe your mate is fully recommitted to the relationship (3) determine the probabilities of the betrayal ever happening again. If you don't have a sense of safety, trust is ill- advised. By safety here, I mean that you believe you can continue to deal with the infidelity and your spouse without needing to control him or her and not feeling as if a surprise waits around every corner, because your mate is taking responsibility for their actions and is making efforts to stop the hurtful behavior. To trust without safety is blind trust, which serves no good purpose except to enable someone you love to continue in hurtful behavior—and to open up yourself to a world of hurt.

So what is trust and how is it developed? Changingminds.org provides the following definition: "Trust is both an emotional and logical act. Emotionally, it is where you expose your vulnerabilities to people, but believing they will not take advantage of your openness. Logically, it is where you have assessed the probabilities of gain and loss, calculating expected utility based on hard performance data, and concluded that the person in question will behave in a predictable manner."<sup>2</sup> Marriage is just that. It's a willingness to be fully known and a willingness to fully know another. It's a relationship where with our heart we hold the gift of our mate, like a fragile gem, to be cared for only in a way that leaves us both feeling spiritually filled.

Marriage is where, for love's sake, we risk giving another person the opportunity to injure us. At the same time, it is a *calculated* risk, based on past experience with our lover. We believe we know how they will respond and have determined them to be trustworthy.



Obviously, when trust is broken, we feel taken advantage of and deeply wounded. We begin to question our own judgment. “How could I have been so blind or deceived?” Therefore, before trust can be restored, your heart has to heal, and enough time has to pass before you can logically conclude this person who betrayed you is again trustworthy. Until you come to a place where you can move beyond the pain of the betrayal, you’ll find it difficult to trust them, even if you want to.

## **Part I**

### **Overcoming the Pain**

As unfair as it may seem, much of the work in dealing with the pain and stress of betrayal is the responsibility of the hurt spouse. The unfaithful mate can assist the process by making amends, stopping hurtful behaviors, listening, helping to create safety, even taking responsibility for their problem—but they can’t do the work of grieving or processing the losses. That piece, sadly, is left for you. The following are suggestions for moving beyond the pain. These are not a progression of steps so much as a group of tasks or actions you face in moving forward toward trust.

### **Realize It’s Not Your Fault**

All marriages have problems. In many ways, that may be one of their greatest benefits. You probably aren’t perfect either, but you must realize that nothing you do (or did) causes another person’s actions, including your spouse’s. We all have free will, and most of us certainly are not victims. Now, please don’t hear me say that you don’t need to prayerfully consider the ways you failed to respond in love to your mate. If you want to move forward and grow from this experience, when the time is right you need to honestly examine the places where you fell short in your marriage, but don’t shoulder the blame for what someone else has done. You have plenty to cope with without taking responsibility for the actions and consequences your mate needs to manage. Make sure you have a clear understanding of the responsibility—what’s yours and what’s theirs.

## Accept That Life's Not Fair

Be willing to let go of your belief that life should be fair. Personal experience teaches all of us this is a lie. Unrealistic expectations will only increase your pain and stress. You can never even begin to put this betrayal in a fairness paradigm. If an innocent bystander is standing on the side of a road and gets hit by a car, they've certainly done nothing to deserve what happened. However, if they survive, they still have to do the necessary physical therapy to recover and have good quality of life.

If you decide you'd like to have a meaningful relationship in the future, either with your current mate or with a new spouse, you must do the work to heal the wounds of the betrayal.

## Understand Trust vs. Safety

Contrary to popular belief, trust isn't the most important component to a secure marriage—*safety* is. You can always replace trust with a whole lot of honest communication if you have a safe environment in which to do it.

Trust can actually put a marriage at risk. Assume you have an employee who you trust. Will you have less or more communication with them? Typically, it would be less because you know you can trust them. Trust, it turns out, is one of the contributing factors to affairs. Peggy Vaughan, in her book *The Monogamy Myth*, makes the point that trusting the institution of marriage and making the assumption that we will naturally stay faithful, leave marriages at risk. Rather than being cautious and honestly communicating about risky situations, we pretend all is well, assume we can handle it and place the relationship in jeopardy.<sup>3</sup> We would be far better served by a little less trust and a lot more honest communication.

On the other hand, a focus on safety lays out a doable path for couples in crisis. Accept that trust may be a while in coming but that you don't need trust to move forward. Instead, *focus on making the relationship safe*. Discover new ways to communicate your fears and concerns. Find others who have already recovered from a similar situation and learn from their mistakes and successes. Initially, make safety your aim. If you do, then the trust will come.

## **Discover the Difference between Faith and Trust**

If I ask my wife whether or not she trusts me, she'll almost always respond, "No, but I do trust God, and I trust God with you."

Trust and faith have a lot in common. Personally, I believe that faith is an organ of the soul, just like my eyes or ears are organs of my body. My eyes were never intended to generate light; rather, they were intended to *perceive* light. My ears were never intended to generate sound; they were intended to *perceive* sound. If they begin to generate sound, that will certainly drive me a bit crazy.

In the same way, faith is an organ of my soul and was never intended to generate the work of God; rather, it was intended to *perceive* the work of God. Our problem begins when we focus our faith on something unstable. If we place our faith on our ability to handle this betrayal, then that should scare us to death. If we focus our faith on our mate's ability to get it right, we'll probably have a panic attack. We have to place our faith in something solid if we want to eliminate fear, and we do have to eliminate fear before trust is rebuilt.

Faith allows for a firm footing regardless of your mate. It is separate and apart from him or her and provides a stable anchor as you deal with life's struggles. Extending trust to your mate requires an inner strength and stability that can come from a stable faith in God. Like love, trust requires risk, and may require your own healing before you can once again extend that gift. Faith will help you walk that path.

## **Refuse to Mistrust**

Here's a joke I heard many years ago: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the light bulb has to want to change—real bad. That is certainly true of trust.

As a young boy, I remember overhearing my dad talking to a good friend who owned a trucking business. Apparently, one of his truckers hadn't paid attention to the height on an overpass and had destroyed the rig. For a six-year-old boy, this was riveting stuff, as the man described the process of getting his truck out from under the bridge.

I also remember Dad asking his friend if he had fired the driver. "Heck no," he replied, "Why would I want another trucking company to benefit from the \$75,000 education I just paid for this driver? He won't ever make that mistake again." My dad's friend actually trusted

this guy. How did that happen? What I've observed through the years is that trust isn't the problem—it's the mistrust that kills you.

Trust is a choice in the same way that forgiveness or love is a choice. I don't qualify for trust any more than I qualify for love. It's a gift that is given and undeserved. Who in our lives hasn't disappointed someone, including us? To err is human, and to fail is a natural part of our condition. If relationships are based on others getting it right, then you'll be lonely indeed. Even worse, if trust is based on getting it right, then you can't even trust yourself. An honest self-examination reveals that little separates us from others—that there's a bit of good in the worst of us and a bit of bad in the best of us.

Now, please don't think I'm saying that putting yourself in an unsafe relationship is a good idea or that it's required for your healing. Many is the time I've told a man or woman they needed a psychiatric exam if they planned to reconcile with a mate who had just destroyed them. Some people just aren't safe and have no real motivation to change. These are the folks who, as sure as I'm writing these words, will do it again. They'll say they're going to change and may even mean it, but their pride or their lack of healthy motivation will eventually cause them to fail. So let me repeat: *I'm not saying to stay with someone who's not willing to do whatever is necessary to be safe.*

However, we do want to live and experience life, and the price we pay for mistrust is disconnection from both self and others. If I live in a self-protective mode, never taking risks, then I rob myself of life itself. Even if you and your mate don't reconcile, you don't want to carry mistrust into a future relationship. The last thing any of us want to do is join the "walking dead." This quote from C.S. Lewis describes the state of a mistrustful heart:

"Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. . . . It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. . . . The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."<sup>4</sup>

To honor yourself you need to (to the best of your ability) make sure the one you love is taking personal responsibility for their side of the street, and that they've made an active decision to be safe enough for you. In fact, ironically, what frequently makes them a good candidate

for re-establishing trust is their distrust of themselves. Personally, I know the only way I can be safe enough for Stephanie is to know that I'm more than capable of wounding those I love, and that I'll do whatever I can to avoid putting myself in a high-risk situation where failure could happen. Often, I think it's my mistrust of myself that allows Stephanie to feel safe. I suspect if I trusted me, then it might be more difficult for her to trust me.

Some of you may be thinking that my lack of trust in myself might be used as an excuse to act out, but it isn't if the lack of trust is based on acceptance of who and what I am, as well as my limitations. On the other hand, if my lack of trust in myself is shame-based, then the odds are that I will act out. Shame and acceptance are mutually exclusive. With shame, I find myself unacceptable and live in a constant state of fear of being found out and people discovering what a loser I truly am. With acceptance, I see my limitations and begin to live in solutions rather than needing to deny the problem.

Now, I'm not saying that distrust in oneself (the betrayer) is the same thing as you mistrusting your spouse. This section, after all, is about you not mistrusting. When your unfaithful spouse is distrusting themselves, recognizing their limitations, accepting the fact that they acted out and are capable of doing it again, they will be less likely to wound you further. And you will be more likely to avoid mistrusting them—opening yourself up to the possibility of trusting again.

Jesus tells an interesting parable about a man sowing seed. Some of the seed fell on the path and was eaten by birds. Some fell on rocky ground and quickly sprang up, only to wither in the sun because the roots were unable to go deep into the soil. Still more fell in good soil, but the weeds and grasses choked it out. The rest fell on good soil, where it produced a good crop.<sup>5</sup>

When betrayal occurs and people begin to seek help, a seed is sown. Some do nothing. Others start, but have no follow-through. Others begin the journey and do great for a while, but other problems eventually distract them and their commitment falters. Yet a large percentage of people do learn and grow. They honestly look at what they've done, grieve, accept what's happened, and allow God to transform their loss and pain into something better than they ever dreamed.

If in time you see sustained progress in your mate, then ultimately you've got to confront yourself and ask if you're willing to take a risk. Are you willing to live and join the dance called life? Healing is not about our mates getting it perfect; it is about all of us, out of love, choosing to be safe enough for our mates. Don't be foolish and trust someone who's not trustworthy, but at the same time, don't destine yourself, out of fear, to a life of isolation. You don't yet trust your mate, but don't mistrust to the point of harming yourself. Instead, I do encourage you to trust God. Then if and when it's time to move forward, you seize the day, take the plunge, and go for it.

## **Understand the Relationship between Trust and Intimacy**

Intimacy is a willingness to let another know who you are and a willingness to fully know another person. I've found intimacy development to be crucial in re-establishing trust.

Surprisingly, most couples, after the revelation of an affair, (if the unfaithful mate is honest and grieves over what they've done to their mate) experience a vastly improved sex life. In fact, it's not uncommon for couples to report that it's the best sex they've ever had. One contributing factor to this phenomenon is a newfound intimacy stemming from honesty. At its root, infidelity is the keeping of secrets, and to the extent we keep secrets, we inhibit our ability to be intimate.

A hurt spouse wants to know, "How can I ever trust them again and know whether or not they are cheating? They did such a good job lying to me the first time, how will I be able to tell if they're doing it again?" The answer to these questions lies in "intimacy."

Couples who achieve new levels of intimacy in the wake of an affair create a new barometer by which to determine which way the weather in the relationship is turning. Typically, affairs don't just happen. Instead, often there is a long, slow process during which a couple drifts apart. If you weren't watching your levels of intimacy in the past, this likely contributed to the affair. Therefore, monitoring your newfound marital attachment and—the intimacy you have discovered by being honest—helps you both tune in to any problems and assess in advance whether or not there is a risk for another betrayal. With honesty, intimacy, and openness in place, most people are able to sense a disconnection and begin to address the issue long before someone gets

to the point of acting out. Use your new sense of connection as a way to know whether or not it's safe to push further into the relationship.

## **Barriers to Trust**

As I address a few of the most common barriers to trust, please don't think I'm saying what's happened is your fault or that you're the problem. I just want to point out a few of the common barriers to moving back into a trusting relationship.

## **Unforgiveness and Vengeance**

Don't confuse forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself and sets you free from the hurtful actions of another. It is an action whereby you free yourself from being a prisoner of the past to a liberated person at peace with your memories, even if they are painful. Forgiveness also is a part of the process you need to undergo in order to heal from the damage created by your mate's infidelity. Reconciliation is dependent on forgiveness, but forgiveness is not dependent on reconciliation.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. It is a process that takes time; it is not a one-time event. Forgiveness is a conscious decision whereby you determine to let go of your mate's offense. It's not something taken lightly or done too quickly. To those who may be thinking you will never forgive, I explain the truth of forgiveness in an attempt to get you to reconsider your position. In our treatment of thousands of hurt spouses, a common theme has been either forgiving too quickly or failing to forgive. Both of these approaches cripple the hurt spouse, greatly decreasing their probabilities of having a meaningful trusting relationship in the future, with their spouse or a future potential mate.

Many mistakenly believe that if they can make their mate hurt as badly as they have, then somehow that will ease their pain—but it doesn't. Vengeance only creates further hurt and pain for the injured mate. Don't mistakenly believe that vengeance somehow makes your mate safe and decreases the probability of the betrayal happening again. Vengeance leaves you in a prison where you have to play jailer to keep your mate in prison. It effectively leaves you tied to someone you obviously don't trust. Forgiveness at least can set you free to observe whether or not your mate can ever be safe enough for trust and/or reconciliation.

It is our position at the Affair Recovery Center that reconciliation is dependent on safety. And safety is best determined by the heart attitudes of the offending mate and their response to the betrayal. To err is human; we're all guilty of acting in ways that are contrary to love and have wounded those we love. In fact, we've all done things that later we realized we didn't even want to do, but our responses to these hurtful actions reveal whether or not that person we hurt can be safe in a future relationship.

Before moving toward trust, you must first ease your own pain by granting yourself the gift of forgiveness. Your healing will never be complete until you can be free from the potential resentments created by the betrayal. Don't allow your impulse for vengeance to tie you to an unsafe person and to act in ways that will harm yourself. As the old saying goes, "Bitterness is the poison we take to kill another person." So ease your pain by releasing the offense.

### **God Concept**

Another barrier to trust is our God concept. I realize some of you may not even believe in God, but I'd encourage you to still see how this might apply.

To start, I'd like you to answer the following questions according to how you feel about God in your worst moment, *not* what you think about God.

- When I think about God I feel . . .
- When I have to trust God I feel . . .
- When I think about God I wish . . .
- Sometimes I get angry at God when . . .
- It frustrates me when God wants me to . . .
- The one thing I would change about myself to please God is . . .
- One thing that frightens me about God is . . .
- The one thing I'm afraid God will do is . . .



Recently a woman in my office filled out this questionnaire and answered as follows:

- When I think about God I feel **like I'm never good enough.**
- When I have to trust God I feel **he's going to let me down.**
- When I think about God I wish **he'd be there for me.**
- Sometimes I get angry at God when **he's demanding.**
- It frustrates me when God wants me to **give up control.**
- The one thing I would have to change about myself to please God is **to give up what I want.**
- One thing that frightens me about God is **him telling me what a disappointment I am.**
- The one thing I'm afraid God will do is **make me do something I'm afraid of.**

After she completed her test, I told her I had some great news: “Jesus is in the next room and I’ve reserved thirty minutes for you, but before you go in, I should warn you that he’s going to make you feel like a total loser and that he won’t follow through with anything he promises, so don’t be fooled. He’s going to be terribly demanding and will make you give up all control of your life. He’s also going to force you to give up all that you hold dear and will tell you that you’re nothing but a disappointment. Finally, he’s going to give you an impossible task, and he’ll inform you that any hope of a future relationship with him is dependent on the successful completion of that assignment.”

She paused a moment thinking about what I said, then responded, “You can have my time.” I laughed and answered, “You know this isn’t like God, but I do want to know who in your life made you feel like you were a loser and let you down and failed to be there when you most needed them. Who was demanding and made you give up control? Who was it that made you give up the things you held dear and told you that you were a disappointment?” “That was my mother,” she exclaimed.

Our God concept and our ability to trust is bequeathed by the authority figures in our life during our formative years. It turns out we have both

a subjective and objective concept of God. Objectively we can know God is love and is trustworthy, but our subjective feelings about God are created by those authority figures. If the authority figures in your early life proved to be unsafe and untrustworthy, then you'll find it extremely difficult to trust. And if your mate served as one of the few people you had ever trusted, then you can imagine how devastating the betrayal can be and how it can severely damage your ability to trust again. If you find yourself in such a situation, you will need to find additional help to even learn how to trust anyone again because of past damage in your life.

## **Part II**

### **Is Your Mate committed?**

Without a belief that your mate is fully committed to the relationship, it will be next to impossible to fully trust. I use the word "belief" intentionally. It's not just a matter of "thinking" they might be committed to you, it's coming to the point where you can believe it. Trusting, without believing your mate will act in the best interest of the relationship, is difficult at best. Are they going to be committed?

### **Honesty**

For the injured mate, the willingness of the unfaithful spouse to be honest is the bottom line when determining commitment. For Stephanie (my wife), my willingness to share the whole truth and nothing but the truth was the starting place. Attempts on my part to manipulate and control her reactions by the flow of information, or by spinning the truth, only exposed my lack of commitment. My commitment had to be to her and not to my affair partner, addiction or image.

Commitment is expressed through a willingness to reveal all. If infidelity is the keeping of secrets, then the relinquishment of those secrets reveals a fresh commitment to the marriage. Until there is truthfulness and all secrets are revealed, the unfaithful mate's commitment to the relationship will remain suspect. Your mate's willingness to bare all is one of the first signs of their commitment to you and to the relationship. Just remember, it's a difficult process and typically the information will come out over time.

## **Being All In**

By nature marriage is full of ambivalence. There are always two parts of us. The one that loves and wants to live for another and a part that wants to seek our own personal desires. (which is always at the expense of those we're in relationship with). Being "all in" isn't about getting rid of a normal human condition. As the author of Genesis wrote, it was God who put the tree of the "Knowledge of Good and Evil" in the garden. Therefore having a part of us which wants something different is a normal part of the human condition.

Being all in is often seen in a willingness to sever unhealthy loyalties and a commitment to seek what's healthy for the relationship. For instance: being willing to give up privacy, or traditions for the sake of the marriage. Being willing to do whatever it takes to protect the marriage. When you witness these types of actions it is apparent your mate is trying to be all in.

## **Part III**

### **Determining Future Risk**

Before determining if your mate can be trusted again, consider the following points. Remember, reconciliation is based on safety, and without reconciliation there is no need to trust. The following are factors to evaluate as you consider reconciliation and trust.

### **Response Patterns**

When a trust is broken, unfaithful spouses have three basic responses:

1. They will deny their actions or state that their behavior is problematic. In fact, if you're hurt by what they've done, it's somehow your problem. They'll say you just need to get over it.
2. They will admit what they've done might be a problem, but they're not sure. In fact, they may seem confused. Maybe they should change, but maybe not; they're just not sure. Maybe it's your problem, not theirs; they just don't know. They aren't willing to do anything. They seem powerless to take any action. They may agree to take action, but there is little or no follow-through.
3. They take responsibility for their actions, state they're willing to do whatever it takes to address the problem, and come up with a plan to make that happen.

If your mate falls in the first category, then my recommendation would be to run. I would suggest this person isn't safe to trust.

If your mate is in the second category, your situation is not hopeless, but move carefully. Until they know what they want, you can never determine whether or not they're safe.

If your mate falls in the third category, then there's hope, but only time will tell. Are they willing to make the necessary effort to right the wrong or to minimize the probability of future violations? If not, then you'll find little incentive to attempt reconciliation and restore trust. If they are taking responsibility and addressing their personal issues and the damage caused by the betrayal, then they're moving in the right direction.

***A word of caution:*** When I say it will take time, I mean it will take *time*. Trust is not something redeveloped in a month or two. Often it takes months, if not years, to feel safe enough to trust a spouse after betrayal. It takes time to heal and time to assess if your mate is sincere in their efforts to reestablish the marriage. At the same time, moving toward healing and trust is not a passive sport. As the hurt spouse, you have to take action to both heal and trust. It would be tragic to decide to stay in a marriage never fully committing or trusting. If you're going to commit to stay in a marriage, then true love makes every attempt to trust once again. You want to face fear, have the courage to love, and to allow yourself to be loved.

## **The Problem With Pride**

As a recovering addict, I believe I can buy all the freedom I want, but the only currency I can use is my pride. I have to be able to understand that I'm not in control, that life's not about me. Rather, I'm supposed to be about life, and understand that I'm not that important. I want to be able escape my own self-centered kingdom and begin to consider how my actions impact others. I want to learn how to love. I want to be able to be broken.

Pride, on the other hand, considers only self and asks, "What is this going to cost me?" Pride is only interested in what others think about them, not what they think about others. It's self-seeking, self-serving, and void of love.

As you move forward, consider the role of pride in your mate's life. People can and do change. Often this sort of failure allows them to see

their own shortcomings. If, on the other hand, they are still more concerned with what others think of them, then be cautious. They have yet to hit bottom.

### **Whatever It Takes (WIT)**

WIT is a small phrase, and what I frequently hear as couples begin their journey: “I’ll do whatever it takes.” WIT is a great idea, but rarely is it true. It’s not a lack of sincerity that’s the problem; rather, most people are only willing to do “whatever it takes” up to the point where they think change will occur.

If you feel your mate isn’t doing what it will take, then be cautious, but don’t lose hope. Research indicates that a failure to do “whatever it takes” may well result in some form of relapse, but that relapse may actually serve as the motivating force to get them to really do what it takes next time around.

### **Community of Healing**

One of the strongest indicators of future safety is your mate’s willingness to be a part of a community of healing. Inviting others into their life and seeking help beyond their own limited understanding is a great sign. In large part, my personal journey has been sustained by a band of brothers who constantly encourage and exhort me. Their experiences juxtaposed against mine allow me new ways of understanding my journey and my mate. Their presence in my life helps me keep my eye on the ball. Their struggles remind me of my own humanity, and our failures remind us all of our need for ongoing vigilance in our walk.

I recommend that your mate find others who have walked in their shoes and successfully navigated the difficult issues. A willingness to open up with others about current failures is another indicator of your mate creating an environment for your future safety.

### **Continue Reading**

Maybe the best way to determine your future safety is to read the rest of this report. The next section is the advice I give to unfaithful

partners. I believe it can serve to help you identify what you're looking for.

However, I would issue a word of caution: Please don't use the next section as a way to justify moving forward too quickly. You can never tell the end of the story by what's happening in the beginning—only time will tell. Most people don't even have a clue as to how to respond in these difficult times. Only when they begin to understand what they've done can they even begin to know how to respond. Hopefully, they've never been in this place before now, so how in the world would they know how to respond? At the very least, they need to stop the harmful behavior and begin to address the damage they've inflicted upon you.

In the final section, you'll find suggestions for ways to find many of the necessary tools for healing. Please don't give up; there is hope.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Regaining Trust:**

#### **Advice for the Unfaithful Spouse**

You cannot make your mate trust you, but if you would like to regain their trust, there are actions you can take to create the necessary safety for them to redevelop trust with you. Whether or not they choose to trust is up to them, but at least you can help with their healing.

If you had to build a house, would you choose to place it on sand or on solid rock? Having worked in construction, I can assure you that solid rock beats the heck out of sand. If you've been unfaithful and your mate is in the process of having to rebuild the house, then you want to give them that solid rock for the reconstruction project. What follows are suggestions for how to provide a safe foundation for the rebuilding process. If you can provide that rock for your mate to build on, it will enhance your mate's ability to regain trust.

I realize that some of you reading this are also wounded by what led you to this place where you're conflicted about what you want and whether or not you could ever trust your mate. You're not alone; many people in your situation struggle with the same thing. However, in my mind, love compels us to act in the best interest of another, so I encourage you to at least help your mate heal from the damage caused by your decisions. I hope, in return, they will someday read this section and help you heal so that you can also come to a place of trust.

As mentioned in the earlier sections, there are three issues for the injured mate. First, they must deal with the immediate pain and stress caused by the infidelity. Second, They must come to believe their mate is committed to the relationship. Third, they must determine the probabilities of a betrayal ever happening again. Until these three issues are addressed, it's improbable that the hurt mate can move toward trusting their partner.

### **Part I**

#### **Dealing with the Immediate Pain**

For that reason, there are many things you can do to help facilitate a trusting relationship. Here are some actions you can take to help your

mate deal with the initial pain and stress following discovery of the betrayal.

## **Create Safety**

As the unfaithful spouse, your first step toward creating safety for your mate is to do whatever is necessary to stop the behavior that created the problem. Stop the source of the pain. If it's an affair, cut off all contact. If it's an inappropriate relationship, again, cut off all contact. If it's pornography, stop looking at the porn. If your goal is to help ease your mate's pain and regain their trust, then you first must stop whatever behavior is causing them to see you as untrustworthy.

No effort, or weak effort, to stop the behavior doesn't elicit trust or help with your mate's pain or stress. However, corrective efforts set the process for healing in motion. Cutting off contact, sharing about any contact with the other party, providing access to email accounts, or being willing to change a cell number are all behaviors that communicate loyalty to your mate.

## **Take Responsibility**

To facilitate healing for your mate, let them know you care how your actions have impacted them. Take responsibility for your actions and the consequences that followed. Whether or not there is a future for the marriage, for the sake of the injured mate, help lay a foundation for their future relationships. Your responses have a profound impact on their ability to trust again.

1. *Take responsibility for what you've done.* Let them know you realize it was wrong. Don't blame your mate for your actions. Don't act as the defense attorney for your hurtful behavior. If you do, then most likely your mate will be compelled to play prosecuting attorney, and until they feel *you* understand what you've done, they will continue to present their case. Instead, if you just take responsibility for your actions at the beginning, then your mate can begin to address other issues.
2. *Be a safe vessel for your mate's anger.* Years ago I found a dead flower arrangement outside my office door. The attached card read as follows:

*I'm so angry at my dad for the ways he took advantage of me. I'm angry at my husband because he doesn't know how to help me. I'm*



*angry at all the boys in high school who took advantage of me. I'm angry at all the good boys in high school because they never had anything to do with me. I'm angry at Dr. Hayden because he doesn't know I need to see him, and I'm really angry with you for taking too long to return your phone calls. Besides, you're the only one it's safe to be angry with, is that okay?*

That may well have been the greatest compliment I've ever received. It was a blessing to be able to let this wounded woman have her anger and not take it personally. For years she had needed someone who would let her safely release her anger and not shame her. Having that point of safety is part of what allowed her to begin to trust again. You can do the same for your mate if you will just let them experience their anger and not get defensive or attack back. Just listen.

3. *Express grief over what your actions have cost your spouse.* Saying you're sorry does little to soothe the pain of the injured party. As my wife would remind me each time I said I was sorry: "You're sorry all right," "You're just sorry you got caught," or "You're just sorry what your actions are going to cost you." In retrospect, I realize she was right. If losing my relationship was my greatest concern, then my actions were driven by fear of what they might cost me. Twenty-four years ago I decided I would not say, "I'm sorry"; instead I would say, "I was wrong." Funny, in the past twenty-four years, my wife has never disagreed with me one time when I said I was wrong.

To help promote healing and to ease your mate's pain, express grief over what your actions have cost them. If you can communicate an understanding of what you've done to them—and your grief over that cost—then they can at least begin to see that you care.

4. *Make amends.* Making amends is not about saying you're sorry; rather, it's about your willingness to make restitution for the damage done. Letting the other person know you're willing to do what you can to help them recover communicates that you at least have some integrity and decency. It also begins to set the foundation for building a new trust. We all make mistakes, but do you want to be in a relationship with someone who's unwilling to acknowledge their failure and unwilling to try to make things right? Let them know your desire to do whatever is necessary to make things right between you.

The importance of amends isn't dependant on the future of a marriage. If I hit a parked car then decency would require my taking responsibility for the repair. Wounding another by breaking relational commitments is no different. I need to take responsibility to do what I can to help them heal. At the same time, if there is no future for the marriage, then obviously the goal isn't to heal the relationship, but I do want to contribute to the healing of the individual. If there is no future marriage, then I may have little or no desire for reconciliation, but my desire will be for their healing.

5. *Commit to address the problem.* It's not enough to just take responsibility for wounding your mate. They also need to see that you loath your behavior in the same way they do, and they need to witness action on your part to eliminate the problem. The ability to see the betrayal in the same light allows the two of you to become partners fighting against a common enemy. Efforts you make to this end serve as proof that you're both on the same page when it comes to trying to protect the relationship. More importantly, if you are the one setting up the plan and following through, then you begin to provide the necessary ingredients for trust to grow.
6. *Express your desire to reconcile the relationship.* I've never liked the phrase "Will you forgive me?" because it tends to put a moral imperative on the other person. Many is the time I've heard someone say (and usually it was me), "Okay, I've asked you to forgive me. What else do you want?" as if there's something wrong with the person who won't forgive even after being asked. The lack of empathy and concern shown in that attitude certainly doesn't facilitate the development of trust.

At the same time, asking for forgiveness signifies our desire for a continued relationship, and without that there is little motivation on the hurt spouse's part to move toward working on trust. So, instead of saying, "Will you forgive me?" when I mess up, I've learned to tell my wife, "I hope you'll be able to forgive me. I recognize I don't deserve that, but I certainly hope you will forgive me." Always remember forgiveness is more for their sake than yours. Failure to forgive leaves your mate trapped in this horrible circumstance. You want to do all you can to help set them free from the pain of the betrayal.

### **Exhibit Empathy**

The shock and pain caused by betrayal is totally disorienting. It's more than just hurt feelings; for many it's literally a physical pain. Until you can communicate concern for what your actions have cost your mate and can demonstrate an understanding of how the infidelity has impacted them, then it's difficult at best for the hurt spouse to feel the necessary safety for trust. Remember, it's not about being able to fully understand; rather it's about a willingness to make the effort to understand their pain and loss. That effort acknowledges their wound and displays concern and caring for their plight. Without this it's difficult to answer the questions, "Do I really matter to you?" "Do you really care for me?"

For many this is the single largest sticking point to trust. I've seen couples who, seventeen years after the affair, still stuck at ground zero because the hurt spouse is either still waiting for their mate to "get it," or still trying to make them "get it." When the unfaithful spouse is able to communicate that they "get it," then the hurt spouse can finally exhale and begin to move toward their mate, because now they feel safe.

## **Part II**

### **Are You Committed?**

#### **Truthfulness**

Commitment is best communicated by a willingness to share what you know your mate would want to know. Until your mate understands what's happened and knows that you're willing to let them in on the secrets there will be little sense of relational commitment on your part. You'll either be committed to your mate in this process or you'll be committed to protecting self and others. Infidelity is the keeping of secrets and there can never be a sense of fidelity until you can share the story of what has happened.

Recently, an injured wife in my office stressed how she couldn't trust her mate if she didn't know the truth. Obviously a key factor to rebuilding trust is truth. As long as "the truth" is unknown, the unfaithful spouse will be perceived as lying and undeserving of trust. It might seem simple, but "the truth will set you free," and it's the first step to rebuilding trust.

Some of you may wonder if this step contradicts the first goal of helping your mate deal with the pain and stress, but I assure you it doesn't. Until the injured mate feels they have the truth, the pain and stress remain. Knowing the truth allows them to finally move beyond trying to figure everything out. Frequently they need to know how bad it really was before they can put it behind them.

The difficulty for the hurt partner lies in wondering if they've been told the truth, especially as it relates to a topic as volatile as infidelity. And even if they have been told the truth, can they trust it's the whole truth and nothing but the truth when there has been a history of deceit. Even worse, for most couples, in the discovery stage the unfaithful spouse keeps seeking out information for months. Just because someone says, "I've told you everything," why would they believe it if that claim's been made multiple times before?

For many, the discovery process produces anxiety. Those of us who have been unfaithful want to be believed and trusted, and those who have been deceived want the right to question, and certainly want to avoid, once again, being played the fool.

The solution lies in establishing what the truth really is. Generally this is accomplished by the unfaithful spouse willingly providing information in a non-defensive manner. The unfaithful spouse's willingness to answer difficult and painful questions helps the hurt spouse sense a concern for healing and a loyalty to the marriage. That small action is the beginning of establishing a new trust.

If, however, when the unfaithful mate withholds information or responds defensively, then typically the hurt spouse will have trouble believing they have all the truth and to the extent they feel you are still withholding truth they will still feel you're not committed to them or to this relationship. If the inquiry about what happened drags out, there will be general mistrust about your commitment.. The longer it takes to get the truth out, the longer it will take to re-establish trust.

## **Part III**

## **The Question of Risk**

The second issue your mate is dealing with is determining whether you will be unfaithful to them again. Helping your mate answer this question will help create a foundation for safety, and ultimately trust. Multiple factors contribute to our views on whether or not betrayal will occur again. For the injured spouse, words are cheap. They don't want promises; rather, they want to see your commitment expressed through action. They want to know their mate grieves over what was done to them. They want their mate to take responsibility for their actions. Here are some questions and issues for you to consider that will express these actions to your mate.

### **Be Consistent**

When redeveloping trust, few factors carry more weight than consistency. Research has proven that we have to follow through on our commitments nine times out of ten if we are going to be considered trustworthy. If that ratio falls below five to one then we begin to see that other person as untrustworthy. Sadly, most men are consistent only about 53% of the time. Obviously that ratio falls far short of helping establish trustworthiness. Recovery from infidelity requires a strong commitment to consistency. Failure to make consistency a part of your trust-redevelopment program greatly hampers progress.

### **Act Competently in Everyday Tasks**

If trust is to be re-established in your relationship, the hurt party wants to witness their mate's ability to handle day-to-day tasks. Consistency is not enough for the development of a trusting relationship. The hurt mate needs to know the other party can handle their life competently. This competency and responsibility provide a venue for the injured party to develop respect for their mate. For example, parenting well, doing well at work, taking recovery seriously, and working hard at your personal growth—all reveal your seriousness to your mate. This effort, along with competency, can then begin to challenge the negative lens through which your mate views you and help them see you through new eyes.

### **Listen**

A willingness to listen is imperative in redeveloping trust. You need to be willing to take the challenge of listening to all the ways the infidelity has wounded your mate. They need to be allowed to tell their story, and if you are willing to listen, they will see that at least you care and are interested in them.

Paradoxically, this may not feel as if it's helping at first. In fact, when your every instinct is telling you to put a stop to this painful process, why would you continue to talk about it? How can something that feels as if it's ripping your mate to shreds be helpful in any way? The reality is, your mate's healing is dependent upon them letting you know their pain and believing that you understand the losses and pain attached to all that has happened.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make in the rebuilding process is to say something like, "Good grief, we've gone over this at least a million times. I get it already. I was a jerk. I was awful. You've made your point. I can't take it anymore. Now I feel you're just trying to make me hurt as badly as you hurt. You're just trying to punish me. Can we please move on and talk about something else?" This is a bad move because it communicates that their pain isn't as important as your discomfort. It tells your mate that the process of rebuilding trust needs to be based on what you can tolerate, not what your mate needs. In the mind of the hurt spouse, when you make such statements, you've just revealed the self-centered mind-set of someone who can't be trusted. Why would they want to rebuild trust with someone who places a higher value on their own discomfort than on the pain their actions have created?

Be willing to listen to it all. Let them talk and don't be defensive. For trust to return, you need to hear their pain as much as they need to talk. Both sides of the equation are necessary. It's much like cleaning a wound. When my son was eight, he wrecked his bike on a dirt road. The scrape on his leg was serious, but even worse was the gravel and debris in that wound. Getting all of that out wasn't only painful for him but also painful for his mother and me. Yet at the same time, we knew that failure to get it all out would only result in infection and having to go back and reopen the wound.

Listening while your spouse talks is hard, painful work, and there are no shortcuts. You must be willing to stay with the task until it's done. But when you finish, you will have opened a path for a new trusting relationship to be established between you and your mate.

## **Develop an Attitude of Gratitude**

Working through the pain of betrayal is hard work for both parties, but if you're the unfaithful spouse, at least you chose your path. Not so for the hurt spouse. Your mate was like an innocent bystander on the side of the road who's hit by an out-of-control car. They did nothing except be in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, they now have to go through the process of doing what is necessary to heal. They may feel it's terribly unfair to have to deal with pain they didn't create, and to get help for something they didn't do. Regardless, to heal, your mate still must maneuver through a difficult process for which they didn't volunteer.

To help them in this process, and to encourage them along their path of healing, let your mate know on a regular basis that you're grateful they are still with you, that you're grateful for their willingness to give the relationship a chance. Recognizing this reality will go a long way in helping them feel you care and that you can be trusted.

## **Communicate**

Accurate, open, and transparent communication is a must. If you will openly communicate your intentions and motives, then your mate can accurately evaluate your actions. It also helps the hurt spouse calculate their mate's trustworthiness, especially if you are willing to be transparent and allow your mate to monitor your actions for compliance to fidelity. If, on the other hand, you are closed off and try to maintain your privacy, not providing a way for your mate to validate your compliance to your agreements, then trust won't be established. Don't expect trust just because you know you're doing the right thing. The only one who knows what's going on in your head is you. Your mate has already been deceived by you once, so why should they trust you again? Instead, encourage them to check and provide them the means to check. Your communication and openness will go a long way in helping them learn to trust again.

## **Give Trust**

Trust needs to be given for it to be returned. One party cannot seek to control the situation more than the other. This healing process, while it

requires somewhat different actions for each party, is a journey you both are taking together if your goal is to re-establish trust and reconcile. Your willingness to trust your mate is crucial in their ability to trust you. In fact, if you've had an affair, I dare say you probably had far more trust in your affair partner than your mate. Why is that? Were they really more trustworthy? Or did they place their trust in you and therefore you trusted them? Did your affair partner display their trust in you by seeking your opinions? Did they include you in decision-making processes? Did their trust in you make you feel more like trusting them? If so, then you can begin to understand how giving trust to your mate helps to communicate value and respect.

In the initial stages of a relationship, we typically do a great job at communicating respect for the other person and seeking their opinions. We share in decision making, which communicates trust in our partner. Likewise, those same actions coming our way help us begin to trust our mate.

On the other hand, if we hoard the control in the relationship, then we communicate a sense of untrustworthiness. The message we send makes our mate feel: "I can't trust you with this information," or "I can't trust you to do the right thing." The ensuing power struggle often reinforces distrust.

If you want to gain trust, then begin to give trust. Share the control of the process with your mate and be willing to place values on their opinions, abilities, and desires.

### **Show Concern**

A violation of trust is perceived as someone acting in their own self-interest and a lack of regard for the consequences to their mate. To alter that perception, you need to show a *genuine* concern for your partner. Their trust for you can grow when you display sensitivity to their needs, desires, and interests. Acting in the best interest of others and refraining from self-serving pursuits can greatly increase your ability to trust and be trusted once again.

### **Be Eager and Proactive**



Don't be a reluctant trust builder. If you want to help your mate trust again, your willingness to seek out ways to help your mate heal speaks volumes. Look for ways where you can sacrifice your own comfort and freedom in the short run for the sake of your mate's security, happiness, and peace of mind in the long run.

We judge ourselves by our intentions, but the only way others have to judge us is by our actions. Therefore, our actions are the only true way we have to reveal our heart's intent. So don't ask, "What can I do to help you feel safe?" Instead, be proactive and suggest actions you might take in order to help them feel safe. As my dad used to always say to me, "Never go to someone with the problem. Always come to them with the solution." That way they can see you're taking responsibility. Some examples: Ask if it would be helpful if you called each hour during the day just to check in with them. Ask if it would help if you gave them the passwords to your accounts. Ask if it would help if you provided time for them to be away from the kids for a while.

As you can see, there are many actions that might help your mate in their recovery. Your willingness to support them and to offer them solutions lets them know your interest in their healing.

## **Conclusion**

### **For Both Hurt and Unfaithful Spouse**

This report on trust may be a bit overwhelming to some. As you can see, multiple factors go into re-establishing trust after a betrayal, some of which you control and others you don't. Those of you who have been injured cannot force your mate to get the help he or she needs. This is a personal decision. Still, future safety for the relationship is largely dependent on addressing the damage done to the marriage, the unfaithful spouse's willingness to help their mate heal, and a willingness on both sides to tackle any personal issues that may have caused the betrayal. The unfaithful spouse is also dependent on their mate's work. As unfair as it seems, much of the work for healing the pain is the hurt mate's work to do. They have chosen to walk through the grief in order to enter a new life and new marriage with the same spouse.

If you're willing to take this journey of healing, then visit us at "Affair Recovery Center" ([affairrecovery.com](http://affairrecovery.com)). We have programs specifically designed to facilitate healing and wholeness in the wake of marital betrayal. Our *Harboring Hope* online course will be available in a few short weeks for those of you who need it. It will be the most effective course of action for dealing with the pain and stress of a betrayal as the hurt mate. Not only does it provide a safe and structured path for understanding and dealing with the grief, but it also offers an anonymous online group to give you the necessary support for healing.

If you've received this report without registering your email, then you will miss the other special bonus materials we plan to give out during our celebration and launch of this new resource for hurting spouses. If you're interested in other materials, go to [HarboringHope.com](http://HarboringHope.com) and register for future supportive bonuses.

*Harboring Hope* is coauthored by Leslie Hardie, LCSW, and John Haney, PhD, LPC. It is distributed by the Affair Recovery Center ([affairrecovery.com](http://affairrecovery.com)) and published by Hope for Recovery LTD.

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## **About the Author**

My name is Rick Reynolds. I am a marriage and family therapist in Austin, Texas, and I specialize in the treatment of affairs. My interest in affairs came as the result of my betrayal of my own wife over twenty four years ago. Since that time, I have worked with thousands of couples and individuals recovering from the devastating impact of betrayal. For those of you who are interested, I made the decision to stop my affair and have now been married thirty years. I am thankful that my wife made the decision to stay with me. Some of you may think my failed attempt at fidelity disqualifies me from writing this book, but I believe it is the very thing that uniquely qualifies me. I have been there and done that, and it's true that the majority of growth comes from failure and hardship. This report is an attempt to explain some of what I've learned over the past thirty years, in my own marriage and in counseling others in similar situations. My desire is that my experience will provide hope for your own recovery.