



Overcoming Affairs

Although affairs test relationships to breaking point and cause huge pain, they are less likely to split up couples than long-term hostility. The betrayed partner, often, is left somewhat “traumatised” becoming hyper-vigilant, suspicious, paranoid, and experiences plenty of invading thoughts (like “flashbacks”) which can bring on a sense of rage, depression, panic, and grief, and a preoccupation with the betrayal.

Affairs don’t usually begin in a vacuum as they are typically influenced (over time) by poor conflict management skills. Either by too much conflict or avoidance of conflict, any true communication depletes (e.g., less confiding, daily stories told, turning towards each other, appreciations, positive comparisons with others, nurturing relationship) and partners are left lonely, hurt, misunderstood, etc. and eventually seek affection, connection, enjoyment, etc. elsewhere.

The Sound Relationship House (across) provides a framework to help couples rebuild (or enhance) their relationship. The 9 components (7 Levels and 2 Walls) are interactive fluid processes. The first three levels are essential for friendship, intimacy, and passion and to build up other levels!

There are four behaviours mainly responsible for conflict, harming a relationship, and hindering it being rebuilt:

1. Criticism, implying something is wrong with the person;
2. Defensiveness, warding off a perceived attack;
3. Contempt, behaviour that puts one person “above” another; and
4. Stonewalling, withdrawing from a conversation.

Although difficult, these are best avoided when trying to work with the fallout of an affair and rebuilding a relationship.

However, if both partners are willing to work hard, to explore and understand, and to move forward, the relationship can be rebuilt by: Atonement; Attunement; and Attachment.





The Atonement Phase requires lots of honest questions and answers about the affair.

The Partner who betrayed:

- Verifies that no cheating is currently occurring
- Takes steps (and shows) that contact is broken with person with whom the affair was had and/or methods of contact terminated
- Expresses remorse, explores own shame
- Apologises (this could be multiple times)
- Accepts responsibility without defensiveness and does not blame partner
- Conveys understanding of wrongdoing
- Validates viewpoint of other, empathises
- Confesses to wrongdoing with full transparency (avoids sex details as this could be traumatic for partner), no more secrets, expresses multiple examples of honesty to rebuild trustworthiness

The Partner who was betrayed:

- Explores feelings and understanding, "PTSD"
- Hears other without criticism (hard to listen to and shuts down conversation)
- Speaks emotionally focussed (e.g., "I'm so angry/sad/heartbroken...")
- Exhausts questions and eventually becomes satisfied with answers
- Hears and accepts betrayers remorse
- Might temporarily need access to the other partner's email/social media/phone accounts to rebuild trust

The Couple:

- Braced for this most difficult stage that lasts as long as necessary
- Patient as lots of emotionally tough conversations have to be had
- Explore what went wrong in the relationship, be vulnerable and honest without blaming, the cheating partner takes full blame for breach of trust from the affair
- Empathise with each other
- Understand the extent to how much the affair has affected the relationship and the effects on each other
- Use non-defensive listening and empathy and share needs without criticism

The Attunement Phase requires lots of honest exploration about behaviours within the relationship.

The Couple:

- Move ahead with forgiveness
- Ready to rebuild without blaming the partner
- Begin to rebuild trust and shared vision of the future
- Commit to rebuilding better emotional bonds, communication and conflict management skills, friendship, romance,
- Recognise where previously the relationship wasn't meeting their needs and they alter dynamics accordingly
- Manage perpetual problems
- Mend other past regrettable incidents
- Makes their relationship a priority
- Use non-defensive listening and empathy and share needs without criticism

The Attachment Phase requires willingness to further reconnect, emotionally and sexually.

The Couple:

- Express needs inside and outside bedroom
- Return to (more) physical intimacy; explore sexual preferences, nuances, fulfilments, boundaries, initiation, refusals
- Build more on emotional connection
- Explore consequences of any future betrayal
- Work on shared meaning
- Deepen their commitment, building a shared meaning for the future and re-establishing a strong foundation
- Recognise it can take months or years to attain this level