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Affair Recovery

Coping with an affair is one of the greatest challenges a couple can face. When infidelity occurs in marriage it's a very difficult time -- every day can feel like a dark shadow is over your life and it can be a struggle just to get by. People are trying to manage feelings of hurt, anger, confusion, abandonment and betrayal. The person who has been betrayed frequently questions every aspect of their marriage, wondering if there was truth to any of the shared memories or joys they experienced with their partner.

It can be difficult to decide whether you should stay and repair the marriage or leave. Making what feels like a healthy decision can feel hard and what you want to do can change from day to day. For many couples, professional help can be very valuable in deciding if it's better to move on or to stay and work through to recovery.

At the Couples College, we have five specific goals in helping couples recover after an affair

1. To understand the stages individuals go through after an affair
2. To decide if they want to repair their marriage or if it's better for the relationship to move on and heal.
3. To teach each person what they need individually to do for themselves and their partner for healing to occur
4. To understand that healing takes time and that although you may want to get back to a place of comfort and safety with each other, it's a step-by-step process
5. Understanding and exploring why the affair happened, and creating healthy expectations as you move to a place of reconnection, hope and trust.

Recovery from infidelity occurs in five stages.

Stage One

Trauma

One to six months (depending on the individuals)

In this stage individuals have a feeling of numbness, shock, and overwhelming grief. The relationship is in crisis and both partners, the one betrayed and the offending spouse are frequently unable to think and process clearly.

It is important not to make any big decisions at this time, because you have been traumatized either by finding out about the affair or by getting caught. Your ability to have good judgement and make rational decisions is greatly decreased. Many individuals regret decisions made in this period and those decisions can interfere with your own ability to fully recover.

Begin by taking care of yourself. Are you sleeping, eating, nourishing and supporting yourself? You may be having a wide range of thoughts from wanting revenge, wanting to hurt the other person or the person they cheated with to wanting to go into a dark room and cry. It's important to understand that the emotions and swinging between a myriad of thoughts is part of the trauma stage of infidelity.

Stage Two

Beginning to work on the issues

In this stage individuals are trying to understand what happened. The betrayed spouse seeks details of the affair, so they can work through the trauma and begin to find a more stable position. The betrayer is being asked to look at the harm they have created and to explore and understand their actions and the impact on their spouse.

This can be a very difficult time with a lot of fighting and arguing, difficulty trusting anything your partner is saying and questioning yourself and why you're still communicating with this person.

This is the beginning of healing and recovery for the betrayed and accountability for the betrayer.

Stage Three

Facing the Issues

At this stage both individuals have allowed themselves to grieve and work through the anger the affair created. The offending partner has come to a place of understanding the impact of his behavior on their spouse. Most couples at this stage are able to make a clear decision about moving forward with the relationship or moving on separately. They have answered many of the questions and have been given the details they need to recover from the hurt and trauma. They now have to face the issues within their marriage that either existed before the affair or have now been created by the affair.

This becomes a time to work on rebuilding trust, friendship and commitment back into the relationship so the marriage can thrive and move forward. There will be many ups and downs during this stage of rebuilding and many couples go through questioning their choice, if they stay committed. It is not easy to rebuild trust -- it takes time and commitment to the process of healing

It becomes important to use your own voice and to not allow outside influences to tell you what to do. No one can truly walk in your shoes after an affair the decisions you make need to be your own.

Stage Four

Letting go of the grief and sadness (approximately one year)

If you and your partner have had good support and communication, your relationship is on the mend. There are still periods of doubt and hurt and anger may erupt after longer periods of peace. Things won't be back to normal, but there is a sense of connection and hope. Usually you are back to functioning at a higher level with family, work and yourselves.

Stage Five

Recovery (two years or more)

Most experts agree that it takes at least two years or more to recover from an affair. For some marriages it can take much longer. The more time couples can spend together healing and working through the event the faster their rate of recovery. This is why therapy and having a committed safe space increases success and shortens the time it takes to heal.

In the end it doesn't matter how long it takes if you love each other and are committed to getting back or even improving your marriage.

You can do it and reclaim the joy and happiness of partnering with this person you have always loved.