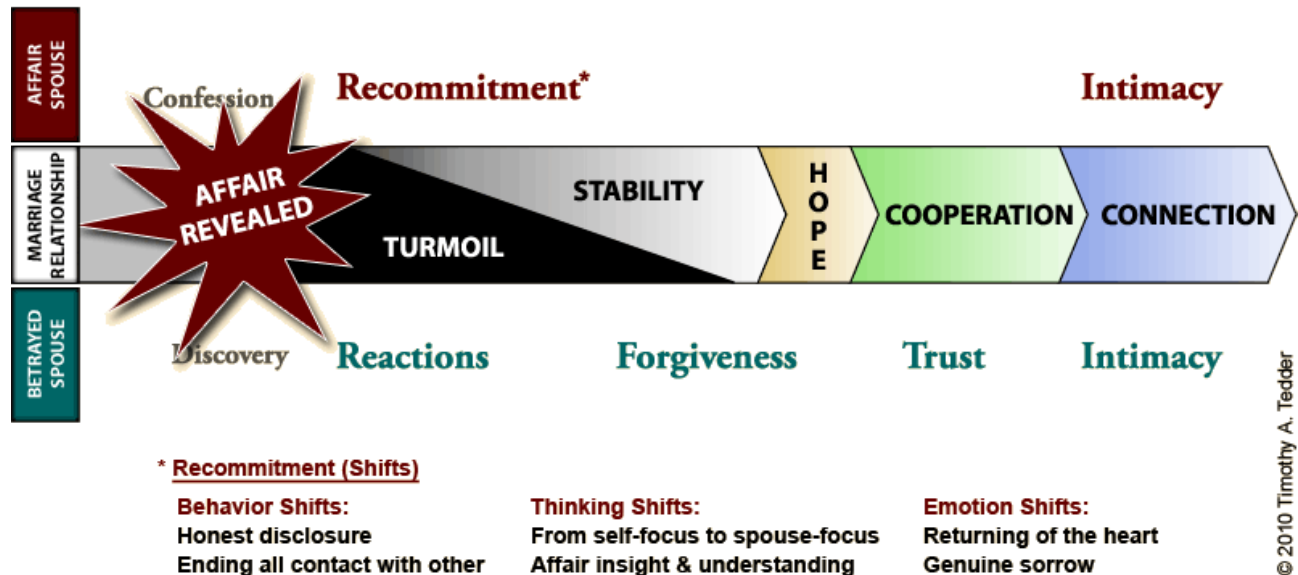


## Stages of Affair Recovery

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Recovering from an affair is a difficult process. It takes more effort and time than most couples anticipate. But those who work through the stages of affair recovery can keep marriages and families intact. In fact, what is often discovered through the process is a *new level* of intimate connection. How do they get there? Here's an overview of the Stages of Affair Recovery...



From the time an affair is revealed, either by discovery or confession, a process begins that determines whether the marriage experiences success or failure. Not every marriage survives an affair, but if you want yours to make it, here are some general guidelines to follow...

## Recovery Guidelines

### To the Betrayed Spouse

There is no "right way" to react to the discovery that your spouse has had an affair. For a period of time, you will experience a wide range of *reactions* that will likely include anger, grief, and depression. These are all normal reactions to a traumatic event and they may be so strong that you doubt they will ever end. Be assured, they will. In fact, you can move past them *even if your spouse continues to disappoint you*. Time will give you the opportunity to heal.

But in order for your marriage to survive, your spouse will need to demonstrate a genuine re-commitment to your marriage, and you will need to forgive him/her. Then, as your spouse demonstrates trustworthiness, you will eventually take the risk of trusting her/him again. This isn't something you'll rush into; trust has to be rebuilt over time.

Perhaps one of your greatest challenges in the recovery process will be accepting your own responsibility for the state of your marriage. Please understand that I am in no way suggesting that the affair was your fault. *It wasn't*. However, if you hope to enjoy a restored (and, perhaps, improved) intimate connection with your spouse, you will need to recognize your own missteps in the dance of your relationship.

## To the Affair Spouse

If you want your marriage to recover, you must be willing to recommit to it. If you're not ready to do this, then it's better for you to be honest and meet with a counselor to help you move through your choices. *Don't play games with your spouse by pretending you want to work things out while continuing to maintain a secret reality.*

If you feel like you're stuck between two relationship (either feeling like you love two people, or that you are conflicted between what you *should do* and what you *want to do*), the most important thing you will need to learn is that figuring out who you will become (being) is more important than deciding what choice you will make (doing). Gaining clarity in regard to who you are, how you got here, and the kind of person you desire to become will create an environment in which you can make healthy choices in regard to circumstances and relationships.

To rebuild your marriage, you need to be honest with your spouse. The time for lying and pretending is over. Break off ALL connections with the other person and turn your attention to your spouse. *You cannot expect your spouse to move ahead until you have made sincere Behavior Shifts.*

You're going to want to put the past behind you and just move on, but you need to realize it will take much longer for your spouse to get to that same place. You may be at the tail-end of an emotional process, but they are just at the beginning of theirs. *You will have to be patient and give them time to move through their anger and grief.* If you try to stop it, you will only increase the length of recovery.

If you were emotionally connected with the other person, you may have a hard time weaning yourself from them. Get someone (other than your spouse) to help you with this. If you make the Behavior Shifts and Thinking Shifts, you'll find that the Emotional Shifts will also take place. Your spouse has a part to play in this, but don't expect to get what you need from him/her until they have been able to find their way to forgiveness. Wait for it.

Forgiveness is theirs to give, but trust is something you have to earn. Since you broke their trust, do not expect or demand it back immediately. You will need to do two things before your spouse can genuinely trust you again. First of all, you will need to get in touch with your own grief and pain over what this affair has cost everyone. Your spouse will have a difficult time trusting if they never sense this deep level of sorrow. It may take you a while to experience this brokenness, but don't shy away from it; this is just as necessary for you as it is for your spouse. Secondly, trust will require a consistent demonstration of your trustworthiness. If you were deceitful for months or years, don't expect trust to return in any less time.

## To the Couple

The *turmoil* at the beginning of the process is unimaginable, but this will eventually diminish as *stability* takes its place. Once *forgiveness* can be offered and received, you will begin to experience new *hope*. In time, consistency in your relationship will allow trust to return. You'll begin to feel like a team again. But don't stop there. Move beyond *cooperation* to connection by learning how to intentionally pursue each other in ways that really matter to you both.

Establishing an *intimate connection* will provide a natural guard against anything that threatens your marriage in the future.

## Predictors of Successful Affair Recovery

Let me give you four predictors of success based on my work with couples:

- 1. The affair spouse is able to move quickly to the *Behavior Shifts* of honest disclosure and the complete cut-off of all relationship ties with the other person.** The longer the spouse holds on to deceptions or continues in any kind of affair behavior, the harder it becomes for the marriage to survive.
- 2. The betrayed spouse is able to genuinely forgive.** This comes easier for some than for others, but it's necessary for the marriage to move forward. For the betrayed spouse, forgiveness means they no longer have to be held captive by the past. For the spouse who had the affair, real forgiveness helps them heal from shame and live without fear of continual accusation.
- 3. The affair spouse gains necessary insight into their affair behavior.** In order to guard against repeat behavior, a person needs to understand the various influences that were at play when they chose the affair and give proper attention to each.
- 4. The couple finds new ways to pursue intimate connection with each other.** Simply returning to "business as usual" often means a return to affair vulnerability. Smart couples find ways to make their marriage stronger by both accepting responsibility for the problems in their marriage and working toward change.