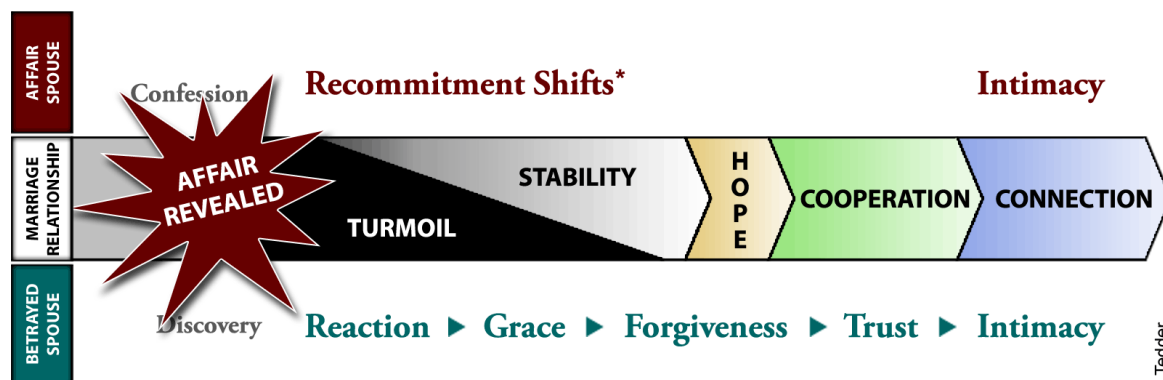


## Stages of Affair Recovery

Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC | [AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com)

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? Consider these stages of affair recovery:



### \* Recommitment Shifts

#### Behavior Shifts:

Honest disclosure  
Ending all contact with other

#### Thinking Shifts:

From self-focus to spouse-focus  
Affair insight & understanding

#### Emotion Shifts:

Returning of the heart  
Genuine sorrow

© 2010 Timothy A. Tedder

From the time an affair is revealed, either by discovery or confession, a process begins that determines whether the marriage experiences success or failure. The *turmoil* at the beginning of the process is unimaginable, but this will eventually diminish as *stability* takes its place. Once *forgiveness* is offered and received, a couple will begin to experience new *hope*. In time, consistency in the relationship will allow trust to return and the couple will act in *cooperation* as they continue to rebuild the marriage.

But recovery doesn't stop with cooperation. The goal of recovery is the experience of an *intimate connection*. When properly understood, this connection deepens as time goes on and provides the most certain defense against anything that threatens their marriage in the future.

## Recovery Guidelines for 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. 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.

Your spouse has tremendous responsibility for the restoration of your marriage. But he/she cannot do it alone. In order to move away from the pain of the past and toward the hope of the future, you will have to be willing to go through certain steps. There is no chance for intimacy if you do not eventually find your way through each of these.

1. **Reaction:** You will need to grieve your spouse's betrayal. There is real pain here, and you will experience tremendous sadness and anger. It will take some time for your questions to be answered and your emotions to settle down. You will benefit from finding outside support to help you through this time.
2. **Grace:** It is likely that you will feel that the weight of affair consequences fall more heavily on you than on your spouse. Where is the fairness in that?! You will want justice, but be careful that you do not assume the role of the justice-keeper in your relationship. If you truly desire a restored marriage you will need to eventually offer grace to your spouse. This means you give them something they don't deserve: a second chance. Instead of acting as though betrayal is your ongoing reality, you choose to act as though restoration will be the reality. Instead of focusing on your spouse's failure, you give them room to work on change.
3. **Forgiveness:** At some point, you will need to release your spouse from the debt of their affair. It is an act of setting them free from any debt incurred by their betrayal. You decide that you will no longer use the affair to

accuse or shame them. You are able to say, "I forgive you" and then stay committed to forgiveness (it's an ongoing choice) from that point on.

4. **Trust:** This will take time... maybe even a couple years. Over time, as your spouse demonstrates an ongoing willingness to be a "safe place" in your life, you will be able to start trusting again. Your insecurities will diminish and you will regain confidence in your spouse's honesty and commitment. Even though you realize there is always risk in trusting someone, you offer your heart again.
5. **Intimacy:** If you move through all these steps, you may find a level of intimacy with your spouse that you have never experienced before. As you give attention to your responsibilities in building a healthy relationship, you will experience a satisfying partnership.

Perhaps one of your greatest challenges in the recovery process will be accepting your own responsibility for the past condition of your marriage. 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 marriage.

## Recovery Guidelines for the Affair Spouse

If you've had an affair but you want your marriage to survive, 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 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 this: 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 about your 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 quickly put the past behind you, but your spouse cannot move forward until they've worked through your betrayal. You may be at the tail-end of experiencing your affair, but your spouse is only at the beginning. *You will have to be patient and give them time to move through their anger and grief.* If you try to cut the process short, 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.

1. It is important that you consistently focus on *making your spouse feel safe* in a relationship with you. Go to extraordinary measures, for as long as it takes, to assure them that all affair behavior has ended.
2. 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 genuine 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.

Finally, it is important that you figure out, as completely as you can, the answers to WHY you had the affair. Notice I said answers, not answer. The reasons are usually numerous, like pieces to a puzzle. You may have understanding of some of the obvious ones, but it will be important for you to gain a more comprehensive perspective regarding your behavior or you will be vulnerable to a repeat performance in the future.

## Predictors of Successful Affair Recovery

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

- 1. The couple has previously experienced mutual love, respect, and trust in their marriage.** If they never experienced this level of connection, the affair will likely become the final reason for ending their marriage.
- 2. 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.
- 3. The affair spouse assumes responsibility for helping his/her spouse feel safe again.** This means the affair spouse will be willing to go to extraordinary measures to regain the spouse's trust. It also means that the betrayed spouse will be given enough time to process grief and hurt, even if it takes longer than the affair spouse thinks it should.
- 4. The betrayed spouse is able to offer grace and forgiveness.** 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.
- 5. The affair spouse gains necessary insight into their affair behavior along with a clear vision for change.** 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. Along with gaining insight from the past, it is important for the affair spouse to have a clear vision of what it means to be healthy and whole.
- 6. 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.