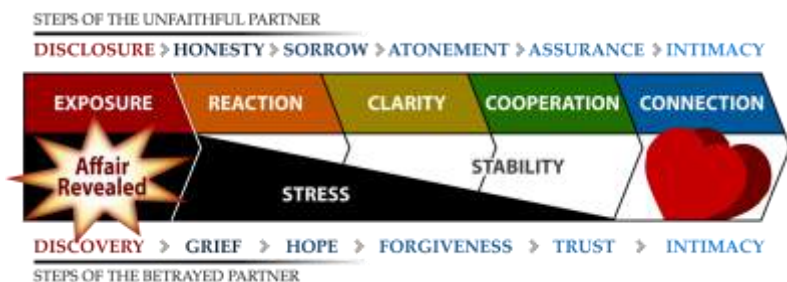


# Affair Healing: The Counseling Process

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The process of affair healing varies with each couple and is effected by such factors as: individual histories, relationship history, the nature of the affair, the current status of the affair, and the present goals of each partner. For the restoration of intimacy and trust in a relationship, a couple will need to move through the following stages: Exposure, Reaction, Clarity, Cooperation, and Connection.



Couples may seek counseling at any stage, although most will begin therapy during the Reaction Stage after the affair has been revealed (Exposure). The following overview provides information regarding the various steps necessary in the affair healing process. Clients are guided through these steps using a combination of in-session and out-of-session (homework) therapeutic interventions.

## The REACTION Stage

The uncovering of an affair evokes tremendous emotions in both partners and produces extreme levels of stress which may remain for several days or weeks, depending on the circumstances. Both partners make initial choices regarding their marriage.

In this stage, the counseling recommendations vary significantly based on the status of the affair and the declared intent of both spouses. Affair healing counseling for couples should not be started until there is clear indication that the affair has ended and both partners express an interest on moving toward relationship repair and the renewal of their marriage.

If the affair has not ended or if either spouse remains unsure about their willingness to work toward the healing of the marriage, either Individual Counseling or Discernment Counseling is encouraged. Either spouse may choose to separate from the marriage or move cooperatively into the Affair Healing Counseling process.

### Individual Counseling

**Description:** Individual sessions with either/both partners if the affair is still active or if there is no joint agreement to move *together* toward resolution.

**Goals:** clarify choices, encourage proper self-care, stabilize emotions, manage conflict

### Discernment Counseling

**Description:** Joint sessions that include private conversations with each partner. May be chosen if the affair is still active and at least one spouse is indecisive about the marriage, but both agree to move toward a decision one way or the other.

**Goals:** decide to either end the marriage or commit to working on it for a specified time (shifting to Affair Healing Counseling), stabilize emotions, reduce conflict

### Affair Healing Counseling

**Description:** Joint sessions where both partners work cooperatively toward healing. Should be chosen only when the affair has ended and both spouse's express a desire to work toward change.

**Goals:** clarify relationship goals, stabilize emotions, reduce conflict, transition into Clarity Stage recovery steps

## The CLARITY Stage

The betrayed spouse seeks to understand the truth. The unfaithful spouse helps by providing an honest account of the affair and sharing insights into why it happened. Both gain a clearer view of their past and future, and understand their roles in creating a new marriage.

### Therapeutic Steps:

- Expose the truth regarding the affair.
- Nurture empathy.
- Understand and manage the effects of trauma.
- Gain insight into the “why” of the affair.
- Clarify or create a shared vision for their future together, or move toward healthy separation.
- Secure the marriage with commitments to truthfulness, protection, and forgiveness.
- Define the cost of subsequent betrayal.

## The COOPERATION Stage

The couple agrees to join forces, each willing to do their part in working toward renewal. The cooperative efforts usually result in a reduction of stress as each partner experiences a relationship that is more satisfying and secure.

### Therapeutic Steps:

- Understand shifts in relationship perspectives.
- Define relationship movements that build intimacy and trust.
- Gain a proper perspective of vulnerability’s role in building secure relationships.
- Use anger to build the relationship rather than damage it.
- Learn the proper steps for repairing ongoing relationship wounds.
- Understand relationship hindrances: patterns and causes.
- Experience lasting change: long-term shifts in individual and relationship patterns.

## The CONNECTION Stage

As trust is built, spouses risk greater vulnerability and so experience deeper connection. Lessons learned through the renewal process are used to build a more intimate bond.

### Therapeutic Steps:

- Create a shared vision statement for the marriage.
- Explore each partner’s most significant relationship needs.
- Learn how to more effectively connect through meeting important needs.
- Cultivate a pattern of mutual affirmation and assurance.



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