

# AFFAIR HEALING



A  
*Recovery  
Guide for  
Couples*

*Includes a supplemental guide for couples using  
the Affair Healing Manuals ([AffairHealingBook.com](http://AffairHealingBook.com))*

Moving Through 5 Stages of  
Relationship Renewal

**Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC**  
Counselor & Founder of [AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com)

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A Recovery Guide for Couples  
**SAMPLE**

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Affair Healing-A Recovery Guide for Couples  
(Moving Through 5 Stages of Relationship Renewal) by Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC

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## **Coming: Self-Study Instructions for Couples**

Tim Tedder's two expanded Affair Healing books (*A Recovery Manual for Betrayed Spouses* and *A Recovery Manual for Unfaithful Spouses*) can be used separately by individuals, or together by couples in a cooperative self-study. Upon release of the second manual (for unfaithful spouses), this Couple's Guide will be updated to include step-by-step instructions for couples using the manuals together.

The first manual, *Affair Healing: A Recovery Manual for Betrayed Spouses*, is currently available. It includes 14 chapters, exercises, and 18 worksheets designed to help wounded partners find healing after infidelity. See [AffairHealingBook.com](http://AffairHealingBook.com) for more information. For a purchase discount, see the *Special Offer* page at the end of this book.

# Introduction

Recovering from an affair is a difficult process. It takes more effort and time than most couples anticipate. But those that choose to do the work can experience something beyond mere survival; they can participate in a marriage that is satisfying to both of them. For that to happen, each partner must be willing to take the steps that move them through the stages of relationship renewal.

Before exploring the path of renewal, let me acknowledge that it isn't the only path to affair healing. For some, healing is attained by focussing on individual growth rather than relationship renewal. This is especially true for the betrayed spouse whose wayward partner does not return to the marriage with the certainty and commitment required to heal it. But it may also be true for the unfaithful spouse who, despite sincere efforts to make amends, realizes their wounded partner is not willing to forgive or trust them again.

*After an affair, most married couples stay together, but not always happily so.*

After an affair, most married couples stay together, but not always happily so. I use the term "relationship renewal" rather than "marriage recovery" because I believe it more accurately reflects the kind of connection that couples desire. The latter may be accomplished by merely avoiding divorce or returning to the kind of marriage the couple experienced prior to the affair. Most couples, however, tell me they don't want the old relationship; they want something new.

From the time an affair is revealed, either by discovery or disclosure, a process begins that determines the outcome of the marriage. Couples can successfully move through each stage toward renewal if both are willing to take the necessary steps, but a different destination awaits if either exits the path. A betrayed spouse, for example, may choose not to invest in hope, forgiveness, or trust. An unfaithful spouse may decide to remain dishonest, fail to feel genuine sorrow, or refuse to accept responsibility for getting the marriage back to a secure place. Both partners may refuse to ever be vulnerable with each other again. Any of these choices will move the couple out of the renewal process, either ending the marriage or moving it into a state of managed disconnection.

There is a better way.

*Additional Information:*

*While writing this guide, I requested input from men and women who were in the process of affair recovery. Many responded with personal accounts of their own experiences, some of which are included in this publication. Names associated with stories and illustrations have been changed to protect anonymity, unless permission was granted otherwise.*

*This book does not require the purchase of the *Affair Healing Manual for Betrayed Spouses* or the *Affair Healing Manual for Unfaithful Spouses*<sup>1</sup>, but additional content and resources in those manuals are referenced in footnotes. For a purchase discount, see the *Special Offer* section at the end of this book.*

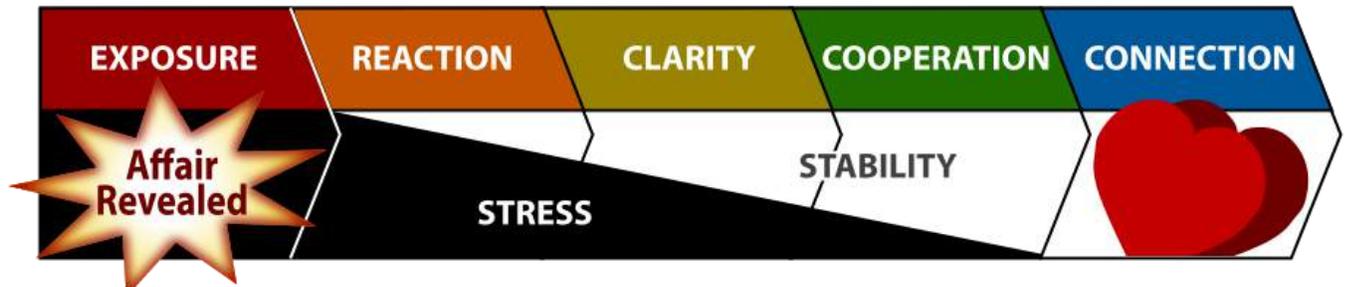
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<sup>1</sup> See [AffairHealingBook.com](http://AffairHealingBook.com) for more information. The manuals provide additional help for all of the content provided in this *Relationship Renewal* eBook.

# The Renewal Process

STEPS OF THE UNFAITHFUL PARTNER

DISCLOSURE > HONESTY > SORROW > ATONEMENT > ASSURANCE > INTIMACY



DISCOVERY > GRIEF > HOPE > FORGIVENESS > TRUST > INTIMACY

STEPS OF THE BETRAYED PARTNER

The process of marriage renewal can be separated into these five stages:

1. **Exposure:** An affair is revealed through discovery by the betrayed partner, disclosure by the unfaithful partner, or a combination of both.
2. **Reaction:** 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.
3. **Clarity:** 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 clarity in understanding their roles in creating a new marriage.
4. **Cooperation:** 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.
5. **Connection:** 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.

It is important to recognize that these stages are fluid. You will likely experience a blending between the stages as you move from one to another, and sometimes may find yourself

flowing back into an earlier stage. Still, it's helpful to consider the differences between them and understand the natural progressions from one stage to the next.

This fluidity should be expected in the steps taken by each spouse, too. A betrayed spouse who completes the initial step of grief may still experience moments of mourning even after hope has been established. The same may be said of the unfaithful partner's step of honesty. It is not just a single act of confession, but an ongoing commitment to truthfulness.

## Stage 1: EXPOSURE<sup>2</sup>

◆ *“My wife came home from work and laid her cell phone on the kitchen counter. I thought this was odd since she and her phone were inseparable. Out of curiosity, I walked over, picked it up and swiped to open it. What I found left me shaking uncontrollably. There was a text conversation with a 25 year coworker that didn't leave much to the imagination. I nearly dropped the phone I was so angry. I composed myself as much as I could, leaned up against the kitchen counter, and waited for her to return.” (forum post)<sup>3</sup>*

◆ *“My husband had moved out saying he needed space to think. I suspected an affair but he always denied it. I finally got the courage to snoop and looked at cell phone records and his email. That's when I discovered thousands of text messages at odd hours to the same number spanning several months. The emails professed their love and discussed plans to move in together and file for divorce, as well as lots of naked pictures. I gathered all the evidence and presented it to him. He couldn't deny it any longer.” (forum post)*

◆ *“On our way home from work, my husband and I picked up a friend, Cindy, whom we had invited over for dinner. While my husband was preparing the meal, Cindy and I were chatting outside on the veranda. An hour later, my husband came to us with a bowl of salad in his hands. He was crying. He looked at me and said, ‘I am in love. I am in love with someone else. I am in love with her,’ pointing to Cindy. I felt like someone had put a knife in my heart.” (forum post)*

Whether exposure occurs the day after an affair begins, or years after it ended, it marks the start of the relationship renewal process. The unfaithful spouse may wonder why an event from the past requires so much present attention, but the wounded spouse only begins to work through the hurt and confusion of the betrayal once it is known. The moment of affair exposure is so significant in a marriage that it is often referred to as “D-day,” the day on which infidelity was either discovered or disclosed.

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<sup>2</sup> For additional information and resources about the Exposure Stage, see chapter 1 of the [Affair Healing manuals](#).

<sup>3</sup> While writing this guide, I requested input from men and women who were in the process of affair recovery. Many responded with personal accounts of their own experiences. Names associated with stories and illustrations have been changed to protect anonymity, unless permission was granted otherwise.

Affairs are revealed by many different means, but all of them fit into one of three categories: affairs revealed by the unfaithful partner's disclosure, by the betrayed partner's discovery, or a combination of both.

## **Affair Exposure by Disclosure**

Most wayward partners will not choose to reveal their affair. This neglect is probably caused by their desires to hide their shame, stay with their lover, avoid expected consequences, or protect their spouse from the pain of knowing the truth. But there are exceptions to this norm. Sometimes an affair is first revealed by the confession of an unfaithful spouse.

### ***What motivates some to confess?***

Consider these four primary motives which may move an unfaithful spouse to confess an affair: a conflict of values, someone's threat, a threat of circumstances, or a desire to exit the marriage.

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## Stage 2: REACTION<sup>4</sup>

◆ *“I am struggling. Do I leave or do I stay? I ask myself, ‘Which makes me stronger?’ I’ve had friends and family in similar situations. Although I never gave an opinion, I always thought they should leave! But now that it’s me, I’m clueless as to what to do or think.” (email)*

◆ *“Never in a million years would I have imagined this would happen to me. I am overtaken with every emotion and am not sure I’ll be able to heal. Forgiveness is not even on my radar right now. Part of me wants to just get up and leave... I have been in so much agony that just getting through another day has been very difficult.” (forum post)*

Once an affair is revealed, the marriage changes forever. It will become something either better or worse than it was before. Although significant shifts can happen during any stage of the renewal process, the early reactions of each spouse can often predict which outcome is most likely to be realized.

The instructions I provide in this chapter are meant for situations in which the unfaithful spouse has ended the affair and both partners are willing to consider staying together. If that is not the case (if one is still entangled in the affair or either is not committed to relationship renewal), then they need to consider other choices as outlined in the first few chapters of the *Affair Healing* manuals, for which this book is a companion resource.

*Once an affair is revealed, the marriage changes forever. It will become something either better or worse than it was before.*

CHAPTER CONTINUES IN PURCHASED EBOOK

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<sup>4</sup> For additional information and resources about the Reaction Stage, see chapters 2-4 and worksheets 1-4 in the [Affair Healing Manual for Betrayed Spouses](#).

## Stage 3: CLARITY<sup>5</sup>

- ◆ *“You have two choices. You can stay married and make the necessary changes to make you happy. Or you can change your situation and leave your marriage. To go on living with the indecision or not doing anything about the situation will slowly eat away at you. And the resentment that builds up as a result is so damaging for a marriage.” (forum post)*
- ◆ *“My wife didn't remember every detail. I think she was being honest. She told so many lies, it must be impossible to remember all of them... The details that helped me start to ‘put it to bed’ were: How did she hide it from me? How did she communicate with him. How did it start. Where was I? When did it start? When did it end? Why did it end?” (forum post)*
- ◆ *“The truth has come out slowly and almost painstakingly. Five years into what I had hoped was recovery, I still have many questions, obsessive thoughts and, because of those, resentment.” (forum post)*
- ◆ *“There were times it crossed my mind to ask the sexual details of my husband's affair, but I knew it would do more harm than good. I chose not to ask; I was in control of that part of this hell I was experiencing.” (forum post)*
- ◆ *“When I remember the pain, when I am triggered, on my best days I remember the lessons learned and appreciate all the good that has happened along the way. That is all I can do. I cannot forget. I cannot erase the memories. I can only choose to move forward in a way that gives meaning and purpose to my story.” (forum post)*

When an affair is revealed, most couples experience a period of significant confusion. Either partner, or both, may be uncertain about their desire to remain in the marriage and so they are unable to make any confident choice about the future of their relationship.

The Clarity Stage provides an opportunity for both partners to gain an accurate perspective of what has happened and define the choices they will make for their future. They must find a way to gain increasing certainty regarding their past, present, and future.

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<sup>5</sup> For additional information and resources about the Clarity Stage, see chapters 5-8 and worksheets 5-10 in the [Affair Healing Manual for Betrayed Spouses](#).

During this stage, some marriages end, but most survive. For couples who desire a renewed marriage, not just a salvaged one, careful attention should be given to the manner in which they attempt to gain clear perspectives. Not only is there risk in doing too little work in the pursuit of clarity, there is also the possibility of doing too much.

*Not only is there risk in doing too little work in the pursuit of clarity, there is also the possibility of doing too much.*

## **Finding Clarity In the Past**

As I have already stated, I strongly encourage couples to seek the help of a counselor before they delve into conversations about the details of an affair. Emotionally charged conversations may feel like they provide momentary relief or protection, but they often end up causing additional long-term damage to the marriage. When deciding what information should be avoided or explored, each spouse may feel compelled to over-compensate with either choice.

CHAPTER CONTINUES IN PURCHASED EBOOK

## Stage 4: COOPERATION<sup>7</sup>

◆ *“It’s been a year and our recovery has been hard. Sometimes it still hurts, but it’s gotten so much better. We feel like our marriage is where it’s supposed to be. We talk about our problems and work through them together. We don’t always agree, but we feel like a team. Our marriage is more of a committed partnership now.”*  
(Lauren & Craig)

◆ *“I know there is a risk in staying in this marriage, but getting divorced and marrying someone else would come with its own risks, too. My confidence lies in my faith in God to sustain us and the work that we have done up to this point. And honestly, Rick has created an environment that makes it easy for me to trust him.”*  
(Julia)

◆ *“This road to recovery has not been easy in any way. The affair was a huge crisis in our lives and we are still learning to deal with it. There is much to understand, talk about, process, and accept. It isn’t a cakewalk but it has to be done. We both want to do it together.”* (forum post)

Your ultimate goal is to experience satisfying connection and secure trust as the norm in your marriage. But before you become good lovers, you may need to practice being better partners.

The Cooperation Stage focuses on strengthening your partnership.

*Please note: This stage cannot be considered before previous stages have been adequately processed. You will be unable to focus on the normal pattern of your relationship (independent of affair influences) before completing the Reaction and Clarity stages. Even then, the wound of the affair will continue to influence the interactions between spouses. This reality is addressed in the last section of this chapter.*

Let’s start by recognizing the difference between your decision to remain married and the choice to be cooperating partners. It’s possible to experience the legal union of marriage without the unity of partnership. You can *be* together without *working* together.

Imagine me wandering outside one night and capturing a couple outdoor cats in our neighborhood (depositing fleas in our yard, but don’t get me started). Now picture me using a

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<sup>7</sup> For additional information and resources about the Cooperation Stage, see chapters 13-14 and worksheets 15-16 in the [Affair Healing Manual for Betrayed Spouses](#).

piece of sturdy twine to tie their tails securely together. What do you think would be the result?

Would they be joined together? Absolutely. Would they be living in unity? Absolutely not.

Your relationship was hit with a blow that likely pushed the two of you apart, perhaps *far* apart. From that distance, you cannot jump right back into a secure, consistently intimate connection. You have to learn to trust your partnership first.

*It's possible to experience the legal union of marriage without the unity of partnership. You can be together without working together.*

You can begin building a cooperative partnership by taking the following four steps.<sup>8</sup>

## **First Step: Assess Your Relationship Patterns**

Every relationship develops a unique pattern that is formed as each partner adapts to the other. At the beginning of most romantic relationships, when the brain is focused on what attracts the two to each other, adaptation seems easy. Because both want to be with the other, they tend to present the best parts of themselves. They focus on their partner's positive attributes while minimizing the negative ones.

But this "easy connection" doesn't last forever.

CHAPTER CONTINUES IN PURCHASED EBOOK

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<sup>8</sup> For help in working through these steps, use the *Partnership Plan Worksheet* provided at the end of this chapter.

## Stage 5: Connection<sup>11</sup>

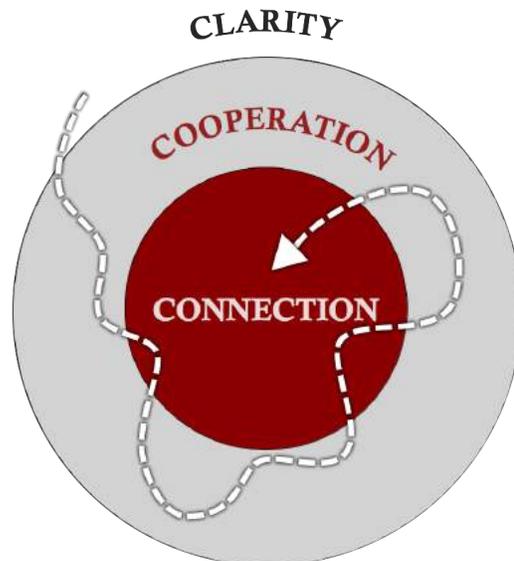
◆ *“Now I live a more authentic life. I am loving my wife the way she deserves, and I feel the love coming back to me. I got involved in my affair fairly slowly... then I was in over my head, and it ended badly. Thank God I had an amazing wife, full of strength and character, forgiveness and love. More than I realized. It actually makes me tear up to just write it.” (email)*

◆ *“I am 6 years post D-day and I can say that I truly am in love with my husband in spite of the hurtful choices he made. It is possible to grow a deeper and more meaningful connection over time.” (Jennifer)*

◆ *“It has been two years since my husband’s affair. Against all odds, we just celebrated our 15 year anniversary. We have grown closer as a couple and have learned a great deal from our experiences. We both think and act differently as a result of what we have been through and we appreciate each other a lot more... Our marriage has been tested to the brink of extinction. Now we can offer our child a stable and loving home with two committed parents who love each other deeply. God is good.” (forum post)*

Reaching connection in your marriage isn't like crossing a line at the end of the race. Healing spouses who are disconnected one moment don't suddenly discover they have “arrived” back to intimacy again. The experience is more like moving toward the center of concentric stages, but their dividing lines are blurred and you often find yourself crossing back-and-forth between them.

You will have occasions of connection before it becomes the norm in your marriage again. In fact, if you've been working as Cooperative Partners, you've probably already experienced encounters that stirred a familiar longing for closeness. Maybe you've stepped cautiously in and out of these connecting moments, but



<sup>11</sup> For additional information and resources about the Connection Stage, see chapters 13-14 and worksheets 17-18 in the [Affair Healing Manual for Betrayed Spouses](#).

eventually you need to move purposefully into them so that Connection becomes the norm in your marriage again.

## **The Ingredient Necessary for Connection**

So what makes the difference between interactions that are merely cooperative (joining partners) and those that are connecting (joining mates)? You may be surprised that it has little to do with behavior. It's not about spending time together, communicating, being considerate, or even having sex. Those acts are all good for relationship building, but you could perform them with a stranger, void of real intimacy.

**CHAPTER CONTINUES IN PURCHASED EBOOK**

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## Worksheet: Relationship Needs Conversation

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*Purpose: To identify the relationship needs most important to each partner and provide goals for building better connections in those areas.*

**Instructions: Print two copies of this exercise (4 pages), one for each spouse.**

**STEP 1:** Each person should print and privately complete the “Rate Your Relationship Needs” pages of this exercise. When both are finished, give them to the other partner and continue on to the next steps.

**STEP 2:** Referring to your partner's ratings, list their top three needs (indicated by a star).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP 3:** Now look at the list of needs and pick out two more needs that received high scores but were not indicated as one of their top 3. (Choose needs that you believe are also important to your partner.)

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP 4:** Have a conversation. Use the guidelines on the “Have A Conversation” page to guide your discussion about each other's relationship needs.

**STEP 5:** Repeat! Take a week or two to work on this one area, then talk about another relationship need.

**THE COMPLETE EXERCISE IS INCLUDED IN PURCHASED EBOOK**

# 6 Predictors of Successful Relationship Renewal

These six predictors are not guarantees. They are indicators that tend to be present in couples who, on the other side of infidelity, rediscover a satisfying and intimate relationship with each other. How many are present in your marriage?

## 1. A Relationship History of Love & Trust

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*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. If both partners remain committed to saving the marriage, they will need to understand that “dealing with the affair” is only the first step in a longer journey of rediscovering the kind of marriage in which trust and intimacy are the norm again.*

## 2. A Quick Return To Trustworthy Behavior

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*The unfaithful partner is able to move quickly to trustworthy behaviors, including (1) honest disclosures about the affair and (2) a complete cut-off of all relationship ties with the affair partner. The longer the unfaithful spouse holds on to deceptions or continues in any kind of affair behavior, the harder it becomes for the marriage to survive.*

CHAPTER CONTINUES IN PURCHASED EBOOK

## About the Author

**Tim Tedder** is a licensed counselor who specializes in helping individuals and couples heal from the wounds of infidelity. He and his wife, Sharon (also a counselor), are the owners of Currents Counseling Services in Winter Park, Florida. When they're not counseling, you may find them in a co-op game on Xbox saving the world from raging dragons or zombie hordes.

Tim has several websites for recovery work:

### [AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com)

A popular resource for sharing experiences, ideas, and resources.

### [CurrentsCounseling.com](http://CurrentsCounseling.com)

Counseling services provided by Tim and Sharon Tedder & staff.

### [MarriageICU.com](http://MarriageICU.com)

Information on affair recovery retreats for couples.

