

# THE RECOVERY ROOM



## Needing To Ask About The Affair

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Recovery Room Podcast #204 | [AffairHealing.com/podcast](https://AffairHealing.com/podcast)

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- **Phone Coaching** ([AffairHealing.com/phone-coaching](https://AffairHealing.com/phone-coaching))
  - **Couple's Recovery Retreats** ([MarriageICU.com](https://MarriageICU.com))
  - **Counseling in Central Florida** ([AffairHealing.com/affair-counseling-orlando](https://AffairHealing.com/affair-counseling-orlando))
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## Community Forum Post (15 weeks after D-day)

*At times I may have a question for my husband and while he has not withheld any information or refused to answer any questions, we are at a point where I may be repeating a question only to be met with this response: He wants me to help him understand why I feel the need to ask. How will it help me? What do I hope to gain?*

*My typical response is - to better understanding, to get perspective & clarity. I already have all of the horribly explicit details so much of what I ask now is related to what he was thinking [at different times during the affair].*

*All I want to do is have him give me a response rather than question my reason for asking. Is that unreasonable? He feels like we go in cycles talking about it all day every day, but I feel that's not true. I know the repeat questions can be frustrating for anyone, but it is at the forefront of my mind every single day and I really don't want to have to rationalize why I am asking each and every time.*

## Podcast Summary

### *Is this experience normal?*

- Yes, the need to ask questions about the affair is a common experience as the injured partner tries to process the trauma caused by betrayal.
- The length of time to ask/answer is not, in itself, a predictor of recovery. Some couples only require weeks of conversation, but most need much longer than that. In determining what is “healthy” for a couple, the length of time they in this process is less important that whether or not they are making progress toward change. Are they making the choices that allow the questions to diminish in frequency and intensity, or are they caught in a pattern of ongoing conversation about affair details that keeps them stuck in the pain?

### *Understanding the betrayed spouse's perspective. The betrayed partner needs...*

- **Clarity:** to expose the secrets and eventually gain insight into what happened and why it happened.
- **Honesty:** to experience the partner’s willingness to be truthful about what they once lied about in order to regain trust.
- **Empathy:** to believe that the one who caused the pain cares about helping them heal.

### *Understanding the unfaithful spouse's perspective (assuming a true desire to heal the marriage). When questioned about their affair, an unfaithful spouse often feels...*

- **Confused:** betrayed spouses sometimes are unable to give clear answers to questions being asked of them. The deceptive nature of an affair may result in greater difficulty in recalling some details and the lack of insight (especially early in the recovery process) keeps them from giving a complete answer to the “why” question.
- **Shamed:** feelings of guilt and failure may drive them to retreat from conversations. Especially in those who struggle with vulnerability, shame often triggers a response of getting angry or shutting down.
- **Flooded:** overwhelmed by the emotions of the betrayed spouse. This is especially true for anyone who has never responded well to negative emotions. The pain and anger expressed by the betrayed spouse feels dangerous and so they retreat or shut down in order to avoid conflict.
- **Powerless:** wanting to fix what they broke, but not knowing how to do so.

*What does healthy progress look like?*

**Suggestions for the betrayed spouse:**

1. Practice mindfulness. Slow down and focus on your thoughts and feelings. Consider what you are experiencing and ask, “What am I hoping to get out of this?” Turn your focus to yourself rather than remaining hyper-focussed on your spouse or the affair partner.
2. Distinguish between what you WANT to know and what you NEED to know.
3. Ask intentionally rather than impulsively. Give thought to what you ask. Begin to postpone conversations without avoiding them.
4. Choose quality over quantity. Turn your focus to more important questions rather than continuously digging for all the affair details.
5. Communicate an intent to move toward fewer conversations as you heal.
6. Clearly express your desire to move toward forgiveness and trust.
7. Be specific about ways your spouse can provide comfort and relief.

**Suggestions for the unfaithful spouse:**

1. Put your spouse’s needs above your own. The time you gave to the affair was self-serving and without your spouse’s consent. Now it’s your turn to be selfless for a time and give your spouse what he/she needs from you.
2. Be willing to move into vulnerability. You cannot heal your spouse without spending some time in encounters that feel emotionally and relationally risky.
3. Commit to complete honesty. If you feel pressed to talk about something you’re not ready to talk about (or fear it may be damaging), ask for more time or suggest going to a counselor to help you through these conversations.
4. Expect this to take time. Questions will come months, even years, from now. Let that be okay.
5. If you start to feel overwhelmed in conversation, avoid becoming confrontational by admitting your feelings and asking for time to think before talking more about it. Get help, if you need it. Commit to coming back to the conversation (sooner than later) and even be specific about when you plan to do so.

**Suggestions for Couples:**

1. Agree on a conversation break, during which each spouse takes time to write out (1) a description of what they want conversations in their marriage to look like 6 months from now and (2) what they think *they* can do to help move toward that change. Share these insights with each other. Then each should ask, “Is there anything else I can do that would help us get to a better place 6 months from now?” Listen to each other with curiosity, not defensiveness.
2. Each partner should consider the question *Who do I want to be in this marriage?* Focus on your change, even though you are likely very aware of all the ways you want our spouse to change. After you’ve consider this, share your ideas with each other. Again, make every effort to listen with curiosity, not judgement.
3. Come up with a plan of change that you each agree to. For example:
  - The unfaithful spouse may agree to take the initiative to ask, “How are you doing? Is there anything you need to talk about?” 2-3 times a week.
  - The betrayed spouse may agree to write down questions instead of asking them right away and then waiting before having a conversation with a goal of slowly decreasing the number of conversations per week.
  - Agree on a day/time once a week when you check in with each other and ask, “How are we doing with our plan?” Be honest, but focus on encouraging each other with any steps of progress that have been taken.
4. Give grace to yourself and your partner. No couple recovers “perfectly.” Expect moments of failure. Those disappointing moments provide opportunities for apologies, correction, and commitment to ongoing change. Take imperfect steps toward change.