



8 Affair Counseling Cautions

Tim Tedder & Jennifer Gingras
[Recovery Room Podcast](#) #205

Recovery Room podcasts, along with many other recovery resources, are provided through [AffairHealing.com](#). If you need personal help in your affair recovery, you may want to consider making use of the following services:

- **Phone Coaching** ([AffairHealing.com/phone-coaching](#))
 - **Couple's Recovery Retreats** ([MarriageICU.com](#))
 - **Counseling in Central Florida** ([AffairHealing.com/affair-counseling-orlando](#))
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Podcast Summary

Counseling is often an important part of affair recovery, but not every counseling choice or experience is a good one. Tim Tedder and Jennifer Gingras, counselors who specialize in affair recovery issues, discuss eight important issues to consider when seeking therapy after infidelity.

Caution 1: Put off couple's counseling until the affair has ended.

An ongoing affair will sabotage the couples counseling process. Don't go to joint counseling in hopes that the counselor will work her/his "magic" to stop the affair. We recommend either individual counseling or [Discernment Counseling](#), a short-term approach focussed on helping couples make a choice about the next step in their relationship (and can be started even if an affair is still active).

Caution 2: Once partners agree to work out decisions together, start joint counseling.

Staying only in individual counseling can reinforce a focus on individual needs/empowerment while neglecting what might be necessary for the relationship. Even if partners plan to continue individual therapy, they should begin meeting together, too, to address affair recovery issues.

Caution 3: Find a counselor with an affair recovery focus or, at least, plenty of experience.

Without this, marriage counselors may:

- Rush into marriage building without adequate attention to the affair trauma.
- Neglect important aspects of affair counseling: the unique responsibilities of each spouse, understanding why, dealing with triggers, insight into the source of deep emotions related to the affair (anger, shame, sadness, fear, hurt).
- Fail to properly address the ongoing effects of the unhealed affair wound.

Caution 4: Find the right balance between controlling expenses and getting effective help.

If the cost of therapy has kept you from considering counseling, consider these ideas.

- Good counseling, like any health service, is an investment worth paying for. The return value is seen in better emotional health and relationship health, and the cost of therapy may help avoid the cost of ending a marriage.
- Contact the offices of qualified counselors, let them know of your need and your desire to work toward change, and ask if there are any options for reduced fees. Some offices may offer limited scholarships or sliding scales, but won't always advertise these options.
- Check out the [Open Path Collective website](#). For a low membership fee, you will have access to counselors who offer greatly reduced fees. You can search t

Caution 5: Make sure the counselor's goals are in line with your goals.

Does the counselor assume responsibility for leading you to a particular outcome? Do they have any personal beliefs or convictions that would keep them from supporting you if you chose to stay with your spouse? If you chose to leave them? A good counselor should help you move toward healthy outcomes, but *they must support your goals* or be honest up-front about any particular biases they may have.

Caution 6: Go into each session with a focus on ways YOU can be helped toward change rather than with an agenda to change your spouse.

Effective couples work happens when partners begin to take individual responsibility. It is important for each partner to be honest about their experiences in the relationship, but each

can only control their own change. Even if you believe you are only 10-20% responsible for the problems of your marriage, be willing to focus on that 10-20%. Your partner should do the same. In time, you will begin to see whether they are willing to do their part, but waiting for them to change before you work on yourself will keep you in defensive mode and they likely will do the same.

This is even important for the betrayed spouse, although the amount of focus and energy they have at the beginning of the counseling process may be minimal. As counseling progresses, however, they must be willing to give attention to their responsibilities for marriage repair, recovery, and renewal.

Caution 7: Once you start joint counseling, any ongoing individual therapy should be conducted with a different counselor.

The couple's counselor should remain focused on the couple. Shifting to an individual focus can cause a number of potential problems including the creation of an empathetic bias for the individual spouse, an increasingly lopsided perspective of the couple's experienced as it is presented from only one point of view, and an increasing insecurity in the "left-out" spouse who may begin to feel like sides are being taken.

Occasional individual sessions are normal in couple's work, but if you need ongoing individual help, ask for a referral to another counselor.

If the couple discontinues joint counseling and one partner quits counseling or expresses approval of the other continuing individual sessions with the same counselor, then perhaps the shift can be appropriately made to individual therapy. However, any subsequent return to joint counseling would likely require referral to a new marriage counselor.

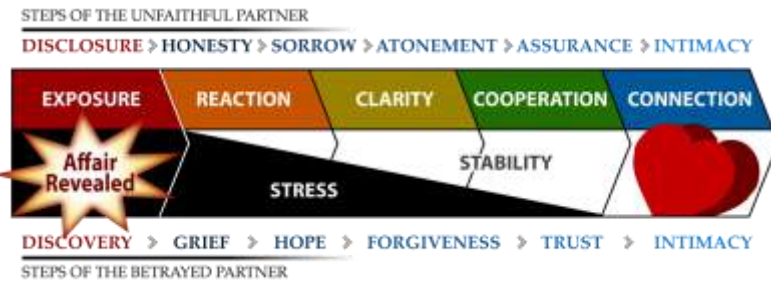
Caution #8: Remain in counseling until the marriage has self-sustaining momentum into intimacy & trust.

Stopping therapy once the initial panic and pain have been diminished will hinder the couple from experiencing the kind of change needed for a secure marriage. Avoiding a breakup is not the same as building a strong marriage. Although the unfaithful spouse may resist any ongoing focus on problems that need to be addressed, a premature ending to counseling only creates a false confidence that is temporary. For therapy to "work" it needs to be completed.

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 currents 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.
- Establish 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:

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



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