



What do I do if my partner has been unfaithful?

Summary of Figuring out Families Podcast with marriage counsellor Derek Boylen

Infidelity is growing more common in our community and it can be a huge challenge for couples to try and work through. Around 25% of couples in our community will experience infidelity emotional or otherwise at some point in their relationship. It is a relatively common experience among couples. In this family guide we will examine how infidelity can occur, what types of infidelity exist, and what can be done to try and rebuild a relationship stronger than it was ever in the past.

There is a perception out there it's mostly men that cheat. In truth a significant percentage come from women who have been unfaithful in those relationships, particularly these days with social media. While infidelity is an equal problem for men and women, the pathway to the infidelity is usually dependent on gender. Male infidelity can often be quite physical from the beginning, but for women, there's an emotional intimacy that can sometimes be there.

Interestingly, when there is infidelity in a relationship, men will often ask their unfaithful wives: what did you do with that person? Whereas the women will often ask their unfaithful husbands: How did you feel about that person? This general discrepancy illustrates that not only are the pathways into intimacy different, but the impact for the aggrieved party is experienced differently too.

There can be many different reasons that infidelity occur. For some it is a type of revenge for a perceived wrong, sometimes sex addiction can be a driving factor, but for most infidelity is due to Infidelity can develop without any clear intent. A good rule of thumb to avoid slipping unknowingly towards infidelity is the following maxim: If I'm communicating

something with anyone on any level that I feel that my partner would not be comfortable with me sharing, I'm probably crossing a line.

In understanding the various ways people can progress towards infidelity, it becomes clear that there is a spectrum of behavior that can be defined as unfaithfulness in a relationship, and it isn't as simple as drawing a line at physical intimacy. Often it is the case that while we can establish one person as physically or emotionally unfaithful, there has also been other infidelity going on as well by the other party. Fidelity in a marriage is to promise in our vows is "I choose you", that means to say that we will make our spouse the number one priority in our lives.

Whenever we put other people and other interests and other things before our partner, we are being unfaithful to them. That doesn't mean we don't care about other people, but when it comes to having to make choices about priorities, we made a clear priority. Sometimes we're unfaithful with our children when we put them before we put our partner. We can be unfaithful when we put social media before our partner, and we spend more time online and updating our Facebook profiles than we do connecting with the person with whom we are in a relationship. This is not to say that all acts of infidelity are of equal weight. But recognizing these violations when they occur and correcting accordingly can help protect the relationship from devolving from the ideals that were established in the wedding vows.

In the cases of physical and emotional infidelity it can be so traumatic so the path to forgiveness and a renewed covenant is far more complex. However, there are many things you can do to make forgiveness possible after a serious infidelity has occurred. If you really want to save your marriage you must be careful when discussing the situation with others. Most couples will talk to our friends or family or work colleagues. The problem with this is when we share

with people, they feel a pressure to want to support us, and can be ultimately unhelpful by taking sides in the relationship. If need the emotional support from friends, they can help you best when you make it clear you need them to be on the side of your marriage.

An experienced couple's therapist can contribute greatly to relationships moving forward healthily. A good counsellor will help to sift through the issues without taking sides. To get the most out of a counsellor you will need to communicate to them that your relationship is important, and what things you want to save that are at risk. By doing so the counsellor knows what they are working towards.

The first thing to recognize is that when infidelity gets discovered there is a massive imbalance between the two individuals in the relationship. The person who has been unfaithful has known that this was coming for a long time and is far more mentally prepared for the uncomfortable inevitability of this conversation. But for the other person this is a bomb that's gone off in their life. They are processing strong and conflicting feelings, feeling angry, feeling bitter, feeling sad, feeling grief of the loss of the old identity of the relationship, and feeling stupid insecure. All these painful and intense emotions are combining into a massive storm of emotions in their head.

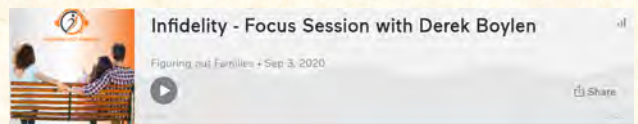
For the partner who has committed the infidelity, it is crucial that they be patient, gentle and honest with their spouse. Infidelity can be so wounding that the other partner may not want to discuss it all. In these cases, it is important to commit to talking about it in small chunks at least.

For a marriage to recover, forgiveness is necessary, but that does not mean it should be something that's given lightly. It needs to be given after a lot of discussion. An apology has sincerity to us when it really captures the gravity of what's been done. I'm sorry that I had an affair doesn't capture the extent of the hurt, the pain experienced, and the anger caused. Identifying all the grievances that an act has caused makes for a more sincere apology.

Forgiveness is important. But don't, don't give it lightly, give it with a real consideration because it will be a key to healing going forward.

The other things to remember about healing of it, that I guess, firstly, the healing isn't forgetting, it isn't going back to doing things the way that we used to do them. Real change must come as well. Forgiveness doesn't mean that they're not going to feel, it means saying that from now on, they're not going to hold that over you. And if we long to repair the relationship, it's not going to be enough to forgive them once, whenever we are reminded of the infidelity, we are going to have to forgive them. Whenever they get an SMS in the middle of the night. And we're uncertain. We could be brought back to that pain and will have to forgive them again.

Forgiveness is a process that takes time and in allowing that time and being patient with that process, there is hope that couples can work through it and have marriages and relationships that they never imagined possible.



Figuring out Families Podcast

Derek Boylen, an experienced marriage and relationship counsellor and a lecturer in relationships at the University of Notre Dame. We have put together this most valuable podcast series which we are calling the Focus Sessions.

The series focusses on many aspects of family relationships and can help in strengthening your family. We hope you'll find the series beneficial and get some insights on issues you may face in your family.

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