

How to survive infidelity

The discovery of infidelity not only severely disrupts your life but is a violation unlike any other event. Most experts who deal with infidelity say that the betrayed spouse deals with anywhere from 50 to 100 different reminders and triggers about their spouse's infidelity daily

Tips for the Unfaithful Partner

You must stop the affair. Commit to creating an atmosphere of safety. Commit to openness and honesty on a daily basis. Be available by phone. Be willing to call from a land line (to show where you are). Hand over all passwords, e-mail addresses, bills, and give access to your mate in order to give him/her assurance.

Decide to have no unaccounted-for time in your day. If you're going to give this relationship a shot at being restored, be willing to do whatever it takes to restore trust. The way to re-establish trust is to first trust your partner with what's going on in your life.

Take responsibility. As bad as your relationship may have been, and as rejected as you may have felt, it still doesn't justify betrayal. Have the courage to say, "I messed up." Take responsibility for your own recovery.

Develop empathy for your partner. Daily express to your mate that you're sorry for the pain that you have caused and/or appreciation that your mate is still there. Being able to express grief over what your actions have cost your partner is one of the first and most important steps to moving beyond the betrayal.

Be patient and ask your partner how he/she is doing. If you see your mate is down, simply ask how he/she is feeling. Your first tendency when you see those storm clouds brewing over them may be to run for shelter, but in recovery, it's important to create a space to share about the pain.

Don't be defensive. Usually defensiveness sounds like, "well if you hadn't..." We often at times try to blame our partner to justify why we messed up. This defensiveness and attempts at justifying your infidelity only adds to the frustration, hurt and anger.

Tips for the Betrayed Spouse

Express your feelings and thoughts without the destructiveness of rage. This one can be tricky and is especially difficult if you are very early on into discovery. It will be somewhat easier if you are able to maintain the perspective that anger (even the rage you may currently be experiencing) is a secondary emotion. Instead of expressing your anger, talk more about the underlying feelings that evoked the anger. The underlying emotions might be hurt or fear.

Avoid rapid-fire questioning. Ask questions slowly, always asking yourself if the answer will be information you want to live with the rest of your life, and possibly have a reminder and/or trigger attached to it. We would encourage you to avoid questions that paint a picture in your head. These comparison questions create the intrusive thoughts you'll later have to deal with. Ask yourself if the questions you're asking are helping you move forward or if it is for some other reason.

Commit to forgiveness. This doesn't have to happen fast, but for your sake you want it to occur. Don't fall into the trap of believing you can control your mate's behaviour by not forgiving. Remember, forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. Forgiving isn't necessarily the same as reconciliation, but if your mate is safe enough it paves the way for the possibility of reconciliation. Forgiveness is also not a onetime act. There will be layers to your pain which will necessitate a commitment, in advance, to forgive as you move forward.

Allow yourself time and space to grieve and process what has happened. To attempt to heal the relationship too quickly can be devastating and is one of the leading factors of relapse for the unfaithful spouse.

Recognise your vulnerabilities. Don't let your hurt, pain, and anger drive you to behaviours and choices you will later regret. Avoid putting yourself in vulnerable situations.

Tasks for the Couple

Separate the relationship from the train wreck of the infidelity. Remember, there is more to your relationship than the infidelity. The infidelity does not rewrite your whole history, although sometimes it may feel like it does. While you can never go back to what you had, you do have the opportunity for something better.

Make time to talk about the relationship and the effects of the infidelity. One of the worst mistakes you can make is to stop the dialogue about what has happened. If you cannot process through the effects of the infidelity, it will most assuredly stall your efforts to heal as a couple. Allow time for both of you to process what you are learning about yourselves and each other along the way. Arrange a problem-free time during which you have fun and enjoy each other. This is a must, otherwise you will begin to feel like your identity and your relationship are just by-products of the infidelity. Remember, there is more to life. So, try to find times where you don't discuss the infidelity.

Remind yourself and each other that your relationship can be better. You are building honesty and empathy that were possibly not there before the infidelity. Your relationship will emerge from this so much better, if you let it. This is an opportunity to build a new foundation, with new patterns of behaviour.