

## The 4 Stages of Healing from Infidelity

I want to give you an idea of the stages of healing from infidelity that you can expect along with some common emotions during each stage. These stages may be a little different in each case but most will go through them all at some point, possibly in a different order.

### **Stage 1: Initial shock after finding out about cheating**

This is the stage when your wife will feel completely lost, disoriented and crushed after learning about your affair. She will feel strong anger towards both you and your affair partner. She may even become violent towards one or both of you.

Her mind is full of horrible thoughts related to the affair, most of them being a mixture of pain, anger, jealousy, frustration, depression, anxiety and mistrust towards the cheating spouse.

Usually the victim can't fathom that you cheated. She may say things like "This isn't happening!" "You would never do this to me!" "This must be a nightmare!"

This can be a very self destructive phase and one that can be quite difficult to deal with. Your spouse may lash out verbally calling you names, throwing objects or may even get physically violent.

The victim will question your every move and won't let you out of their sight. Your spouse needs to vent and release her anger and her disappointment with you. There will be relentless questioning of you as she attempts to understand what the hell happened and why. You may feel as though your spouse hates you, but more than likely they do not – they just hate what you've done.

Your wife's mind is full of horrible thoughts related to the affair, most of them being a mixture of pain, anger, jealousy, frustration, depression, anxiety and mistrust towards you. This stage can go on for several months.

### **Stage 2: Attempt to stabilize life after the affair**

*If you have left your wife after she found out about cheating or if she has left you:*

She is slowly starting to accept the new course her life is now taking. The feelings related to the affair such as anger, pain, anxiety and depression are still in her, but since nothing concrete is constantly reminding her of you (since you are not around on a daily basis), recovery will be much faster than if you were constantly around and she would try to make the relationship work again.

*If you have stayed with your wife after cheating took place and together you are trying to heal your relationship:*

Your wife may feel as a winner for a while and may even feel happy that you have “chosen” her and not your affair partner.

She may feel that she has gotten over the pain, anxiety, depression and anger since you have (most likely) apologized for the betrayal and have promised to be faithful to her and never to cheat again.

Deep in her mind she wishes that she could somehow brush away the memory of the affair and that her life could be the way it used to be.

During this phase her self-confidence slowly starts to return and she may start to feel more secure. It helps her to improve her self-esteem if she is taking good care of herself, both mentally and physically.

This stage is, in my opinion, the most crucial. This is where the cheater tends to screw up the most. I like to call it the “cake eater stage.”

Your wife is in deep shock and denial. Things may appear somewhat better as you’re spending more time together, your sex life is exciting and she is kissing your butt every chance she gets. This is a mirage.

She is relieved that you are home and have stopped the affair but because you have probably lied about the details and the seriousness of the affair, she has no idea how this betrayal will affect her later down the road.

You may be to the point where you are saying you just want to stop talking about the affair and move on, or that she needs to get over it. To you this may seem like a good idea but if this type of mindset continues you will effectively stall the recovery.

Know right now that you will not get away without addressing the issues at hand because they must be addressed at some point, and I'm telling you it's best to do so immediately.

Do not dismiss her questions or lie to avoid the repercussions. She will not let them go and just drop all of her insecurities. They will resurface when the shock wears off and some sense of normalcy returns to your lives.

Don't lie or dismiss her thoughts and feelings. Don't say stupid stuff like, "If we keep talking about the other woman then I will think about her more." Don't justify your actions or blame your wife for them.

Get your act together before you expect any kind of recovery from your wife.

Additionally, don't perceive her actions and feelings toward you right now as an indication that everything is OK. Yes, she may be acting less angry and even more affectionate. You may even think to yourself, "Wow, this isn't so bad. I cheated and now we are having more fun and the sex is great!"

Trust me... you are not off the hook just yet, because as I said, it's all a mirage. You are both living in a fantasy world.

Somewhere down the road your wife is going to crash and realize that for the last few months you have been reaping the benefits of your indiscretions by allowing her to kiss your ass, give you the sex of your life and basically being a doormat.

Don't believe that she has forgiven you as she probably doesn't even understand what she is forgiving. She doesn't have all the details.

Don't pressure her to move on. Don't imply that things are great now regardless how much fun you might be having. Stop discounting your affair because what you did was a major, traumatic offense. Of course it will make you feel better if you could just move on, but you must approach this from her view point. This isn't about you right now.

During this stage most cheaters still believe that they deserve this kind of behavior. They believe that if their wife would have fulfilled their needs or

would have done this or done that then they wouldn't have had an affair in the first place.

I can't express enough how misguided this type of thinking is.

Again, this is the most important stage of the recovery because if you can do what is needed now it will be less painful for all parties involved.

### **Stage 3: Second wave of anger after cheating**

You only go through this phase if you have decided to stay together and you are trying to make your relationship work again.

After some time has passed and the routine has again stepped in to your relationship, the memories of cheating, lying and betrayal performed by you will start to come back to your spouse.

The memories of cheating or an affair might make her feel an extreme anger towards you at unexpected moments, in the middle of making love, during a romantic dinner etc.

The memories of the betrayal, lying and cheating will flatten her feelings towards you and create anger, frustration, anxiety and strong mental pain.

She is furious because you cheated and lied to her.

Your spouse thought you were her base rock in this life, the one person she could always trust and who truly cares for her, and now all this has changed forever as a result of cheating.

She starts to realize she can never go back to the time when she felt unconditional trust towards you. The images of you with your affair partner keep coming back to her and are causing her great mental and sometimes even physical pain.

During the third phase of recovery after cheating she may feel sometimes very happy and sometimes very sad. She wonders if she can ever fully trust you again.

This is the phase during which she is finally starting to realize and accept that your relationship will be permanently different from now on. She is

starting to accept that you can never return back to the way things were before cheating took place.

Phase three of the recovery process is often the hardest one of all four phases. It is important not to get stuck in this phase.

People who cannot move past the third phase of the recovery process often end up becoming bitter and depressed later in their lives.

If your wife is unable to move past this phase she is endangering the current relationship as well as all the other romantic relationships she might develop later in life.

Here, your wife must not allow your actions to affect her life in a negative way any more than they already have.

#### **Stage 4: Final adjustment after cheating or an affair**

If your relationship has survived until this point after cheating took place, it has good chances of continuing even after the trauma created by the betrayal.

During this phase of the recovery, the memory of cheating or an affair is finally starting to sink into the past. If you are still together with your spouse, she is starting to adjust to the way your relationship now is, without longing for the past - which can never return.

Here there is an acceptance of the pain and hurt and a decision to try and move on from it. There is reconciliation. Reconciliation happens when you both agree that the old marriage is dead and you're going to rebuild a new one together. There is a process of grieving for the death of the old marriage that needs to be acknowledged and come to terms with. Here, slowly, but surely, you will start to make some progress.

If you and your wife survived up to this point without separating, your relationship has good chances of becoming even stronger than it was before cheating took place.

But your relationship has also become very fragile and vulnerable should any kind of dishonesty occur. If cheating, lying and betrayal occur again, the process of the recovery takes much longer than it took the first time and

in a worst case the recovery, healing and regaining the trust towards you may not be complete.

As you move through each of these stages you will need to cater to the victim's changing needs and be constantly aware and empathetic to her changing emotions.

**Action Steps:**

- Determine as best you can what stage of infidelity you and your spouse are currently in.
- Think of how you and your wife have responded while in whatever stage(s) that have already been experienced or you are currently experiencing.
- Be aware of your spouse's emotional state. Communicate with her about her feelings and needs and cater to her as necessary.