

# Healing from an Affair



A cheater's guide  
for helping your  
spouse heal from  
your affair

by **Doug & Linda**

Emotional Affair Journey

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from your affair**

**By: Linda & Doug from Emotional Affair Journey**

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*“Healing from an Affair: A cheater’s guide for helping your spouse heal from your affair”*

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This book is intended to provide useful advice and exercises to help individuals and couples heal themselves and their relationship after infidelity. It is not a substitute for professional counseling or therapy. The authors are not professional counselors or therapists, and the advice contained herein should be considered educational only and applied at your own risk. If you need professional counseling, please seek a licensed professional therapist in your area.

Aside from all this legal stuff, enjoy the book and best wishes!

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## Forward:

When Doug told me that he wanted to write a book geared towards men on how to help their wives heal from their affair, I thought it was a great idea. When I first discovered his affair I would have paid a high price for such a book.

As a betrayed spouse I searched high and low for any information that I could find that would help ease the pain and save my marriage. Having a cheater's guide that can help a couple journey from unending pain towards healing would have been priceless to me.

So often after infidelity is discovered it is the victim of that betrayal that goes into crazy mode and starts to work like mad to understand how it could have happened. They constantly search for the answers to questions like, "What did I do wrong?" "Why doesn't he love me anymore?" "What's wrong with me?" "How can I save our marriage?"

I always thought it to be very illogical for the victim to be doing most, if not all of the work to recover and heal from an affair - but then affairs are anything but logical.

The problem is that cheaters typically go through so much trouble and hassle to keep their affairs alive, that when they are discovered it is often a relief. They say, "Finally, a weight has been lifted from my shoulders!"

Unfortunately, the relief the cheater may feel is just the start of the painfully hellish road that the betrayed must travel.

This road can become so much smoother if only the cheater would do the work necessary to help their spouse in their healing and recovery process.

This book takes aim at the exact things that the cheater needs to do to transform them from betrayer and destroyer - to healer.

Best wishes!

**Linda**

## Preface:

A few years back I had an emotional affair with a co-worker and ever since then my wife Linda and I have been working very hard to rebuild our marriage and to get past the affair.

It certainly hasn't been easy and the work still continues to this day and probably will for a long time to come. However, as a result of the work that we have done on our own, combined with the experiences obtained from our *Emotional Affair Journey* blog, we have been able to identify certain behaviors on the part of the cheater that can either lead to success or failure at surviving infidelity.

In general, what we have found is that the cheater must now become the healer. They are the key to affair recovery and to their spouse's healing.

It's not easy for those with the best of intentions, and is certainly more difficult – if not impossible - for those who just don't "get it."

The attitudes and actions of the cheating spouse affect the time it takes for the betrayed spouse to heal more than just about anything else. I know women who have never healed, and most of the time it seems that their spouses are insensitive jerks. I have read about women who healed rather quickly and their husbands have been instrumental in helping to make that happen.

This book will attempt to let the cheater know exactly what he can do to become the healer. It will offer guidance, advice and suggestions for those who wish to rebuild their marriages.

You see, even if the cheater is remorseful and has learned from his mistake, he may not have a clue as to what he needs to do to help his spouse heal. We hope that this book will offer you sound advice and suggestions that you can put to good use so that you can effectively and more quickly recover and heal from the affair.

There certainly are no guarantees that your marriage will survive your affair, but if you diligently follow the suggestions in the book and if you have a willing partner, your chances of success will be significantly greater.

Please also realize that more than likely you're not a bad person and having an affair was probably very uncharacteristic of your personality and behavior. Something happened to you along the way that set you off course. Hopefully, we can help you find out what that was.

So with that said, let's get going!

## **Do you “get it?”**

I'm sure you've heard the saying, “Time heals all wounds.” While there is an element of truth to this saying, it isn't entirely accurate when it comes to healing from an affair. You see, time does help heal, but hard work and effective effort by the couple are the real catalysts for healing.

Let me explain...

During the three years or so that we've been involved with our Emotional Affair Journey blog we have noticed hundreds, if not thousands of betrayed spouses who are stuck in their recovery and in their healing. This feeling of being stuck might happen several months or even years after the discovery of the affair. My wife, Linda was at the same crossroad at one point not too long ago.

We were recovering nicely. The thoughts of the affair didn't invade her mind nearly as much. The triggers were occurring far less frequently and when they did, their effects were minimal. We were getting along great. Yet something was holding her back.

It turns out it was me. Don't get me wrong. In our case, it wasn't as if I wasn't trying hard, and even Linda said I was doing the right things. I simply wasn't doing all the things she needed in order for her to heal.

This same theme has been played over and over again with the folks we mentor and from our blog readers. Most of the time however, the stuck feeling occurs because the cheater is helping very little - if at all - during the recovery process.

In a nutshell, the most prevalent underlying reason for this feeling of being stuck is the lack of consistent help and effort from the cheater to do the things that the betrayed spouse needs them to do in order for them to be able to recover and heal.

It seems like such an easy thing to do, but for some reason the cheater either refuses to give the betrayed spouse what it is they're most longing for or they simply just don't know what it is they need to be doing on a consistent basis.

So this book is meant to be a guide for the cheater (and the betrayed spouse) to give them ideas and concrete things to do in order to help move closer to complete healing and recovery from infidelity.

Though it is written with the cheater in mind, I feel that this guide is good for the betrayed spouse as well because she can read the book, add her own ideas as it relates to her own situation, and then have the cheater read it. It can then become her personal guide or roadmap towards healing and recovery.

There are also many victims of infidelity who have no idea what it will take to get them through the healing process. This book could also help that person become more aware of what she needs the cheater to do - even though the cheater may not be willing to do these things at this time.

This guide is geared for the cheater who actually wants to save their marriage.

For those of you who are not interested in saving your marriage and are not putting forth any effort by choice, you really need to sit down and figure out why that is. Is it because of your own feelings of guilt and shame? Are you hoping this will all just go away? Is it that you have strong lingering feelings for your affair partner? Do you question your love and commitment and whether you even want to try to fix your marriage? Are you just giving up? These are just some of questions that you need to ask yourself.

Now I'm not naïve enough to think that every marriage is going to be successful after an affair, but if each partner follows the advice in this book



and puts forth a strong and honest effort into trying to heal and rebuild the relationship, the chances are quite good.

However, if one of the spouses - and this is usually the cheater - refuses to do the work necessary, and the other person is left to try to heal on her own, languishing in painful emotions and feelings, then the chances of surviving an affair become quite less.

It's true you may be able to stay married, and yes, your marriage can be saved, but the chances of you having a happy, trusting, worthwhile and fulfilling relationship will be diminished.

In essence, what I'm saying here is if you're one of those who refuses to do any healing work, you need to s#!t or get off the pot (pardon my language). You need to figure out what it is you want to do and why.

Why waste the time, the effort, the emotions, the pain, the agony and suffering that you go through trying to repair from an affair if you really don't want to be in the marriage in the first place? It's not fair to either one of you. To those individuals, the advice in this book will mean nothing to you and you'd just be wasting your time.

Rather, this book is for the person who has realized that they have screwed up royally, are remorseful and want to try to save their marriage and help their spouse heal as effectively and as quickly as possible.

### **Are you on the fence?**

The fence sitter can benefit from this book as well. I realize that almost every cheater goes through the fence sitting stage at some point when you really don't know what it is you want and you don't know what to do or where to turn. You're in limbo, and so is your spouse. Therefore, this book might be able to help you analyze what you're doing and to make a decision on which direction you're headed, while at the same time guiding you should you decide to try to and save your marriage.

You may even be to the point where you've decided to stay in your marriage though you are unsure why. It may be because of the kids. It may be due to financial issues. It may be for a myriad of other reasons, but the fact is you decided to stay.

The reason you stayed doesn't really matter at this point. What matters is that you at least give things a try and put 100% effort into the tactics that you're going to learn throughout this book. If at the end of six months, or a year, or two years you just don't think that you can go on, then at that point you need to sit down and really make some decisions on whether or not to continue your marriage.

I can tell you from personal experience that by doing these things and working to connect with your spouse, you can fall back in love with her and you can create a marriage that is wonderful, fulfilling, fun and actually feel as if you were starting all over again. It ain't gonna happen though if you just sit back and not do the work.

It's possible that you could work like hell and do everything in your power and be the best husband you could possibly be, show tremendous and sincere remorse, and you still might not be successful. Your wife may just remain stuck or she may not be able to ever recover and heal from your infidelity. It's a real possibility but my hope is that will not be the case for you.

I'm not going to sugar coat anything in this book either.

One of the reasons I was motivated to write this was due to the utter frustration I feel as I hear story after story of cheaters who refuse to help at all with their wife's affair recovery and healing and wonder why their wife just can't "get over it." At times the cheater needs to be treated in a very stern manner for them to understand the consequences of their actions. Believe me, I speak from experience here.

So to quickly summarize before moving on...If you're a cheater who "get's it" (or wants to "get it") and wants to become a healer, then this book will help guide you. If you're the cheater who is sitting on the fence, you can put the tactics to work with 100% effort, look deep within and analyze what's best for everyone involved.

If you're the cheater (perhaps a serial cheater) who has no desire to do anything to help heal and just doesn't "get it," then I will truthfully tell you that you're wasting your time reading this.

Though this book is directed toward cheating men, it will also benefit the female cheater. The same issues tend to exist whether the cheater is male or female. You will just need to apply a woman's perspective on things.

Finally, if you came in with a spouse who, in your opinion is "the problem," please remember that however much that may or may not be the case, you are reacting and your reactions may have room for change.

Relationships are like a dance, with each person's movements somewhat dependent on the other person's. Therefore, it will be absolutely necessary for you to examine your own feelings and behavior as much as that of your spouse.

I'm not a professional writer or therapist or anything like that. This book is written from our own experiences - our mistakes and successes. It is also based on experiences communicating with others in the same boat. Some have been successful, while others are still in search of success.

This book is also written with input from my lovely wife, Linda. She has an incredible gift of understanding human nature, especially as it relates to the subject of healing from infidelity. Most (if not all) of the advice on how the betrayed spouse is feeling or what is going through their mind was derived based on Linda's input. You will find her thoughts splattered about this book in italics. Learn from what she says as your wife probably feels similar.

I've written this book from my gut and from my heart. You may not agree with everything that I suggest you do to help your wife heal from your affair. That's OK. We're all entitled to our own opinions, but I can tell you, it worked for us. It took a lot of trial and error and time, but it worked. And it can for you as well.

If you are the cheater and are reading this book, I'm guessing you probably did not buy it yourself. (If you did, then you're off to a great start!) Therefore, if you were given this book, know that your wife is very serious about the fact that something needs to change in your recovery. Your wife isn't going to get over your affair until you step it up. If you truly want to be with your wife then you need to step forward and do the work.

Okay. Enough of that. Let's get going.

## 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 she does not – she just hates 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 a good chance 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 you have already experienced - or 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.

## Understanding your wife's pain

Most of us cheaters (or ex-cheaters), have no clue how much pain we are causing, especially when we're in our affairs and immediately after our affairs are discovered. We are too wrapped up in the affair or in our own issues to notice.

Many victims have said that the pain is worse than losing a loved one.

I think the main reason this is so is because the pain from infidelity is a pain that keeps on giving and it lingers in the victim's mind for a long time. Each time they experience a trigger, the pain is there again as if the affair just occurred. They have many questions, emotions, images and feelings that constantly stir up more pain. The affair remains in the mind of the betrayed through every waking moment.

We've caused a severe trauma to our spouses, and it's a trauma that they never deserved. So we have to do our best and work our hardest to help them past this.

If for some reason you cannot comprehend the pain that you've caused or are choosing instead to disregard it, I highly suggest that you educate yourself and/or change your way of thinking right now.

Ask your wife about her pain after your affair if she hasn't already told you. If you're afraid to do that at this point, go online and check out almost any infidelity forum or blog and read some of the entries from those who have suffered as a result of an affair. I promise you it will be a real eye opener.

Unless you don't have a sympathetic bone in your body, I think that the statements from your wife or those online will touch you to a point that you can really start to comprehend the pain. Understanding that pain alone can help to change your way of thinking almost immediately.

And if you haven't figured out by now, this pain isn't something that goes away easily nor quickly. This pain can last for a long time. Experts say it takes anywhere from 2 to 4 years for a person to recover from infidelity. We are aware of some situations where the trauma has been an issue for 20 years or more. So this isn't something that we should take lightly, but instead we really need to understand exactly what we've done and just how

hard the road to recovery is and how much work it will take to help our spouses.

In case you still can't relate, let me continue on so as to really drive the point home.

Your spouse feels shock, both emotionally and physically. She's exhausted, feels worthless and probably has lost a lot of weight from the crushing stress. She has felt anger, sadness and despair and since she never saw your affair coming, it has crushed the hell out of her. She may suffer from panic attacks and has totally lost her confidence, her self-esteem and cannot trust herself to make good decisions any longer.

There is a feeling like a knife has been stabbed in her back from your betrayal. There will be times when she feels as if her life is over. In fact, she may have even thought of suicide. She feels disrespected and wonders how you could have done this to her. She trusted you and now everything she believed in as far as your relationship, your marriage and you as a person has been flushed down the toilet.

One of our blog readers writes:

*“One story I read to my husband made him weep and I can't remember what book it was in but it went like this... There was this wonderful, vibrant woman, mother of three, busy in her community, loving mother and wife. One night she discovered her husband of 30 years was having an affair (I believe an emotional affair). She went in the garage and hung herself.*

*To women an affair is like being raped. Men need to know the depth of their decisions. They need to understand that this affair will change another human being forever. Even though we recover we will be FOREVER damaged and changed. While we will learn to live with the change it is immensely unfair especially considering who you have hurt.”*

Are you catching on yet?

## **Action Steps:**

- Talk to your wife about the pain that your affair has caused her. Listen for understanding and attempt to really feel her pain. Put yourself in her shoes.
- Visit various forums and websites related to affairs and read some of the stories of pain and trauma as a result of infidelity.
- Quietly contemplate on your own situation and the pain that you've caused.
- Think of ways that you can ease her pain.

## Men and Women are...well, different!

I want to take a step back here just a bit to talk about some of the differences between men and women.

It is my opinion that many of the problems that arise in relationships and especially after an affair are due to the differences (and misunderstandings) between genders when it comes to communication and relating in general.

Why does this matter? Well, I think it's important to understand the differences so that you can be aware during your many conversations and interactions. I can tell you from experience that my lack of understanding of how Linda communicated was a major hurdle when we would discuss the affair.

By practicing and paying attention to what each of you needs in your marriage, communication-wise, you are opening up a new road that can be clean and clear of any misunderstandings, arguments and resentments.

The following is meant to be an overview of some of the gender differences and is in no way a comprehensive resource on the subject. If you wish to learn more, there are several books on the subject, such as *"Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus"* by John Gray.

Richard Drobnick, LCSW, DCSW, Director of the Mars and Venus Counseling Center, says that men and women are different in many ways as they see the world through completely different perspectives. The key to understanding the differences is in the way that we communicate.

### **6 Ways Men and Women Communicate Differently**

**One.** Men believe communication should have a clear purpose. Behind every conversation is a problem that needs solving or point that needs to be made. Communication is used to get to the root of the dilemma as efficiently as possible.

Women use communication to discover how she's feeling and what it is she wants to say. She sees conversation as an act of sharing and an opportunity

to increase intimacy with her partner. Through sharing, she releases negative feelings and solidifies her bond with the man she loves.

Linda and I were discussing this recently and she mentioned that often times she will just start talking in order to release feelings and doesn't really expect much of a response from me at all. She just wants me to listen and know that I understand and empathize with her thoughts and feelings.

**Two.** When a man tells a story he has already sorted through the muck in his own head and shares only those details that he deems essential to the point of the story. He might wonder why women need to talk as much as they do and he often will interrupt the woman once he has heard enough to offer a solution.

A woman uses communication to explore and organize her thoughts to discover the point of the story. She may not know what information is necessary or excessive until the words come spilling out. But she isn't necessarily searching for a solution when she initiates a conversation. She's looking for someone to listen and understand what she's feeling.

**Three.** A man is conditioned to listen actively when a woman initiates conversation. He assumes she is seeking his advice or assistance. He engages with the woman, filtering everything she's saying through the lens of, "What can we actually do about this?" Learning to listen patiently not just passively doesn't come easily to him.

A woman sees conversation as a productive end in and of itself. If she feels sufficiently heard or understood, she may not need to take further action to resolve a problem or make things better. The fact that she has been listened to assuages her anxieties and the pangs of negative feelings. Sharing with someone who understands and loves her heals her from the inside and equips her with the emotional tools necessary to handle the trials and tribulations of the outside world.

**Four.** When she is feeling down, a man would want to tackle her problems head-on like a fireman. He feels impatient to put the fire out as quickly as possible. For him the quickest way to put the fire out is by giving solutions. Because he wants so badly to provide for his spouse, he may take her mood personally and defend himself. He might hear things literally not realizing when his spouse is upset.

A woman will use words as tools to explore and express difficult emotions. By using words as tools to explore and express her difficult emotions when she is upset, she is able to process her negative emotions and let them go. Women value, support and nurture, and are most fulfilled by sharing, cooperation and community. When a man shows interest in her by asking caring questions or expressing heartfelt concerns, she feels loved and cared for and he is fulfilling her primary love need.

**Five.** When he is feeling down...He will often withdraw into his cave. This means he becomes quiet and withdrawn when he's upset or stressed. A man's cave time is like a short vacation: he reduces stress by forgetting about his problems and focusing on other things like watching television and reading the newspaper or playing video games.

He might avoid communication with his spouse during times of duress. If she persists with nurturing questions or criticism he withdraws even further, fearing that his partner doesn't trust him to take care of business on his own. However with her support and understanding, a man will return and be more emotionally available caring and loving.

A woman might interpret her spouse's silence as a sign that she is failing him or that she's losing him. She instinctively tries to nurture him through his problems by asking an abundance of caring questions. Or she may react defensively out of fear that her own need for healthy open communication is not being respected within the relationship.

Ultimately, she can do more for him by appreciating his space which shows him that she trusts him to work out the problem on his own. Trusting is one of the greatest gifts she has to offer him. In the meantime, she should do something nurturing for herself, so she won't resent him when he emerges from his cave time.

**Six.** Communication breaks down when...He feels like he's being told what to do. The most important thing to a man is doing a good job. When his competence is questioned he'll not only feel hurt, but he'll throw up a wall of resistance, and communication begins to break down. He thrives in an environment where he's the expert. Rather than being told, "You should do this," he is likely to respond better to "What do you think of this?" The trick to improving him is to resist telling him what to do.

A woman hears from her spouse that her problems are as real and pressing as they seem in that very moment. Her spouse may mistakenly think he's being helpful in providing reality checks like "You're making a mountain out of a mole hill!" or "You're getting overly emotional about it." To her it feels like he is attempting to minimize her feelings or talk her out of having them.

Men and women typically desire to satisfy their partners, but they may miss the mark because it is truly difficult to understand and accept our partner's different ways of communication.

If you take this information above and dissect it and try to analyze it based on situations that occur in your own relationship, I bet that you will find that there are times, maybe more often than you care to admit, where your communication breaks down because of gender differences in communication styles. This can especially be the case in the situation of recovering from infidelity and trying to help your wife heal from your affair.

Quite often your wife is going to be approaching you in perhaps an argumentative or accusatory manner. As a man, our first reaction might be defensive as our fight or flight mechanism kicks in at that point in time.

I certainly had my instances of being frustrated and getting defensive with Linda's questioning while talking about my affair. However, I learned over time that though she needs to have details and answers regarding the affair, most of the time she is simply approaching me to express her feelings and to reach out in a way that she knows I care for her. She needs to know that I understand and empathize with her feelings. There have been times when she has expressed herself and has released some emotions and all she wanted me to do was listen and hold her. Then she was better.

From her standpoint, she has learned to approach me in a more relaxed manner. Not accusatory and not like it's an interrogation. She has learned that this is what causes me to react in a counterproductive manner. As a result, this has eased my defensiveness and frustrations and has allowed me to open up and to communicate a little bit more about whatever it is she's wanting to talk about.



According to Melissa Dittman Tracy there are five main communication differences between the sexes:

1. **Women's brains are always on.** There is more neural activity in the female brain at any given time than in the male brain.
2. **Men just want the facts.** Men usually ask questions to stimulate conversation in their work relationships and often end conversation more abruptly than women.
3. **Women focus on friendship first.** For female salespeople for instance, they tend to build relationships when they sell. They don't tend to go into a transaction focused on the final outcome, but wanting to build rapport and learn more about the client first.
4. **Men take it one task at a time.** Men tend to like to focus on one task at a time, whereas women's brains are more geared to multitask.
5. **Women remember the little details.** Females can generally remember more physical and relational details than men.

### **Some additional observations:**

- Women interrupt to demonstrate concern. While men interrupt to try to control the conversation.
- In negotiations women prefer discussion with the goal being agreement. Men feel that this is a manipulation. They are more direct and want speedy results.
- Women need to know that a lack of communication on the man's part has more to do with their different wiring, not because of a lack of affection.
- Men tend to express themselves better through actions more than words.
- Working to earn money in order to take care of their families is a man's expression of love. By the same token men need to understand that women express themselves through verbal communication. The feelings need to be acknowledged as opposed to explained away.

The differences between men and women include differences in thought process, sensitivity, memory, and communication. A successful relationship is one that recognizes the differences between men and women and is able to get beyond the 'he said, she said' scenarios.

This would be especially true in the case of infidelity because you are already at each other's throats and you're trying to solve many problems all at once.

The task that faces men and women is to learn to accept their differences, avoid taking their differences as personal attempts to frustrate each other, and to compromise whenever possible.

Ok, so now we have a better idea of the differences between men and women and how it's going to create some challenges for you when you're communicating about and working through the affair issues – if it hasn't already.

Here is a link to a video that will give you a somewhat humorous view of the differences in the way men and women think:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XjUFYxSxDk>

### **Action Steps:**

- Think about the differences in communication styles that exist between you and your spouse. How does each of you react when demonstrating these differences?
- Have a discussion with your spouse about these differences and the meanings associated with his/her various styles. For instance, what is behind your need to control a conversation?
- Discuss ways that each of you misinterprets the meaning of one another's communication styles.
- Suggest to one another how you can better manage the differences in communication.

## What does your partner need to help her heal?

Now we are going to get into the specifics of what your spouse needs from you in order for her healing process to progress.

We have regularly conducted surveys or have had discussions asking this very question. Chances are your spouse needs the exact same things from you. Here are some key points that need to be addressed in order for you to become a healer (in no particular order):

- Stop all contact with the other person – forever
- Be sensitive when your partner suffers from a trigger
- Stop being so selfish
- Take responsibility for your actions – and inactions
- Stop trying to always be in control
- Have some patience
- Be trustworthy
- Talk about things
- Be honest
- Show remorse and apologize
- Acknowledge the depth of the pain that your affair brought to your marriage
- Educate yourself about affairs and relationships
- Figure out for yourself why you did what you did
- Be thoughtful and reassuring
- Stop being so defensive
- Be loving and supportive
- Stop thinking that the grass is always greener somewhere else
- Listen – really listen
- Stop blaming your spouse for your affair
- Make your life and everything you do an open book
- Check your anger at the door
- Get some counseling or therapy
- Ask your spouse what he/she needs from you on a regular basis
- Gratitude or gratefulness

We will address each of these points individually.

Before we do, let me just say that it's very difficult to be labeled as a cheater. You have to accept that label before you can begin the healing and recovery process.

If you are still living in denial that what you did was justified or not as bad as you are ready to admit to yourself and your wife, then these steps will not be productive.

You need to face up to the hard truth. You might want to make a private list or journal of all the things that went on during the affair. No one has to see it, but putting it out there where you can see and absorb it can be a real eye opener for you to understand the seriousness of your actions.

Ok, here we go!

## Stop all contact with the affair partner - forever!

I won't get too much into all of the why's and how's of ending your affair and stopping all contact for good. I'm sure that you know that ending the affair and any contact with your affair partner is a necessity if you want to save your marriage. There can be no recovery and healing otherwise. Just do it.

I didn't end my affair immediately upon discovery and I regret that fact very much. I realize it can be tough and you may waiver on your resolve to end things, but you must. When I did end the affair, I did so by phone and I've had zero contact since.

In many respects, you have been behaving like a person addicted to a drug. Your drug of choice has been another woman. When a person is addicted to drugs, the drug provides that person with wonderful feelings. Similarly, the affair gave you wonderful feelings. After all, that's probably why you got involved with the affair in the first place.

Because of this addiction, it may not be possible for you to easily give up the affair. You're going to feel all the feelings you were trying to avoid by engaging in the affair. When you are feeling down and out or when you are in emotional pain, the way of escape you became accustomed to won't be there.

Now is when you need to have faith that when you end the affair and you start looking within and begin working on yourself and your issues, at some future time you will be in better shape and feel better than you ever have. That may not be how you're feeling at this very moment, but keep the faith, and you can make it happen.

If you have indeed ended your affair, good for you! The challenge that you face from here on out is to make and honor the commitment to yourself and your wife that you will not have any further contact with your affair partner and that you will tell your wife should any accidental contact occur (like running into her at the store, etc.).

If you haven't ended the affair, now is the time to do so. There simply is no way that you can repair your relationship, your honesty, your integrity, and your life if you are still engaged in an affair.

There are four possible ways you can let your affair partner know that the affair is over:

1. Simply do not contact her ever again
2. Tell her over the phone
3. Send her a letter
4. Send her an e-mail

Do not meet with her in person to end the relationship. It probably won't turn out very good.

Regardless of the way you choose to contact your affair partner, you should make this final contact almost business-like and in the presence of your wife. By doing this, you are actually starting the trust building process. If you are ending it by phone, let your wife listen in. If you choose to send an e-mail or write a letter, allow your wife to read it and offer suggestions prior to sending it.

Make it clear that this permanently and unconditionally marks the end of the relationship and that you will not be in contact with her anymore and that you will not respond to any of her attempts to communicate with you.

Let her know that the affair was wrong and that you have chosen to work on your marriage. You will not be friends with her or respond to her if you happen to run into her unexpectedly.

You don't have to be an asshole about it if it's not necessary, but be quite clear to her that the affair is over and that any remaining connections you have to one another must end as well.

After you've ended it, there may be times when your affair partner will try to contact you. Again, do not respond. If this happens, tell your wife. If the affair partner sends you emails or letters, do not respond and show them to your wife.

None of this will be easy but you must suck it up and face the pain if you want to save your marriage.

### **Action Steps:**

- Formulate your plan to end the affair and discuss it with your wife.
- Follow your plan and stick to it.

## Be sensitive when your partner suffers from a trigger

As you are probably already aware, you will go through periods initially when things will not be very pleasant – and rightfully so.

Your wife is going to be angry. She's going to be emotional and she's going to be crying much of the time. There may be days when she won't feel like getting out of bed.

But as time goes on, little by little you will find that she may go for days or weeks or possibly even months where everything seems pretty good. Then all of a sudden something happens which causes painful memories to come flying back. There is a flood of emotion, anger or resentment and she feels like she just wants to burst out and cry.

This my friend, would be a trigger.

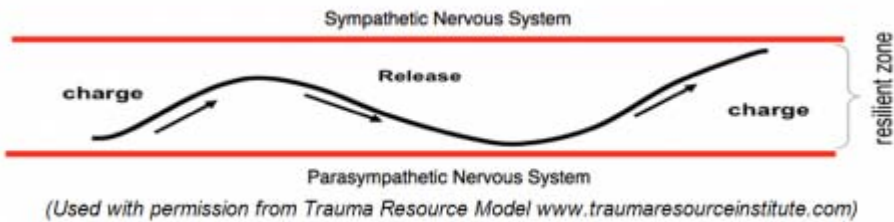
According to Joyce E. Smith, MA, MFT, when your wife experiences a trigger, there are actually physiological changes that are happening inside her brain that she cannot control.

Here's a brief Anatomy and Physiology lesson on what happens inside your wife's brain when she suffers a trigger caused by the infidelity trauma.

First, let's side step a bit and give you a very brief description of something called our Autonomic Nervous System, or ANS. As the first part of the word "auto" implies, this is something that happens automatically. Think of it as something akin to breathing – most of the time we don't give it a second thought. It's purely instinctual, and there's nothing conscious about it.

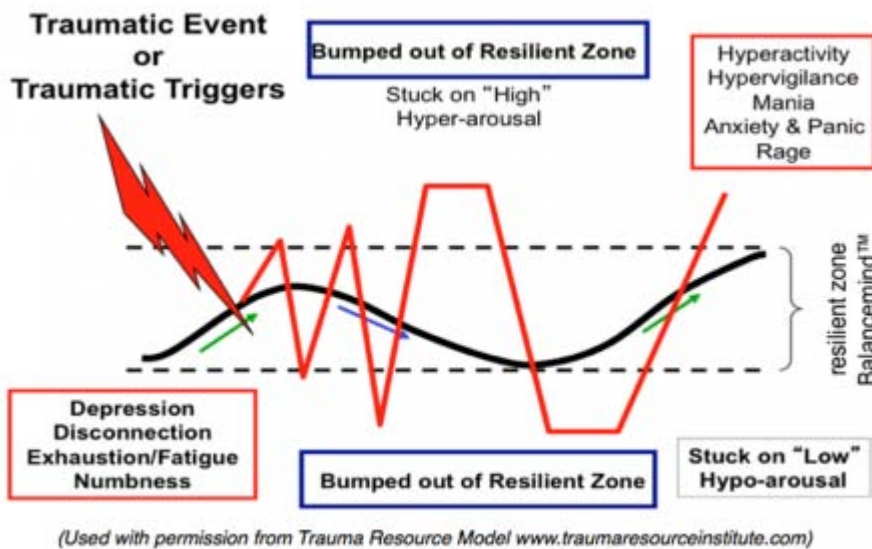
Contained in our ANS are two branches: the Sympathetic Nervous System or SNS, and the Parasympathetic Nervous System or PNS. The SNS (think stress) gets our organs ready for action, causing an increase in our breathing rate, blood pressure, heart rate, stress hormones, sweating, and our pupils to dilate. Our PNS causes a slowing down in the same areas. Under normal circumstances, there's a gentle ebb and flow between the two, which looks something like this:





When we experience trauma, our SNS kicks into action when we perceive that in order to survive, we must either physically defend ourselves, or get out of there fast!!! This is referred to as “fight or flight.” There is also a third component which most people are not familiar with called “freeze.” This results when we perceive we’re not able to “fight or flight”. When this occurs, we’re usually left feeling a tremendous amount of guilt and shame. All those times you find yourself asking “Why didn’t I?”, “I can’t believe I didn’t!” etc. *It’s because you physiologically couldn’t!*

When there’s a traumatic event (like when your spouse discovered your infidelity), or any trigger of that event, our ANS goes nuts, ping-ponging out of control. In addition, sometimes we might become “stuck on high”, filled with rage, anxiety or always feeling on edge. Other times you might become “stuck on low”, better known as depression. This can happen when you burn out from being “stuck on high” for too long. Below is an illustration of what all of this might look like.



So you can see that your wife isn't really crazy.

Let me explain some more about the circus of our neurobiological hijacking.

Tucked inside our brain is a little area called the amygdala which registers fear. It's also in cahoots with our inherent survival mechanism. In order to survive in the world, it's important to stay away from anything that threatens our existence. So....., when there's a perception of something endangering our sense of safety, our inherent survival mechanism kicks into action with a laser like quality. Its sole task is to make sure we recognize and avoid anything remotely related to the original trauma so we never have that experience again.

In order to educate our own personal mental SWAT team, in the moment of trauma, our brain takes a snapshot-like photo of everything related to it – and I mean *everything!* It could be a color, a smell, the time of day, a specific word, a blond woman, or any woman for that matter.

Oh yeah, and what about you? Do you think that YOU just might be a trigger too? You get the idea.

Much like shards of broken glass, each individual trigger is filed away in a separate compartment of our brain, in the “to deal with later” section, all tied together by the word “danger.”

If this is getting a bit too technical, hang on just a little bit longer, as all this is about to be tied together.

The left side of our brain contains our rational and logical functions. This part has a timeline, and is able to correctly put things that have occurred in the past, in the past. Now the right side is a different story. This side ties into your emotions *and* your inherent survival mechanism. When your wife is triggered, this side takes over before she can blink. Her rational thinking instantaneously goes into shut down mode and is temporarily inaccessible. Think about it. If there's a tiger staring you in the face, is your first thought going to be “Hmmm, what should I make for dinner?” or “GET ME OUT OF HERE!!!”

When your wife is triggered by something, it's generally either related to something in the past, or something she's afraid is going to happen in the future. Unfortunately the emotional or right side of our brain doesn't have a sense of time, and reacts as if there's only NOW!!!! When she senses any

one of those triggers, her brain and nervous system screams **DANGER!!!** Suddenly, faster than the speed of light, she's teleported back to the exact moment the trauma occurred, as if frozen in time – like she's stuck in some vicious time warp. She may not be able to currently see any evidence of the trauma, but she'll have a tough time trying to convince her nervous system of that.

I hope by now you're beginning to understand why the betrayal of infidelity has been staying with your spouse like a nagging mosquito that won't go away.

In addition, if she's had any prior traumatic experiences, (i.e. been raped, been physically or sexually abused, a car accident, have grown up in an alcoholic household, etc.) each one of those events has its own collection of individual triggers.

If there's anything in common with her experience of being betrayed, ALL of those neuro-networks light up together, like one giant nuclear explosion.

There you have it. Now you know why when your spouse suffers a trigger, it can be like D-day all over again.

A couple of Linda's triggers include my texting on my cell phone (if she doesn't know who it is) and if I walk away while talking on my phone. I try to make sure then that I do not do these things. If I'm texting with someone, I be sure to mention who it is I'm texting and why. If I feel I have to walk away when I talk on the phone, I make sure Linda knows who it is I'm talking to.

When it comes to triggers, it would be ideal if you could actually be aware of what they are and then anticipate them. For instance, if your wife knew you conducted much of your affair in a local hotel, you may want to steer clear of that hotel when the two of you are out driving around. If your affair was hot and heavy during the holidays, chances are that time of year will be one big trigger, so you'll want to be super attentive to her during that time.

Anticipate these kinds of things. This isn't very easy at first, but after a while (and if you use your brain a bit) you will start to understand and be more aware of what your wife's triggers are.

What makes it even more challenging is that she may not even know what some of her triggers are. Something can happen, or she can be in a particular place and for no apparent reason, she is triggered.

It's very important to talk to your wife about what triggers her so that you can be more aware.

To illustrate, as I write this it is approaching Christmas. Linda loves Christmas and she always makes our house look wonderful, which really gets us all in the holiday spirit. However, everything that she does during the holidays like baking cookies, shopping, decorating, etc. – when combined with her teaching job - really stresses her out. You can just see the tense look on her face as the 'big day' approaches.

The other day I mentioned that she was starting to get all stressed out and that I wanted to help her get stuff done so she could relax and enjoy things more. I feel the holidays shouldn't be so stressful. Well, little did I realize that what I said was a substantial trigger for her. Apparently, I told her similar things while my affair was going on.

I obviously did not remember saying these things four years ago (which is no surprise) and certainly was not aware that my words would be a trigger for her. We talked briefly about it and now I'm aware and if necessary, will approach the issue differently next year.

***Linda:*** *Just know that it's virtually impossible to avoid all of your wife's triggers, so when they do happen you need to be really understanding and empathetic and let her experience the emotions and feelings that she's going to have. Know that it's normal and that it's really not about you so much as it is about her trying to deal with her pain.*

*One important thing to remember is that you need to remove yourself from her emotions. Do not get defensive. Do not think she's trying to punish you, because that is the last thing that she is doing. She actually wants to get closer to you (remember how women and men relate differently).*

Do not take her reactions to triggers personally!

Oftentimes a trigger will come up when she is feeling insecure or wants to vent. You may not know what the insecurity is, but you will know that when she begins talking about the affair, it is pretty certain that she is feeling distance from you and she needs for you to come closer.

So do not try to “fix” anything. Do not tell her to “Get over it.” Do not try to make her better. The best thing to do is to hold her, tell her you are sorry, and use words “I am sorry for...” (What are you sorry for?) Don’t just say, “I’m sorry.” Say “I’m sorry for hurting you. I’m sorry for betraying you.” Be as specific as you can and be patient. She’s moving towards you.

Remember that and try to just put yourself in her place. Act like you’re not the cheater but a friend who’s trying to help her.

The good news – for both of you – is that the painful effect of triggers will start to fade after a while. Though they still exist with Linda, the effect isn’t quite so bad, although even to this day, we still try to avoid things that are triggers.

### **Action Steps:**

- Become acutely aware of what triggers your wife. Triggers are very personal things and are different for each victim. You can certainly ask her what they are. Know the dates, places, events, etc. that are triggers for your wife.
- Anticipate them. For instance, if your affair was discovered during the winter months, chances are your wife may have a very difficult time during the holidays.
- Be patient and understanding when the triggers occur. Don’t get frustrated, angry or defensive. Be empathetic.
- Let your wife express her emotions freely and without judgment.

## Stop being so selfish

We all know that having an affair in the first place is an insanely selfish thing to do. I'm not going to beat that point into your brain any further. But whether you realize it or not, your selfishness may be continuing as we speak – even if you've ended your affair and committed yourself to saving your marriage.

One of the most disturbing behaviors we've observed by the cheater time and time again is selfishness – thinking that everything is about them and how they are hurting, feeling and grieving – as a result of their affair. They believe there are only two people in the world that are important or valuable – them and their affair partner. Additionally, they more than likely have the mindset that they just want to move on and demand their spouse to just get over it. That's selfish.

I have witnessed many cheaters (me included at one time) who lack compassion and empathy and are unable to see beyond the fantasy world and understand the pain their selfishness has caused.

Also, many times after an affair has been discovered, the cheater shows selfishness by “sitting on the fence.” In other words, the cheater won't make a decision post discovery, so instead they hold everyone hostage. They want their affair partner and their spouse—the ultimate in having your cake and eating it too!

It's a very cowardly act as they can make a conscious CHOICE to have an affair, but can't make a choice about whether to stay or go. It's just another way to make it all about them.

Here's what Linda has to say about my selfishness:

*“After three years I truly understand how much selfishness played a part in Doug's affair. I remember about almost a year after the final D-day, Doug wrote a post about his selfishness and how he realized that that was part of the affair and the reason why he didn't end the affair after I found out. I think that was the first post that he actually started to get it. Up until that point, he was writing more about what he read in books. It wasn't from the heart and he had finally come to the point where he internalized that he had been very selfish.”*

*At first when I found out about Doug's affair I blamed myself because I didn't do this, or I didn't do that. What he was telling me at the time made me believe that. I didn't meet his needs and that we were living like roommates, etc. After three years, now I understand it had nothing to do with me and him not ending the affair. It was just something that he wanted to do. He didn't want to end it.*

*He really didn't care about anyone but himself. He didn't care about me. He didn't care about his children. He didn't care about the other woman. It was all about how he was feeling. That selfishness allowed him to be dishonest and to say things that were very uncharacteristic of him."*

If you take the time to look inside yourself and really analyze what was going on while you were in your affair before, during and probably after it, you'll realize that there was/is a great deal of selfishness on your part.

### **Action Steps:**

- Think about your selfishness and be aware of it and the consequences it is having in your marriage and in your life.
- Get to the root of your selfishness. What was missing in your life that caused you to be so selfish? Why was it so necessary to concentrate on your ego rather than be the husband that you want to (and should) be?
- Have confidence. Being selfish sometimes relates to a lack of self confidence. Make a list of things you are good at, cut it into slips, and put them in a jar. Everyday draw one slip out of the jar and read it, remembering that although you may be good at one thing, you are not good at everything.
- Work on being less selfish. Make an effort to focus on other people's perspective. Ask questions of others and listen actively. Extend yourself to help your wife, family and friends. It will make you feel good, as it softens and warms your ways.



## Take responsibility for your actions - and/or inactions

Oftentimes when you are a cheater you feel a tremendous amount of guilt, so you will justify your actions believing that that will make it better. I think you can agree that is nothing but bull\$#!+.

Whenever you use a justification to explain your actions – or lack of taking action - you are either telling the world that it was not your fault or you are telling your wife that it was all her fault.

For example, if you say, “You weren’t meeting my needs, but it’s not your fault,” those are two opposites. Whenever you use the word “you,” you are taking responsibility off of you and putting it on your spouse. You need to take full responsibility. “I did this. I did that. I felt this way.”

As they say... “Man up!” Admit you were wrong. Admit that you totally screwed up for no good reason. Then get busy making up for your screw up!

Taking responsibility earns you respect. We can't be perfect all the time, we all make mistakes. When we accept responsibility we are accepting the blame for our actions and also accepting the responsibility for making improvements in our lives.

Accepting responsibility is a measure of one's self-worth, their level of security, and the true sign of strength and courage. Having this ability can empower you to grow in ways that would bring you great rewards and accomplishments in your life.

### **Action Steps:**

- Acknowledge and accept what happened and that you messed up completely on your own – no excuses.
- Realize that you cannot place the blame on others for the choices you have made.
- Reflect on why you won’t take responsibility for your actions. Do you do this in other areas of your life? What are the underlying reasons – fear, insecurity, arrogance?
- Tell your wife in an appropriate way that there were no justifications for your affair and that you take full responsibility for your actions.



## Stop trying to always be in control

As a man, we're typically taught when we're young that we need to be in control of ourselves, our emotions - basically everything we do - and over everyone we come in contact with. It's what our fathers did, so it must be right.

In some ways, you probably got into an affair because you lost some control of your life and the affair served as a way that you could regain it. You could somehow take control of the affair.

When you're trying to help your wife heal from an affair, you need to let go of that control. You need to be on your wife's timetable for healing and that will mean a loss of control on your part, but you need to be patient and let her work through things.

You need to really look within yourself and be aware of how often you are trying to control the situation. You're going to have to give up most of your rights, lose your humility and allow your wife to control things, tell you what she needs, give you direction and then you need to follow that and do everything you can to help her out.

You also need to let loose of that man-like control of your emotions. Learn to be vulnerable.

Like most men, I was taught that crying wasn't the way to express emotions. I can tell you that I have never cried so much as I have while Linda and I struggled through our healing process. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to cry, open up and show some vulnerability. Chances are your wife will appreciate it and you can learn from it.

### **Action Steps:**

- Reflect on the ways that you try to exert your control over your wife, marriage and family. Is it necessary? What have the consequences been as a result of your need to always be in control?
- In what ways do you exert control over your emotions? How might your situation be different if you were more vulnerable? How could it be different moving forward?

- **Let your wife know that you will do whatever is necessary to get her through this and allow her to take the reins.**

## Have some patience

I can honestly say that at times in the past, I could be one of the most impatient people that I know. This whole situation has helped me to become much more patient though.

At first, I had very little patience for Linda's tears, for her emotional state or for answering questions about the affair. I had to change that or our marriage was going to disintegrate.

One of the keys to helping your wife recover is to listen patiently to her pain and answer her questions.

***Linda:*** *You have to realize that when she is asking a question, oftentimes she's not hearing all of your answers. Her emotional state is such that she's only hearing half of what you're saying, so she will ask you the same questions over and over. So you may have to repeat yourself over and over again. It's not because she's punishing you; she's just trying to make sense of your answers. She's trying to absorb them.*

You need to realize that you will be answering the same questions and dealing with the same situations probably month after month for quite some time. The more patience that you show and the more open you are about answering her questions, the shorter time it will take for her to recover.

It's not only the same questions that'll be coming up but it will be the same triggers and the same emotions that you'll be dealing with.

There will also be some seasonality to things. In the wintertime, if your affair happened during that time, there will be lots of triggers. Holidays will be awful because she will associate those days with family events and if you cheated during that time, you invaded those family traditions. Birthdays will be bad. The list goes on. You have to realize that you will need to be very patient. It was your choice to cheat. Deal with it.

### **Action Steps:**

- Make a list of things that cause you to become impatient. This will help you to discover the true cause of your impatience.

When you feel impatient, it's important to get out of this frame of mind as quickly as possible. Try these strategies:

- Take deep, slow breaths, and count to 10. Doing this helps slow your heart rate, relaxes your body, and distances you emotionally from the situation. If you're feeling really impatient, you might need to do a longer count, or do this several times.
- Impatience can cause you to tense your muscles involuntarily. So, consciously focus on relaxing your body. Again, take slow, deep breaths. Relax your muscles, from your toes up to the top of your head.
- Learn to manage your emotions. Remember, you have a choice in how you react in every situation. You can choose to be patient, or choose not to be.
- Force yourself to slow down. Make yourself speak and move more slowly. It will appear to others as if you're calm – and, by "acting" patient, you can often "feel" more patient.
- Practice listening skills. Make sure you give other people your full attention, and patiently plan your response to what they say.
- Remind yourself that your impatience is only creating more stress, which is completely unproductive.
- Try to talk yourself out of your impatient frame of mind. Remind yourself how silly it is that you're reacting this way.

## Be trustworthy

Ah, trust. Trust is the most difficult hurdle for the marriage to overcome after an affair. I will tell you that when it comes to rebuilding trust in your marriage and in you, the work is all on your shoulders. Your wife will need to work at rebuilding trust in herself, but the rest is up to you. Here, your words mean next to nothing and your actions mean everything.

Many cheaters believe that if they surrender their cell phone, their passwords, their e-mail addresses and things like that that they are being trustworthy, but it goes a lot deeper than that. Being trustworthy means you are keeping the promises to your spouse and not just saying, "I'm not going to see the affair partner anymore. I'm going to stop the affair." It's how you live your life on a daily basis.

***Linda:*** *It's very important to be consistent in everything you do and say. She is trying to trust you again and she is very aware of your actions and words. Any inconsistency will produce fear and fear will bring panic and anxiety. Now, she may act crazy and her actions will not be consistent (happy one moment, crying or anger the next) but your job is to be a kind and patient as possible. You have to remember you are dealing with a person who has experienced a severe trauma. Every facet of her life has been violated. She is acting like a person who has been raped, abused, etc. and it will take time to heal.*

If you promise that you are going to stop by the store and pick up milk, you had better come home with some milk! Anytime that you decide to break a promise - even a seemingly trivial act of picking up a gallon of milk - it will trigger something in your wife that says, "Oh, he can't be trusted."

It doesn't take much to break the fragileness of rebuilding the trust after an affair.

Realize as well that your words do not mean much to your wife because during your affair you verbally lied to her. You told the other woman many times that you loved her or that you weren't happy in your marriage, so your words mean very little to your wife. Trust at this point is all going to be based on your actions.

Also realize that one of your wife's biggest fears is that you will either start your affair up again with your affair partner, or at some point in the future have another affair. She doesn't want to go through this again. The pain was too great. You can alleviate some of her worries if you are trustworthy.

What are you doing to rebuild the trust each day? How are you showing her that you are here for the long haul? You don't realize that when you cheat you take away your spouse's past, present, and future.

Your wife believed that you would grow old together. She may get sick or injured, and believed that you would be there to take care of her. Well, that trust was broken. She doesn't believe that anymore, so you need to do everything on a daily basis to rebuild trust.

Trust is such a difficult and fragile thing that we could write an entire book just on rebuilding trust after an affair. In fact, we have! If you want to really know how to have trust again in your relationship, you might want to check out [\*"Journey to Trust: Rebuilding Trust After an Affair."\*](#)

### **Action Steps:**

- Assess the level of trust within your relationship. What are some of the things that cause mistrust the most?
- Think about how the loss of trust has affected your marriage/relationship.
- Discover the barriers to trust in your relationship. For instance, has your continued lying and/or impatience created a barrier to rebuilding trust?
- Work at doing small trust-building actions on a daily basis. Spend more time together. Be transparent in everything you do.

## Talk about things

Trust me on this one guys, this is a biggie.

Refusing to talk about the affair is the number one complaint women have about their husbands, based on our surveys.

I realize you don't want to talk about it for whatever reason. I didn't want to talk about it either. I just wanted it to go away. Unfortunately, that doesn't matter if you want to save your marriage and help your wife heal.

I know as a man, a lot of times we don't want to talk about things and we don't want to express feelings and all that sort of stuff, but you just have to suck it up and do it. You need to sacrifice your quiet cave time and learn to open up. Otherwise, your affair is going to be the elephant in the room for a very long time.

When mentoring cheaters, one thing I will tell them is that if they want to help their wives get over the affair, recover and heal, they need to wrap their heads around the fact that if they just give their wives what it is they're looking for, the healing process will go so much faster. It will help their wives to "move on" more quickly, which is exactly what they (the cheaters) really want in the first place.

Certainly talking about your affair is arguably the most important thing that you're going to have to do. So do it for both of you!

If your situation is anything like many other cheaters, an interesting thing happened after your affair was discovered. You may have felt like the weight was lifted from your shoulders. The stress of the affair was magically relieved once your wife found out about it. Assuming you then ended the affair, you may have felt that it was all over and it was time to move on. After all, what's past is past and you promise never to do it again. So she needs to get over it.

Well, I don't think I need to tell you how misguided that thought process is. For you wife, the pain, the emotions, the anger and the questions are only just beginning. Talking about the affair so that she understands it is what she needs right now.

When you do talk about it, be completely honest. What you may not realize is that when your affair was first discovered you probably only revealed part of the details believing that that was all your wife needed to hear. But as time goes on and she keeps pounding you with questions and she finds out more information and details, it's like starting all over again for her. It's like having a D-day over and over again.

I think Linda and I have probably had about 10 D-days. Even two or three years later I released new information. Then we would have to start from day one building trust and dealing with the new triggers. I screwed up badly here and suggest you do as I say and not as I did! So be completely honest upfront (more on this in the next section).

***Linda:*** *I know you think that telling your wife everything will be very difficult for her, and it will. By verbalizing everything that you did, it's going to be very difficult for you as well because you will finally realize "Gosh, I really stepped over the boundaries and I can't believe that I did this. I can't believe I caused so much pain." It's just as important for you to verbalize the details of the affair so that you can deal with it too. If you keep it in this nice little box and you keep it looking all rose-colored, that's the way it's going to stay. You need to get it out so the ugly truth is revealed and addressed.*

### **Action Steps:**

- Pretty easy here guys...If your wife wants to talk about the affair, oblige her. Let her be in control of the conversation.
- I recommend that you both agree to some ground rules that help to create a safe environment which fosters open communication. Rules like, you agree to talk about the affair for an hour at a time, or there will be no angry outbursts, etc.
- Review the communication differences between the sexes that were previously mentioned, keeping them in mind while you talk with your wife.
- If your wife asks you a comparative question such as "Was she better in bed than I am?" remind her that the question isn't a very healthy one and that you don't intend to answer it. Reassure her that you are willing to be completely honest, but that you also feel responsible for not sharing illicit details of the affair that serve no function.



## Be honest

The most important thing after an affair is discovered is that you are completely honest about the details of the affair. Keeping things a secret on the misguided belief that it will hurt your wife or it will be uncomfortable for you will come back to haunt you down the road.

***Linda:*** *Your wife probably knows a lot more about your affair than you think she does. Just from examining phone records and from what you have told her, she has drawn a pretty clear conclusion of what happened in the affair. A woman's intuition is powerful. She knows if you are keeping things from her.*

Unfortunately, complete honesty is not as easy as it might seem. In the course of the conversations during recovery, some difficult questions will arise. It can get tense and things can become quite heated and uncomfortable. If you tend to like to shy away from confrontation, it will feel like you are in hell.

As a result, this type of environment is conducive to telling “little white lies,” telling your wife what you think she wants to hear or throwing up your instinctual defenses and shutting down once you feel things are getting out of hand. At times, lying can be very tempting. Your goal is to not engage in these behaviors.

What's more, lying always builds a pattern of more lying. If you feel that lying gets you what you want, you will lie again. I guarantee it.

In the long run, these lies do not serve your relationship in any way whatsoever. They only add to the worry, distrust and suspicion that are lurking around your relationship after the affair.

They also prevent important issues from being discussed. If you are lying about something because you think your wife will have an unpleasant emotional response, it is because it is an important issue for her. These kinds of difficult issues are exactly the things you should be talking about and trying to work out in your relationship. Open up and air it out, no matter how difficult, as it is in the best interests of your relationship.

Your wife will not fully get over your affair until you are completely honest about everything that happened. That means the physical aspect, the emotional aspect, where it took place, how it took place. Those questions all need to be addressed.

As mentioned before, you also need to be honest going forward in every aspect of your life. Be open and honest with your thoughts and feelings and how you conduct yourself.

Your relationship is either going to survive these difficult times or it won't. You will want your relationship from here on out to be fresh and new and based on complete honesty. It's important that your marriage can survive with honesty.

### **Action Steps:**

- Be honest and transparent in everything you do, but make sure not to use honesty as an excuse to be cruel or hurtful.
- If lying tends to be a habit for you, contemplate why that is. What do you stand to gain or lose by lying?

## Show remorse and apologize

We haven't really talked about the "affair fog," but at some point you were in this misguided state of mind where you believed that you deserved your affair. You managed to rewrite the history of your marriage and were under the impression that your wife has been mean and rotten and an all around terrible person.

You were pretty high on justifying the reasons for the affair, so for a period of time you may have found it very difficult to show remorse and to apologize.

For one, you were/are in denial. You probably said things like, "Nothing happened. We were just friends. We just talked on the phone." You really need to look deep and understand exactly what you did to your marriage and the pain that you caused. Write it down and then you need to apologize for each and everything you did.

We spoke with author Dave Carder (*Torn Asunder*) who asks his cheating clients to make a list of everything that happened during the affair and directly apologize to their wife saying something like, "I am sorry that I told the other woman that I loved her. I'm sorry that I spent Mother's Day on the phone with her rather than you." Go down the list and apologize for each transgression. You may be lucky enough that your wife will forgive you, but don't be upset if she isn't ready to just yet.

You need to show your wife that you feel terrible about what you did and you need to apologize for it. Apologize on a regular basis as well. "I'm sorry I took our marriage for granted." "I'm sorry I did this to you." However, be sure not to throw a "but" in your apologies. Don't say something like, "I'm sorry that I cheated *but* you were mean as a snake at that time." Do not ever add a "but" to your apology. To do so would imply that you are not taking responsibility for your actions!

### **What about guilt?**

Remorse goes hand in hand with guilt. I'm talking about feeling guilty for your affair.

Wikipedia defines guilt in this context as “*an emotion that occurs when a person believes that they have violated a moral standard.*”

To some, these emotions nag at their brains and at their conscious periodically and may be triggered by certain events such as when their wives experience painful emotions and feelings as a result of the affair.

In my opinion, this is natural and is all part of the affair recovery process. This type of guilt may last for a very long time – possibly forever – but the effects of the emotions should lessen over a period of time. This is especially true if the betrayed has seen fit to offer forgiveness for their spouse’s betrayal and the cheater has come to terms internally with the betrayal and has been able to forgive himself.

To others however, the feelings of guilt can become overwhelming at times – and quite possibly dangerous.

Strong, lasting feelings of guilt can lead to such conditions as frustration, melancholia, persistent agony, mental instability, uncontrolled anger, inferiority complex, self-condemnation and depression. These conditions could manifest themselves via destructive activities such as excessive drinking, smoking or drug use, for example.

For these types of situations I can only recommend that a person seek some treatment from a qualified therapist or counselor.

Also, be sure to keep an open line of communication with your wife and/or other family members and friends should you sense that your extreme feelings of guilt are getting the best of you.

If you’re not feeling this type of *excessive guilt* but are still *feeling guilty* after the affair, that is completely natural and can actually be a healthy thing.

You should be feeling guilty and it's your burden to bear, but you should also get over it at some point.

I read somewhere that we should think of guilt as a “seat-belt for your soul.” It's your brain's way of telling you not to cheat again. It's reminding you that the perceived enjoyment of being unfaithful is not worth the pain

and hurt of deceiving someone.

It is *vital* that you be honest with yourself. You must be 110% sure that: (a) what you did was a mistake and you will learn from it and make efforts to avoid repeating it and, (b) you are willing to make the significant effort to get the marriage back on very strong foundation.

A preacher friend of mine says that the best way to deal with guilt, discovered long ago by various priests, is to drown it with positive actions. Don't dwell on your guilt--instead take that anxiety and nervous energy and pour it into deeds that reaffirm your mental state instead of sapping it. The greater the guilt, the greater the action.

I'm not sure I agree with that philosophy 100% but it may be a beneficial way for you to attack your guilt.

That's actually how I dealt with my guilt at first. I busted my butt trying to atone for my betrayal and ease my guilt by basically being ultra loving and helpful to Linda. I was at her beckon call.

This was all well and good, but I was leaving some very important things out – mainly the part about looking within and learning from what I had done. Introspection and personal change were pivotal aspects for gaining Linda's forgiveness and resulted in lessening my own feelings of guilt.

***Linda:*** *Often times when the betrayed spouse brings up the affair due to triggers or insecurities, the cheater will combat their feelings of guilt with anger or by deflecting the questions or situation. I learned to be in tune to Doug's anger and deflections by realizing that his anger is a direct result of the guilt he feels.*

*In the beginning I thought that Doug acted this way because he was hiding something, or didn't want to relive the wonderful feelings or times he had with the other woman. I learned to understand that talking about the deceitful and selfish things he did during the affair produced a large amount of guilt for him and his reactions were to avoid it at all costs by going back to his old coping mechanism of fight or flight.*

*Both you and your wife need to understand that you are most likely feeling tremendous guilt for your actions and you have yet to learn how to cope with those feelings.*

I still feel guilty to this day for what I did and I'm sure I will for a long, long time, but knowing that I'm forgiven is a positive thing.

Guilt and shame are useful short-term emotions, up to a point and for learning purposes only. Learn some valuable life lessons from this experience, and try to understand your own soul. Then, try to let go of the guilt.

### **Action Steps:**

- Make a list of all the transgressions against your marriage and your wife as a result of your affair.
- Understand how those transgressions affected her.
- Apologize to your wife for each transgression. Ask for her forgiveness. *"I am sorry for \_\_\_\_\_. I realize that this made you feel \_\_\_\_\_. I hope that you can and will forgive me."*
- Make it a habit to show remorse and apologize on a regular basis.
- Remember, if you are having troubles dealing with guilt or are feeling excessively guilty for your affair and can't seem to make any progress, a good therapist can guide you through things. If you don't want to talk to a therapist, talk to your religious person, social worker, or someone else who is used to hearing people's problems and being supportive of them.
- Try to understand and learn from your feelings of guilt and use that knowledge in a positive manner.

## Acknowledge the depth of the pain that your affair brought to your marriage

We've already talked some about the pain and trauma that your spouse has experienced, but for a very long time most cheaters do not realize (or do not care about) the amount of pain that the affair has caused. If you actually could feel the pain that they are going through, it would be difficult to live on a daily basis.

It's difficult for the cheater to put themselves in their wife's shoes. I also think women are better at feeling other people's pain than men are. Men just want to fix it and move on.

You might want to think about how you would feel if the shoe were on the other foot. Ask yourself, "If my wife was with another man or had kissed another man, how would it make me feel?"

It may not register with you at all, but it's important to understand what your wife is going through. Other than wanting to kill the other man, how would you feel personally?

Here is an excerpt from a post that Linda wrote that may help to drive the point home much better than I can:

*"One common denominator that is the result of infidelity is pain. Certainly, the pain of Doug's emotional affair has been greater than any other pain I have ever experienced. The pain can be expressed in different ways and it can be responded to in different ways – but it is always there.*

*What helped to ease the pain was to get to the point where Doug was able to experience the pain with me. This took a few months and multiple conversations and experiences, but became quite a healing experience when he did acknowledge the pain he caused.*

*Looking back on it, it is apparent that this acknowledgement cannot be forced. It only came as a result of open and honest communication and the sharing of feelings between the two of us. Without this process, I'm positive that any further unwillingness to acknowledge the pain or his part in causing the pain would have cost me a significantly longer period of feeling that pain.*



*Until the cheating spouse gets to the point where they can live through the pain with you [the betrayed], you will often feel the need to be able to ease it somehow – to escape it. Though it's a natural reaction, I urge you not to do this. Enduring the pain helps the healing process.*

*...Another common way for pain avoidance is when the cheating spouse attempts to spare their spouse further pain by withholding information. An example might be where the cheating spouse has further contact with the affair partner, perhaps even by accident, but fails to communicate this to their husband or wife.*

*This error in judgment will eventually come to light causing more pain and a significant setback to the healing of the marriage. There is a renewed feeling of deception and any trust that has been reestablished will be wiped out. Further deception plus loss of trust, equals more pain.*

*Another pain avoidance tactic that I have witnessed, both in the comments on this blog and with my mentoring clients, is the cheater intentionally sabotaging any attempts to talk about the affair. They do this by getting angry or somehow deflecting the conversation.*

*Until Doug saw the light, he was very good at this. He didn't always do it, but often he would become angry and frustrated by my questions or attempts to talk about his emotional affair which would cause me to back down (which I'm sure he knew I would do). The message that came through to me was, "Just get over it." Obviously not something I was ready to do at the time.*

*...Once the cheating spouse can feel your pain and empathize with what you've gone through, you will be surprised at how it can help in your healing from an affair."*

## **PTSD as a result of infidelity**

To keep the whole pain aspect in perspective, you need to realize that the reactions to infidelity can cause lingering trauma. Much like some veterans of war experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), so too can the victim of infidelity.

When your wife first found out about your betrayal, it probably felt like the rug has been pulled out from under her feet. Everything she knew to be



true and valid in the world, suddenly had no meaning. She started doubting herself, her judgment, her perceptions. Nothing was as it seemed. Her world was turned upside down. Her perceptions of the world were shattered.

Everywhere she went, there were constant reminders (triggers) of the affair. EVERYWHERE! Even though she logically now knows (hopefully) the affair is over, she can't seem to shake this panicky, anxiety-ridden feeling.

All too often her heart is pounding, her brain is fuzzy, her memory is shot to hell, she cries at the tip of a hat. Her sense of trust has been violated, and when that goes, she starts questioning exactly what is safe? Anything???

She might be thinking she is going crazy, but most likely she is experiencing a form of PTSD.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision or DSM-IV-TR, a manual used by therapists to diagnose psychological issues, PTSD occurs when a "person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or other." In addition, "the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror."

Now I'm guessing you're probably saying to yourself "my betrayal had nothing to do with death or physical injury, but that second part – that pretty much describes my wife!"

Well, there's a case to be made there HAS been a death – the death of your relationship as far as what you previously perceived to be true.

With all deaths, according to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, there are five distinct stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance; which don't necessarily have to occur in this exact order.

Are you beginning to see a correlation? In order to heal completely from the pain of betrayal of infidelity, eventually your wife (and you) will need to go through all of these stages.

Now back to the betrayal and PTSD analogy. I'll bet previously you had thought only something akin to soldiers returning from a war could cause PTSD, right? Wrong!

Many people experience PTSD and have no idea that's what's going on – AND there's a pretty substantial chance this may be exactly what she's been going through.

Let's go over some of the other required criteria (somewhat paraphrased here) for a diagnosis of PTSD contained in the DSM IV-TR. See if this sounds all too familiar to you:

**1. The trauma is persistently re-experienced in one or more of the following ways:**

- Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions
- Emotionally and/or physically reacting more intensely than the situation calls for (as if the danger of an attacking tiger is still in the room, right in front of you)
- Making attempts to ignore or suppress the intrusive thoughts, impulses, or images by trying divert your attention with another thought or action
- Intense physical reaction to anything either internal or external that remind you of the traumatic event
- Intense emotional reaction to anything either internal or external that reminds you of the traumatic event

(Beginning to see a pattern here?)

**2. Persistent avoidance of anything associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness subsequent to the trauma (as indicated by 3 or more of the following):**

- Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities

- Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
- Restricted range of affect (i.e. unable to have loving feelings)
- Sense of a foreshortened future

**3. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal subsequent to the trauma (as indicated by two or more of the following):**

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response

In addition, there are a couple other requirements in the DSM IV-TR, such as a continued duration of over one month. Given most people seem to take an average of 2-4 years to heal from the betrayal of infidelity, I think it's safe to say this condition is fairly prevalent!

So, now that you've gotten the basic gist of what PTSD is all about, what do you think? Does at least some of this describe what your wife is experiencing?

**Action Steps:**

- Talk with your wife about the pain and trauma she has endured as a result of your affair.
- Put yourself in her shoes. Be empathetic. Don't dismiss her pain.
- When she expresses pain, go deep with her and probe so as to really understand the effect it has, the causes, the cures.
- Keep in mind your actions that might cause pain – dishonesty, not being trustworthy, showing anger. Stop these actions!
- Remember to regularly apologize and show remorse for causing her pain.

## Educate yourself about affairs and relationships

I have no real statistics on this, but I'm betting that men aren't exactly the primary market for relationship books. We just don't read them. Well, at least not voluntarily.

Before my affair, I can honestly say that I never read a marriage book of any kind. The only thing remotely close was John Gray's "*Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*." If my memory serves me right, I do believe that Linda "suggested" it to me about 15 or so years ago. Obviously, the information didn't exactly stay fresh in the old brain.

I venture to guess that you probably have read very few relationship books, if any, yourself. And I'm almost positive that you certainly haven't read any books about infidelity prior to this whole mess. Am I right?

Well, you're in a different world now and it's important that you educate yourself on the dynamics of affairs (causes, effects, typical responses, prevention, etc.) and how to recover from them.

While I'm sure these books aren't exactly high on your list of reading material, they can help you to get in the mind of a betrayed spouse as well as help you to understand why you did what you did and why your affair partner did what she did.

Also, you need to educate yourself on relationships in general, so as you move forward, you can improve upon your relationships - not only with your wife but with your kids, friends, co-workers, etc.

***Linda:*** *I'm sure that you've noticed that your wife has probably read hundreds of books, websites or blogs since she found out about your affair and you're probably wondering "Why does she keep doing that? Why is she dwelling on it? Why can't she just move on?"*

*For her, it gives her a sense of control. If she understands it, then she can possibly fix things and stop it from happening again. If you become knowledgeable, it will also give you a sense of control. You will understand the dynamics of affairs, why they were so enticing, why they are about fantasy, and what you need to do to have a better marriage.*

Sometimes men think, “If my wife gives me this book she’s trying to control me, and if I read it then I’m going to give up my control.” But actually, it’s the opposite. It will give you a sense of control of your life and it will be beneficial to you if you become knowledgeable about the subject.

You don’t need to sit down and read an entire book straight away. I’ve been where you are and I know you have no desire to do that right now. That’s okay.

When I first started reading these books, it was because Linda would read them, underline or highlight a few passages, and then ask me to read them. I usually grumbled and half-heartedly agreed to do so.

Eventually, that evolved into doing research, reading tons of books, web sites, listening to webinars and podcasts, talking to relationship authors and experts and of course, starting a blog.

You certainly don’t have to go to the extent that I did but you should do at least enough to understand the affair dynamics - from why they start to the recovery process after they have ended.

### **Action Steps:**

- Read and apply the information in this book.
- Be open to reading other books, articles and websites that are suggested by your wife. Better yet, go out and find some on your own.
- Initiate conversation with your wife about useful and interesting information you’ve learned.
- Start and continue a regular habit of reading at least one relationship book per month.
- Put into practice any applicable and/or beneficial strategies that you’ve learned in the process.

## Figure out for yourself why you did what you did

Educating yourself segues nicely to the fact that you must figure out for yourself why you did what you did. It's okay to enlist the help of a therapist, your wife or a friend to help you, but you need to look deep within and figure it out as soon as possible.

What were your reasons for the affair? Did you need an ego boosting? Did you feel that no one appreciated you? What were your own issues? Why were you so selfish?

You need to take ownership of your thoughts, feelings and actions. That means reading books (there are lots of great books out there), counseling, therapy, talk to a trusted male friend, something that you can get to the root of why you chose to do this. Do not put any of this on your wife.

True recovery cannot progress until the cheater shifts the focus to themselves - not in a selfish way - but in an introspective manner.

Keep in mind that you are not necessarily doing this just for your wife. You are doing it for you as well. Obviously there have been some issues with your life that need to be addressed.

The whole process over the last 3 years has opened my eyes to my own faults as a person and has been the most painful but enlightening learning experience of my life. It's not easy to look at yourself and discover your own faults and character flaws. It brings you back to Earth real quick – and hard. But at the same time, it's also a very powerful process that can help you to not only figure out why you had your affair, but to also help you to become a better person in all areas of your life.

You need to conduct a thorough analysis of your past character, habits and behavior resulting in a better understanding of why the affair occurred.

Here are a few of the things I have learned about why I allowed the affair to happen. You may want to use these elements as a starting point for your own analysis.

**I failed to maintain boundaries.** I always had flirted with attractive women throughout my teenage and adult life. Most of the time I considered it simple harmless fun while at a party or at work. All this

flirting back and forth did nothing but build my fragile self-esteem and stroke my male ego, all the while not realizing the possible effects it had on the person with whom I was flirting with.

Allowing myself to meet my affair partner and other women for lunch even prior to my emotional affair, and even though always work related, were other mistakes in judgment. I think the cumulative effect of this bending of boundaries created a hole in the fence that should have kept anyone other than Linda out.

**I was insensitive and selfish.** At the time, I was too consumed with my own feelings, business problems and what was missing in our relationship that I didn't think about the consequences my emotional affair could have on Linda, our lives and our family. It was selfish and insensitive of me not to share my feelings of discontent in our relationship with Linda and instead shared them with another person.

Also, this selfishness and insensitivity caused me to act in a way that was quite contrary to my upbringing and to the morals and values that I was taught. I was a hypocrite and totally ignored my own conscious.

**I lied to myself.** Because of the "affair fog" I was in at the time, I became a master at rationalization. After discussing it at length with the other woman, I truly came to believe that Linda didn't care for me and thought our marriage was destined to be one void of true love, intimacy and passion. I re-wrote the story of our wonderful marriage and turned it into a piece of worthless fiction. If I hadn't, how could I have justified what I was doing?

**I was an uncaring coward.** When Linda discovered the emotional affair I should have ended it immediately and dropped to my knees begging her for forgiveness. Instead, I continued my justifications and the affair. And though it killed me to see her in so much pain, I was in my little bubble thinking that the grass was greener with the other woman. I will forever feel guilt because of that. I erroneously felt that I didn't want to hurt either of them and ended up hurting the person who deserved it the least. I was wrong. My conscious was telling me the way out but I was too stupid to take it.



I realize that when somebody tells you to look within yourself and do some serious introspection you might be thinking, *“OK great. That sounds wonderful but how exactly do I do that? Where do I begin?”*

Well, I found a wonderful exercise in the book *“When Good Men Behave Badly”* by David B Wexler Ph.D. that you should complete.

It’s an affair inventory and it can help to kick start your thought process a little bit and can help you gain a little bit more understanding of where you are at and how you got there.

Obviously, you should have asked yourself the following questions before your affair, but since you probably didn’t you can do so now.

If you are man (or woman) who is currently having an affair or has already had one, try to figure out what need you are/were truly looking to fulfill by pursuing this other woman. If you've already ended your affair take this inventory and convert it to the past tense. That is, think back about why you did what you did based on the questions that are going to be presented to you.

As you do this, keep asking yourself:

- Will I really get what I need from doing this? Will it last?”
- Is it worth the potential damage to my marriage, my children, my health, and my long-term self-respect?
- Are there other ways to find what I'm really looking for?

For each question below that you answer yes to write on a separate sheet of paper or in your journal at least three alternate ways that this need could be met. Writing anything about these feelings may feel like way too high of a security risk, but at least think through your answers to these questions!

- Do I feel like I'm getting old and hope that this will help make me feel young, alive, and vital again?
- Do I have low self-esteem and need a boost to my ego?



- Do I feel trapped in my life roles and want the freedom to act in a different way?
- Am I tired of the routine life I have? Do I need some excitement?
- Do I feel like I have always been deprived what I need and this is my chance to get something for me?
- Do I feel lonely, not knowing how else to feel close to someone?
- Do I feel like my wife doesn't understand me and I need to find someone who really does?
- Do I have doubts about my sexuality and need to remind myself that I am attracted and potent?
- Do I miss having someone really appreciate me, complement my looks, laugh at my jokes, and respect my work?
- Do I need to find a way to prove that I can still have adventure in my life?
- Do I need a jump start to feel deep emotions and not know any other way to do it?
- Am I simply looking for variety in sexual experience?
- And the ultimate question: am I married to the wrong person? Do I really want to change relationships and develop a different life?

You may go through this exercise and still decide that it is/was worth it to have an affair. At least you can be more conscious of why you're doing what you're doing or have done what you did. (Just to be clear here, it is never right to have an affair.)

So there you have it. Do you think you can perform an honest assessment of your very being? Sure you can. You just have to not blow it off and think that it's hokey. You've betrayed your spouse and caused her a great deal of pain and unless you're a heartless serial cheater, you need to figure out why so you won't do it again.

## **Action Steps:**

- Find a quiet, comfortable, peaceful place where there are no distractions.
- Release yourself of any false pride and arrogance and ask yourself the pertinent questions to help you understand why you had your affair. There's no need for them as you are communicating only with yourself.
- Consider your past relationships and any possible character flaws.
- Answer the questions from the affair inventory.
- Meditate on it. Allow yourself plenty of time. Take notes if necessary.
- If you can determine the "why's," discuss them with your wife. Talk about possible changes that can be made – both personally and in the relationship – so that there will never be a repeat of these actions.
- If the reasons are such that you feel additional counseling would be helpful, then by all means, find a therapist.
- If you are not able to determine and understand clearly the reasons, perhaps talking with a counselor, friend, or clergy person would be more helpful.

## Be thoughtful and reassuring

If you've been married for any length of time, you probably can understand how spouses can take each other for granted. You start to treat each other less passionately, you snipe at each other and basically get on each other's nerves from time to time.

I'm going to ask you to step your game up a bit at this point.

Think back to the days when you did everything in your power to woo your wife - to impress her or make her laugh. Think about her favorite foods, little gifts, fun nights out and things like that.

There can be one slight problem that can crop up though and that is your wife knows that you probably did a lot of these things with your affair partner. Therefore, be careful what you do as many things may not be received as well as you would anticipate. You're going to have to be aware of that.

If you ate lunch with your affair partner at a certain Italian cafe and your wife knows about it, don't take her there. Use your head. You're going to have to find new and different ways to show your wife that you are thoughtful and that you love her.

***Linda:*** *Tell her that you love her. Though telling her that you love her probably will mean very little to her early on - especially if you said the same thing to your affair partner. Oftentimes she may not even want to hear you say it. You don't want to stop telling her that you love her, but just understand that if she looks at you in that "You've got to be kidding me" sort of way, she's picturing you saying that to your affair partner.*

A lot of things are going to take patience and experimenting with different things - just seeing what works and what doesn't - but don't get discouraged. Just realize that for a period of time, you're going to be walking on eggshells.

Thoughtfulness doesn't have to be a grand gesture. Thoughtfulness should occur every day. For instance, I make Linda's breakfast every morning. I start up her car and make sure it's warm for her on cold mornings and then carry her work bags out to the car every day. I hug her and tell her that I

love her and let her know I appreciate her and tell her she looks beautiful. These are simple, random acts of kindness that show her that I care about her. None of them are difficult or require grand plans or much thought but they mean a lot to her and the effects tend to compound over time.

Take time to talk about the future and the plans that you have for the rest of your life. Discuss future vacations or other special days. Let her know you're not going anywhere. This is reassuring to her that you are committed and invested in the relationship for the long haul.

We're in our fifties and Linda has been a teacher for almost 30 years. She's getting pretty close to the time when she can retire. I work out of the home and am self-employed. I'm constantly planning and working on stuff in my spare time so that when it's time for her to retire we can have the freedom to do whatever we want at anytime. Why do I tell you this? Well, it's an example of how I reassure her that I value our relationship and want to have fun spending time and growing old together. You need to do similar things.

Your affair basically told your wife that (at least for a period of time) you did not care about her or her feelings at all. You need to start rebuilding by doing thoughtful, caring things for her every day.

### **Action Steps:**

- Think about what you have in common with each other and what you like to do as a couple.
- Talk with your wife about what she most enjoyed when you were first dating.
- Schedule date nights.
- Think of things – simple things – you can do on a daily basis that show you care for her.
- Talk about future plans for your home, retirement, travel, holidays, etc.

## Stop being so defensive

Healing from an affair is not a competition. Stop being so defensive and stop trying to be right all the time.

Being defensive is a sub-element if you will, of communication and deals very much with how you act when you are talking about the affair or your relationship issues.

***Linda:*** *When your wife wants to talk to you or ask you questions about your affair, it's not necessarily an accusation or a defamation of your character or anything like that. She's just out to understand things and she's out to express her feelings and her needs. So take it as such. Don't throw up your flight-or-fight instincts so quickly. Suck it up and take it. A lot of times all she wants to do is vent and you can just sit there and not say a damn thing.*

Oftentimes when your wife comes to you and she's venting, she may go off on all sorts of tangents, she may raise her voice and get very animated. It may seem as though she is angry at you or that she is punishing you. She probably isn't though. She doesn't necessarily want you to feel bad. More than likely, she just wants to connect with you.

When Linda would approach me with questions I would become defensive in a huge way. When I did, Linda would pull away. She would retreat like a hurt child and it would shut her down. What I learned later is that all she wanted to accomplish was to get closer to me, yet my defensiveness only served to pull us further away.

This is a typical dance that couples who are trying to recover often do and it needs to stop.

When I stopped the defensiveness and instead just listened to her – that's all she wanted was for me to listen – we got closer and calm, open communication typically ensued.

You need to be aware that when she's upset, you will become defensive and pull away because you're afraid. You don't like her emotions. They make your blood pressure go up; it makes you sweat; it makes you feel riled up.

You just need to remain calm and let her do what she needs to do. Talk to her calmly answering her questions. Then hug her, tell her that you love her, and she will likely feel satisfied.

That all being said, one thing that can be an issue is if your wife does in fact talk for hours on end about the affair or regularly approaches you in a way that comes off as an interrogation, verbally abusive or accusatory. Though you may certainly deserve the treatment you are receiving, it is not conducive to effective communication and can cause it to break down, which in turn leads to problems such as anger, resentment and defensiveness.

If she is communicating to you in such a way, you need to have a discussion with her about how she can approach you in ways that best allow you to communicate and be open with your feelings and thoughts – without the negativity.

Additionally, remember that you both need to use “I” statements when talking to one another. “I feel this way because...” rather than saying, “You cheated, you did this or that...” It puts everyone on the defensive.

There comes a point in time where you need to meet each other halfway. You need to realize that your communication probably was poor before the affair and that it’s something that definitely needs to be improved upon if you’re going to move on from the affair. Learning to communicate effectively will not only help you get through the healing process but will also serve you well in your relationship as you move forward.

It may seem that I’m telling you that all you have to do is suck up to your wife and totally throw your own needs out the window. That’s not it at all. If you help to satisfy your wife’s needs, she is sure to reciprocate and work to satisfy your needs as well. For example, if she needs for you to be a good listener – work on giving that to her. In turn, she probably will be more attentive to your needs in perhaps more intimate ways.

It’s not just about trying to fix the effects of the affair. It’s trying to build a better relationship.

For us, we realized that though we kept the affair conversation front and center, the main problems in our relationship actually existed in our

marriage beforehand. The affair caused these issues to come to light, be addressed and ultimately repaired. Take the approach that it's not just affair recovery; it's your relationship recovery.

**Action Steps:**

- Consider past discussions and actions by your wife that caused you to become defensive. Ask yourself why they caused you to act that way.
- Discuss ways that both of you can communicate better so to eliminate any defensiveness. Put them to work.
- Think of your relationship as a partnership – not a competition.

## Be loving and supportive

This is somewhat related to being thoughtful and reassuring but speaks more to your wife's needs for your commitment to being attentive and loving towards her, instead of cold and distant.

If you were cold and distant it was more than likely because you were simultaneously being a liar and a cheat. You need to be more like the man she fell in love with; attentive, affectionate, helpful, understanding and in all ways devoted and actually cherishing her and your union.

Depending on what stage of recovery you are in, your wife may feel like your entire relationship was/is a lie. She doesn't trust her feelings for you and she doesn't trust you at all. You've probably clammed up and shut down, regularly. This has caused her to feel lonely and alone in your relationship.

Being "alone in a relationship" is something she should not have to tolerate ever again.

What she needs more, now than ever is to feel like she matters to you and that her presence in your life is appreciated. What she needs is to feel like you value her as a partner and as your best friend. She may need to have regular sexual contact and feel an intimate connection with you. She needs for you to stop being so shut down emotionally.

Focus on her and how she feels.

### **Action Steps:**

- Continue to display loving acts of kindness on a daily basis. It doesn't need to be extravagant. Something simple and thoughtful works wonders.
- Be attentive to your wife's needs and desires. Pamper her.
- Try to bring back some passion and romance into your relationship (if you both are ready).



## Stop thinking that the grass is always greener somewhere else

In my opinion, this aspect relates a lot to the whole fantasy aspect of an affair. Let's face it. Your affair was make believe. What I mean by that is in most cases when you are with your affair partner, you're only seeing the very best of her. You've never experienced real life with her.

You're not seeing her without any make-up on or with her hair not done to perfection. You're only seeing her dressed really nice and smelling really good. She's also probably not all stressed out or acting emotional, and I bet you've never seen her PMS-ing. She's never got on you about taking the trash out or fixing that light in the basement that has been broken for four years. You've never had to have an argument about finances or not keeping up your part of the household chores.

You're seeing her homecoming queen, Miss America, sex kitten, perfect housewife and mother personality 100% of the time. Obviously there are exceptions to this, but I venture to guess not many. So keep that in mind.

I believe it's Dr. Willard Harley who says that our spouses meet 80% of our most important emotional needs, while the affair partner only meets 20%. Unfortunately, that 20% is often accentuated because it's new and fresh and exciting.

For most of us the grass always seems greener. In our society, everything is very disposable and you always think that there's something better to be had. You can always get a better phone, a better job, a better TV. "If only I had that other car, I would be so much happier."

When you go beyond the boundaries in your relationships, you start getting a taste of what you think is better. In an affair that taste is such a small piece of a much larger pie. Many times the rest of the pie ain't so sweet!

***Linda:*** *If you really put 100% effort into your marital relationship versus wasting so much time thinking that "If only I had this..." or "If only my wife would do that..." then you would find that life can be pretty damn good with your wife. You must have thought she was fairly awesome at some point since you fell in love with her and married her. Who's to say you can't think that way again?*

One thing we've noticed when mentoring unfaithful people as they try to repair their marriage after their affair is that they suddenly come to this eye opening revelation that their spouse was the best thing that ever happened to them. Not the affair partner after all. When they have taken the time to really analyze things and are able to see through the fog, they really begin to truly cherish and love their spouse.

Once you let go of believing that things are better somewhere else you can really start cherishing what you have at home.

### **Action Steps:**

- Make a list of all the good things about your wife and your relationship.
- Think back on the history of your relationship to all the times when she supported you and appreciated you. Remember the good times and what it was that made them so good. Think about all you have accomplished together as a couple (raised a family, built a business, etc.)
- What is there about your wife that you really love and appreciate?
- Think of some different ways that you can try to reconnect with each other in a passionate way.

## Listen - really listen

Listening may seem like a fairly simple thing to do, but often when we are talking to someone, we hear only a fraction of what is said. Other times, you may hear most of what is said but have no understanding of the meaning. This is especially true when there are such highly emotional conversations that take place due to the affair.

What I'm talking about is actually being in tune with your partner and what she's saying to you when she's talking to you – how she feels, what her fears are, what her desires are, etc.

I've been in the sales profession my whole career – almost 30 years in all. I've been to a ton of sales training workshops and seminars over the years and one of the things that is always covered is the art of listening to what your prospect is telling you. If you *really* listen to the prospect, they will tell you how to sell them.

In a way, it's the same thing in relationships. If you really listen to what your spouse says, she will tell you how to help her heal, how to rebuild trust and how to make her happy.

So what is effective listening? Effective listening is actively absorbing the information given to you by a person, showing that you are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the person so that he or she knows the message was received.

In sales, after a prospect makes a statement, we repeat it back to them so as to confirm our understanding of what was said. I would suggest you both do something similar when talking with each other. It will help to eliminate misunderstandings and should help with the issue of asking the same questions over and over.

You want to practice what's called "reflective listening." That is, to listen for understanding and not for agreement. To be quite sure, there will be very little agreement when discussing the details of the affair, but you can listen for understanding. This will help to keep the full out raging arguments from occurring quite as often.

Effective listening requires an understanding that it is not just the speaker's responsibility to make sure he/she is understood. The listener has a major role to play in hearing the complete message.

The following ideas offered by Herbert G. Lingren from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will assist you in understanding the real message.

**Stop talking!** You cannot listen when you are talking. You will only be thinking about what you are going to say next instead of paying attention to what the other person is trying to say. Consciously focus your attention on the speaker.

**Put the speaker at ease:** Relax, smile, look at the speaker and help that person feel free to talk. Look and act interested. Remove distractions: turn off the TV; close the door; stop what you are doing, and pay attention.

**Pay attention** - to the nonverbal language of physical gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture. An authority on nonverbal language says that 55 percent of the message meaning is nonverbal, 38 percent is indicated by tone of voice, and only 7 percent is conveyed by the words used in a spoken message. Few people know how to listen to the eyes; what a tapping foot means; a furrowed brow; clenched fist; the biting of nails. These often reveal the key feelings behind the words.

**Listen for what is not said.** Ask questions to clarify the meaning of words and the feelings involved, or ask the speaker to enlarge on the statement. People often find it difficult to speak up about matters or experiences that are very important or highly emotional for them. Listen for how the speaker presents the message. What people hesitate to say is often the most critical point.

**Know exactly what the other person is saying.** Reflect back what the other person has said in a "shared meaning" experience so you completely understand the meaning and content of the message before you reply to it. A good listener does not assume they understand the other person. You, as the listener, should not express your views until you have summarized the speaker's message to her satisfaction.

**Be aware of "tune out" words.** These are words which appear in the media that strike an emotional chord in the listener and interferes with

attentive listening (e.g. abortion, nuclear war, communism, homosexuality). Avoid arguing mentally. Listen to understand, not to oppose. (This is a tough one since words like affair, infidelity, cheat, etc. may be “tune out” words.)

**Concentrate on "hidden" emotional meanings.** What are the real feelings behind the words? What is the tone of voice saying? What does the emphasis on certain words mean? Notice how the meaning of the following question is changed when you change the emphasis from one word to the next.

**What** do you want?  
What **do** you want?  
What do **you** want?  
What do you **want**?

**Be patient.** Don't interrupt the speaker. This is disrespectful and suggests you want to talk instead of listen. Allow plenty of time for the speaker to convey ideas and meaning. Be courteous and give the speaker adequate time to present the full message.

**Hold your temper!** Try to keep your own emotions from interfering with your listening efficiency. When emotions are high, there is a tendency to tune out the speaker, become defensive, or want to give advice. You don't have to agree to be a good listener. Don't argue! Even if you win, you lose.

**Empathize with the speaker.** Try to "walk in the other's moccasins" so you can feel what that person is feeling and understand the point of view the speaker is trying to convey.

True attentive and reflective listening offers the opportunity for others to share their feelings with you. Listening and leveling has a chance of healing hurts and building bridges in a relationship. When someone listens to you and you feel understood, you are much more likely to trust the other person, thus opening the gate for more intimate communication.

### **Action Steps:**

- Think about some of your past conversations and how effective your listening and understanding of what was said really was.

- Review and practice the above listening strategies.
- Remember that listening is not a passive activity. Get involved in what your wife is saying.

## Stop blaming your spouse for your affair

As a cheater, we tend to dream up or look for ways to justify our actions. You rewrite the history of your marriage (the affair fog). Naturally, our affair must have been because our wives didn't fulfill our needs in some way (sarcasm).

Regardless the justification, there was no excuse for the affair and your wife was certainly not to blame for it.

Since you had an affair, chances are your marriage wasn't a bed of roses leading up to it. Your wife may very well have played a part in the disintegration of your marriage. That still doesn't excuse what you did.

***Linda:*** *Often your wife will actually feel a tremendous amount of guilt for your affair. She may even take full responsibility for it. This of course is totally off base. She is not responsible at all for your actions or for your choice to have an affair. You had other options.*

For a long time, Linda would beat herself up about what she did or didn't do during the months and years prior to my affair. While it's true that our relationship wasn't at its best and there were things we both could have done to make things better, she was in no way responsible for my actions. It was my choice and my actions.

If you were unhappy or unfulfilled in your marriage like I was, you could have expressed your displeasure to your wife. Perhaps if you did, things would have improved. If not, you could have gone to counseling, separated or even filed for divorce. You had a lot of other choices rather than to go outside your marriage and have an affair.

Not to beat a dead horse, but you must take full responsibility since you made the choice to go outside your marriage. It really had nothing to do with your wife not being beautiful enough, fun enough or any of those things. It was your choice and your issues that you must deal with. You really need to think about what your issues are.

Your marital problems do need to be addressed if you want to save your marriage and create a better one. However, depending on what stage of recovery you are in, you may want to hold off talking about the underlying

marital problems until emotions cool down a bit - especially if your affair has just been discovered. Wait until later when both of you can sit down and calmly discuss how you both were unhappy in your marriage and tackle the underlying issues one at a time.

While “manning up” and taking the blame, you also need to be careful on how you word things so as to not assign blame to your wife. You may not realize that you are blaming her when you say something like, “*You shouldn’t feel guilty. We weren’t close at the time. We were living as roommates.*” Even though you never actually said that the affair was her fault, she’s going to interpret those words to mean that she was to blame. Instead say, “*I take full responsibility for my affair. It’s my fault.*”

If you look back at your marriage prior to the affair, there were lots of things that both of you could have done better. Your wife probably could have had as many reasons to have an affair as you did. But she made the choice not to. But since you did have an affair – take responsibility for it.

### **Action Steps:**

- Think about how you’ve cast blame on your wife for your affair – whether outwardly or not.
- Come to terms with the fact that regardless the state of your marriage prior to your affair, you had other options besides cheating. Admit it...you made a bad choice.
- Apologize to your wife and take full responsibility without any justifications or rationalizations.
- Analyze and acknowledge the issues and problems in your marriage and if appropriate, discuss them with your wife and begin working on correcting them.
- Seek counseling if you feel it’s necessary or if your wife suggests it.



## Make your life and everything you do an open book

This goes along with being transparent in everything that you do.

You've probably heard the word "transparency" kicked around all over the place. If you're not familiar (as it relates to infidelity and affair recovery), all that means is that you are letting your wife know what you're doing at all times. She knows your computer passwords, your computer browsing history is accessible, your cell phones are unlocked and she knows everything or can have access to anything she wants to know at any time. She knows who you are hanging out with and where you are at. You take the time to call or text her throughout your day and let her know if you are going to be home later than you thought you were. These are just a few examples of being an open book.

The purpose of this is to help in the trust building process and to help alleviate the many fears that your wife has about the state of your relationship and your commitment to it.

But there is more to being transparent. Being an open book means that all of you is opened up to your wife. Yes, that means your feelings.

Now before you get all sweaty and nervous, I realize that expressing our feelings is hard for us and is contradictory to how most of us men have been brought up. The hardest feelings to share are often the ones connected to shame or anger.

Throughout our whole lives we've been told to be cautious about revealing our feelings and that we aren't supposed to cry or express painful emotions. We've been raised to never acknowledge our weaknesses, fears, or pain. I think also that many men are afraid to open up for fear of being vulnerable or that they will be criticized or rejected in some way.

Author David Murrow says that in most social circles, males seem to talk about exactly 4 things: sports, weather, politics, and hobbies. Men can also talk about their families, but only certain topics are permitted: how busy everyone is, their children's sports activities, and how well everything is going.

While contemplating those last two sentences I had to chuckle because it is very true most of the time. When I consider some of the conversations I've had with other men, they seem to always center on those basic subjects. When it comes to talking with my closer male friends though, we do go somewhat deeper than that – but not much.

Murrow also suggests that the reason that most men do not tell their wives how they really feel is because if they did, their wives would punish or reject them for it. That's right. When men tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, their wives can become very upset.

I had the pleasure of speaking to many men through our mentoring program and some of these guys actually had decided early on in their marriages to open up and speak the absolute truth to their wives. The result was that their wives overreacted and at the very least were uncomfortable. Many freaked out, withdrew, cried, threw tantrums – you name it. These guys learned early on that their wives did not want to hear the truth and that the key to marital bliss was to carefully manage what they did and didn't say to their wives.

Women who are guilty of this need to realize that they have trained their husbands to conceal the truth from them. These men feel as though they are taking a huge risk in being honest with their wives since their reward for doing so tends to be unpleasant. It's no wonder these guys don't tell their wives the truth.

This leads us to believe then that if you've experienced this sort of reaction from your wife previously and you're going to take a risk now and reveal your feelings and be honest with them, your wife has to understand and change some things that she's said or done in the past so as not to penalize you for telling her your true feelings.

Don't take me the wrong way here though, as I'm not blaming women for every communication problem in a marriage. Husband's do the same things to wives as well.

I know women who can't tell their husbands the truth because they're afraid of them becoming angry or violent. Women suffer just as much, that's for sure. The point I'm making is that the wife needs to open her eyes to the possibility that she might be contributing to her husband's silence

(and vice versa). She needs to consider that perhaps she has unwittingly trained her husband to hide his true heart from her.

It's important that as you do eventually open up and release your feelings and tell your wife personal things, that she realizes that you made a huge effort to be caring and sensitive to her and that she needs to give you credit for that. This is probably something you're going to have to talk to your wife about as you start to open up more.

There are circumstances and instances where keeping your thoughts and feelings buried may be appropriate, but I think when it comes to recovering and healing from an affair, you need to throw what you may have been taught - along with your fears - out the window and just let loose of your feelings as much as possible. Communication will improve, as will intimacy and it will generally help your relationship more than you can imagine.

Besides, while recovering your wife will be extremely hyper-vigilant about your emotions and your feelings and will want to meet your needs. She'll want to know if you're happy or unhappy. You will probably hear the dreaded words, "How does that make you feel?" or "Is everything okay?" more times than you ever thought possible.

Be proactive about it. If you go out on a date night or weekend away and have a great time, you need to express to her that you had a great weekend. Tell her, "I just really like being with you" or "I'm happy that we're together."

Along with being transparent is the need for honesty. Good or bad. If you're going through a rough patch, tell her "Things aren't so great. I wish that you would spend more time with me" or "I need for you to be more patient with me," or "I need some space." It's all about honesty. More than likely, honesty was lacking before the affair or you would have told her that you were feeling a certain way.

So now you need to really think about the way you're feeling. If you're feeling something, you need to be honest about it and trust that your wife will be okay with your honesty. She wants to know how you're doing. She wants to make sure that you are happy and content. That's her highest priority right now. Her biggest fear is you are not happy where you are and will want to stray again.

## **Action Steps:**

- Think about how you can be transparent in your daily actions.
- Provide your wife with access to all accounts, computers, emails, texts, etc.
- Make it a habit to contact your wife frequently throughout the day and always do what you say you're going to do.
- Understand the obstacles to sharing your feelings.
- Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. Freely expressing your feelings is a necessity for a healthy relationship.
- Reflect on the times you haven't been quite honest with your feelings.
- Analyze the reasons and determine if the outcome for not being honest with your feelings was as desirable as it might have been if you were honest.
- Commit to honestly expressing your feelings.
- Continue to ease your wife's fears.
- Ask often if your efforts at being transparent are good enough and if they are helping to restore trust.
- If there have been instances in your marriage when you've been 'punished' by your wife for revealing your feelings, discuss it with her so that she can reflect upon these instances and possibly make any necessary adjustments to her reactions.
- Keep a journal of your feelings.
- Join a support group. Sometimes it's easier to share with strangers than with loved ones, especially if the strangers are also going through what you are.
- Talk with a counselor or spiritual advisor.
- Express your feelings with art, poetry or music.
- Start by sharing the easy feelings to your wife such as, "I sure love it when you cook chicken wings for me." "It makes me feel you care about me." "I'm lucky to have you in my life."

## Check your anger at the door

One thing that will stall your wife's healing and recovery probably more than anything is if you're constantly angry at stuff.

I'm not usually an angry person. In fact, I've always been known for being pretty laid back. However, I've never been as angry as I've been at times early on after my affair was discovered. I would get extremely angry at Linda's incessant questioning – primarily asking the same questions over and over. She would also make accusations or have suspicions that were not always accurate and her insistence on bringing those up repeatedly were another source of my anger.

We realized that anger was constantly stalling things so we both did some work on our communication skills and managed to make improvements. Basically Linda worked on her questioning techniques and I worked on managing my anger and interpreting her true intentions.

In a lot of cases, people use anger as a mechanism to stonewall or gaslight their spouse so they'll just drop whatever the subject is they're talking about. That may work for the cheater temporarily, but eventually it's going to backfire. Progress will halt and the hurt spouse is going to be stuck.

In our case, my anger would cause Linda to shut down (which is what I wanted). She would withdraw and stop the questioning but would then bottle her emotions and resentment inside, only to be released sometime at a later date – typically with much more volatility and emotion. I'm sure you can see how that was a recipe for failure. Something had to give.

Our simple solution came to us thanks to a conversation that Linda and I had where we discussed the reasons why I got angry and what the affects were for her.

I thought about things and determined that for example, I would get defensive and angry when she would question me in an accusatory manner – especially if it was about something where her perception wasn't accurate.

Linda, in turn told me that my anger would cause her to shut down and that even though it would seem as if she were accusing me, she was just venting

and that all she wanted me to do was listen, understand her feelings, let her know it's okay and comfort her.

So now if I start getting frustrated or angry when we have a conversation about something (affair related or otherwise), I simply take some deep breaths and calm myself down. I pause and think about what it is I'm saying and how I'm reacting. I remind myself about where she is coming from and what she is really trying to accomplish. I don't throw stuff (never really did); don't raise my voice; don't stomp around. I think about why she's saying the things she's saying.

I'll be honest and tell you that it does take some work, especially I would imagine, if you normally have a volatile temper. It is also something that was more of an issue for us in the early stages of our recovery while our emotions were at their peak.

It's also important to remember the difference in communication styles between women and men that we discussed earlier. Remember as well that this isn't a competition.

Also, be aware that there is an association between anger and trust. If you are trying to rebuild trust in your marriage and you are regularly displaying anger, you are breaking down that trust.

***Linda:*** *Your wife wants to trust that you will listen to her and acknowledge her pain and her emotions. When you show anger, you are breaking that trust so that your wife is hesitant and doesn't feel comfortable sharing herself with you. You have to realize that her emotions are part of who she is.*

There were times when I would tell Linda: "You shouldn't feel that way." But if she is telling me, "I feel afraid," or "I feel unloved," that is something that she is truly feeling. It's not my place to judge if she should feel that way or not. She's just expressing her feelings to me.

It can be very difficult for a hurt spouse to build up the nerve to actually approach us about the affair – especially if anger is involved. Perhaps that is not the case with your wife, but it was with Linda.

She told me once that sometimes it would take her a week to work up the courage to bring up an affair related issue or tell me how she felt. If I would respond to her with anger, it would just shut her down.

The trust that I was trying so hard to rebuild by being transparent and doing small acts of kindness, etc. wound up getting flushed down the toilet. The love bank I had worked hard to build up would get depleted as a result of my anger. Anger did nothing but stall Linda's healing and prolong the recovery process.

Anger scares most women. So you need to check the anger at the door.

There are many books and courses that have been created to help people manage their anger. Certainly, a comprehensive tutorial on anger management is beyond the scope of this book. However, I do want to give you some anger management tips.

The following 12-step approach will help you direct your anger constructively rather than destructively. This approach to calming down is based on the ideas of Duke University's Redford Williams, MD. The 12 steps form a comprehensive plan to get control of inappropriate and unproductive anger.

### **Step 1: Maintain an "Anger Log"**

[Download the Anger Log worksheet](#) and use it to monitor what triggers your anger and the frequency of your anger responses. When you know what makes you angry, you will be in a much better position to develop strategies to contain it or channel it effectively.

### **Step 2: If You Do, Acknowledge That You Have a Problem Managing Anger**

It is an observed truth that you cannot change what you don't acknowledge. So it is important to identify and accept that anger is a roadblock to your success.

### **Step 3: Use Your Support Network**



If anger is a problem, let the important people in your life know about the changes you are trying to make. They can be a source of motivation and their support will help you when you lapse into old behavior patterns.

#### **Step 4: Use Anger Management Techniques to Interrupt the Anger Cycle**

- Pause.
- Take deep breaths.
- Tell yourself you can handle the situation.
- Stop the negative thoughts.

#### **Step 5: Use Empathy**

If another person is the source of your anger, try to see the situation from his or her perspective. Remind yourself to be objective and realize that everyone makes mistakes and it is through mistakes that people learn how to improve.

#### **Step 6: Laugh at Yourself**

Humor is often the best medicine. Learn to laugh at yourself and not take everything so seriously.

The next time you feel tempted to kick the photocopier, think about how silly you would look and see the humor in your inappropriate expressions of anger.

#### **Step 7: Relax**

Angry people are often the ones who let the little things bother them. If you learn to calm down you will realize that there is no need to get uptight and you will have fewer angry episodes.

#### **Step 8: Build Trust**

Angry people can be cynical people. They believe that others are going to do something on purpose to annoy or frustrate them even before it happens. If you can build trust in people you will be less likely to become angry with them when something does go wrong and more likely to attribute the problem to something other than a malicious intent.



## **Step 9: Listen**

Miscommunication contributes to frustrating and mistrusting situations. The better you listen to what a person is saying, the better able you will be to find a resolution that does not involve an anger response.

## **Step 10: Be Assertive**

Remember, the word is assertive NOT aggressive. When you are angry it is often difficult to express yourself properly. You are too caught up in the negative emotion and your physiological symptoms (beating heart, red face) to put together solid arguments or appropriate responses. If you learn to assert yourself and let other people know your expectations, boundaries, issues, and so on, you will have much more interpersonal success.

## **Step 11: Live Each Day as if it is Your Last**

This saying may be overused, but it holds a fundamental truth. Life is short and it is much better spent positively than negatively. Realize that if you spend all your time getting angry, you will miss out on the many joys and surprises that life has to offer.

## **Step 12: Forgive**

To ensure that the changes you are making go much deeper than the surface, you need to forgive the people in your life that have angered you. It is not easy letting go of past hurts and resentments but the only way to move past your anger is to let go of these feelings and start fresh. (Depending on what, or who, is at the root of your anger, you may have to solicit the help of a professional to achieve this fully.)

Even if you are not at the point where you feel your anger is a problem, it is a wise idea to familiarize yourself with the processes listed. If you do not have the tools to deal with anger correctly, it has a way of building-up over time. Before you know it, you can be in a position where anger is controlling you and becoming a negative influence in your life.

## **Action Steps:**

- Understand why you get angry. Is it a way for you to control or manipulate a given situation? Utilize the Anger Log to keep track of when and why you get angry.
- Talk to your wife about why you get angry. Understand how it affects her.
- Try to control your anger and frustrations as much as possible.
- If necessary, develop other means for which to channel your anger, stress and frustrations. For example, I used to put on the old boxing gloves and beat on a heavy punching bag.
- If you feel that your anger is a problem or is out of control, utilize the 12-step program above and/or consult with a professional.

## Get some counseling or therapy

This goes hand in hand with trying to figure out why you did what you did, but let's go a little bit beyond that.

In addition to trying to get yourself all figured out, there are going to be a lot of other issues that you will have to work through. Some may be personal in nature, while others are more about the both of you and your relationship.

Many of the people who read our site have stated that they not only go to therapy as a couple but also individually. Most have indicated that the therapy sessions were helpful.

If you're having difficulties working out the issues between you and your wife because you're finding yourself getting angry or defensive or your and your wife's communication skills aren't that great, it could be very beneficial to have a third party referee, if you will, to be present to moderate things and help you to effectively move through the recovery process.

Why don't people go to therapy? We've run a few surveys on our blog about therapy and we've found out that a lot of people don't go to counseling because of two main reasons. One is that their spouse (who is typically the cheater) doesn't want to, or refuses to go. The second reason is because of the cost.

Now I realize there are not too many men that relish talking to a therapist or anything like that, but if it's something that your wife wants you to do and if it's something that deep down you think might be beneficial for yourself, then by all means go ahead and do it.

I know that oftentimes the thought of going to a counselor is a sign of weakness or failure. That's simply not the case. They're just there to help you become a better person.

***Linda:*** *If your wife asks you to go to counseling, I think it's a good opportunity for you to show her that you're committed to the marriage and that you're willing to do anything. For a woman, it gives her a sense of control. She thinks, "Finally we can have someone who's going to help us."*

I certainly was not fond of going to counseling and would balk at the idea. Linda knew very well how I felt but when she asked me to go not too long ago I said, "I would do this to save our marriage." She then knew that I was serious about my commitment. And you know what? I lived through it. I benefitted from it. So can you!

As far as the cost goes...Yes, therapy can be quite expensive. However, we have found that most folk's work health insurance covers it. I know that when we've gone, we only had to pay a \$25 co-pay. You might want to check with your work HR department or call your insurance company to get the specifics and whether or not counseling is covered.

If it is not, you can always talk to your religious leader or a very trusted friend for zero cost. There are also many online counseling services that are not all that costly.

When you think about it, the cost of divorce is far greater than what it's going to cost you to go through any counseling, therapy, coaching or mentoring program. In fact, my father, who is a wiz when it comes to money issues, has told me on more than one occasion that one of the primary reasons people file for bankruptcy in the United States is...divorce.

I've been in the lending business for over 20 years and I can't tell you how many couples I've seen who have screwed up finances because of divorce. Their issues range from terrible credit scores, to collections, judgments, foreclosures and bankruptcies. So if money is important to you (and it is with most men I know) then you may want to consider that as well the next time you balk at going to therapy.

One other thing to note is that you should be very selective in the therapist that you go to. Don't just pick any Joe Blow off the street or one that is decidedly either for or against you. It's just like mechanics, doctors, lawyers or any other professional - there are good ones and there are bad ones. Choose one that is experienced in helping couples recover from infidelity.

If you do start counseling and you feel that it's not being beneficial or the therapist is not helping you, then don't hesitate at all to look for another one. Just don't use that as an excuse to quit.

Also, if you go to therapy, don't just go through the motions. The therapist will probably give you things to work on or exercises to complete. Do them.

No therapist can help save a marriage if one partner refuses to work at it.

I can honestly tell you that even though Linda and I are doing great and our marriage has never been better, our recovery process and her healing would have proceeded much faster had we utilized some sort of counseling early on.

### **Actions Steps:**

- If you find that you are arguing, not communicating effectively or are otherwise not progressing, consider making an appointment with a therapist. (Initiating this on your own will mean a great deal in the eyes of your wife.)
- During your contemplation about why you had your affair, consider whether you might benefit from individual counseling.
- For more information about how to find a therapist and questions to ask, check out these two posts from our blog: [Should You Go to Couples Counseling?](#) and [Questions to Ask a Therapist](#) .
- Be sure to check your health insurance to see if counseling is covered.

## Show some gratitude

Merriam-Webster defines gratitude as “*the state of being grateful.*” In other words, be grateful and thankful for your wife, your marriage, your family, your health and everything else that is good in your life.

Be grateful too that your wife didn't kick your butt to the curb, but instead chose to ride this whole painful storm out with you. If that doesn't show you how much she really loves you, then nothing will.

Make it a habit to express your appreciation for your wife and all that she does. Also, take time each day to remember to be grateful for everything you have and that you got to keep in your life. It helps keep things in perspective.

### **Action Steps:**

- Contemplate what you are grateful for in your marriage and your life.
- Write your thoughts down in a “Gratitude Journal.”
- Review and update your journal on a frequent basis.
- Thank your wife frequently for giving you a second chance.

## Ask your spouse what he/she needs from you on a regular basis

What this comes down to in essence, is that our needs are important and none of us are mind readers. Though we may have a fairly good idea what we should be doing or shouldn't be doing to satisfy each other's needs, we may not always be accurate in our thinking.

Make it a habit to regularly ask if your spouse needs anything from you, if you're doing okay, what you could do better. Really, this should be a two-way street. You both should be doing this.

Lack of communication is probably one of the issues that got you into this whole predicament to begin with, so treat that as a life lesson and try to make sure it doesn't happen again. Just keep the lines of communications open at all times so that you guys know how you're both feeling and what the climate of your relationship is.

***Linda:*** *You may find though, that when you ask your wife, "How can I help? What do you need?" she will have difficulty actually being able to articulate what she needs because she is emotionally overwhelmed or she has lost trust in herself and her own feelings. Don't get frustrated or impatient.*

For a very long time when I would ask Linda what she needed she couldn't tell me. I had to fly solo. Luckily, since I know Linda pretty good, I found that sometimes I knew what she needed better than she knew herself. I would try a couple of things and would see how receptive Linda was and sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. The point is I tried.

Sometimes when I would ask her what she needed, she would say, "I don't know what I need," or "I'm okay" but I knew very well that she was not okay. I had to step up and use my own intuition and try to give her what she needed.

### **Action Steps:**

- Ask your wife regularly how things are going and if there is anything else you can do to help her.
- Also consider your wife's needs as you perceive them.
- Communicate your own needs to your spouse regularly as well.

- **Never hesitate to initiate a conversation about how to better meet one another's most important needs.**



## A Word on Making Changes

If you haven't figured it out by now, all of the things that I have discussed to this point may be quite contrary to who you are as a person. To accomplish the work ahead of you and to ensure that your work will last, you need to make some changes. Easy stuff, right?! Hardly. Making lifelong changes is tough. Real tough.

After all, much of the changes that need to be made are the products of years and years of habits and/or actions that have been continually reinforced. You must commit to being a lifelong student of personal growth and be willing to attempt to make the necessary changes as part of your own personal recovery process.

So how does one make changes to lifelong habits? Well, I could certainly write a very long book on that single subject. In fact, many people with varying perspectives already have, so if you want to check out various ideas on making changes, head on over to Amazon as there are scores of books on the subject. For now, here are just a few simple steps/tips to get you started:

- 1. Start by becoming aware.** Awareness is the key. It's the start. Become an observer. Start listening to your self-talk, observe what your mind says and does. Pay attention. It's happening all the time. Meditation helps with this. It helped me immensely. I also learned through sitting in silence or being alone out in nature where there is nothing to do but watch nature and listen to my mind.
- 2. Start small.** No one can make a 180 degree change overnight. You have to chunk it down and start small. For instance, if you have an anger problem, you can't expect to suddenly wish your anger away just because you think it's a good idea. You have to start slow and take it one step at a time.
- 3. I would recommend you focus on one change at a time.** It's very hard to make changes that stick, especially if you're trying to focus on more than one. In my experiments, I've found very consistently that changing multiple things at once doesn't work very well. Your focus gets spread thin, and in the long run you end up

failing to stick to any of the changes. If you've tried and failed at multiple changes at once before, you'll know what I mean.

- 4. Be present and enjoy the process.** Changing doesn't have to be a dreadful experience. For instance, if you feel that you need to exercise more, take notice of the benefits while doing something you enjoy, whether it's running, walking or bowling.
- 5. Be grateful for every step you take.** As I said, making changes to lifelong habits and mindsets can be tough. Be grateful for your accomplishments regardless how small. Reward yourself often.

## Back-Sliding

I feel that I can't end this book until I address the possibility that after all the work that you and your wife have done that you will potentially at some point find yourself slipping back into some of your old negative relationship habits and patterns. I think it's quite natural for that to happen. Hopefully to a very small degree though.

Don't let it upset you. If you've done the work and have gotten to know yourself better, you should be able to realize when and if this is happening. You can then right the ship.

Likewise, over the course of the healing and recovery process, you should have become acutely more aware of your wife's feelings, emotions and moods, thus making you more adept at noticing if something is amiss with her as well.

The point is to learn from history and don't let it repeat itself. You should know why the affair happened and what caused the deterioration in your relationship.

Work on a regular basis to ensure that it does not happen again.

Stick to the marital boundaries that you and your wife have established. If you feel that you are acting outside of those boundaries, firstly, it's great that you now realize that, and secondly, you can nip it in the bud before it gets out of hand by communicating these feelings with your spouse.

In our own experience we have learned so much about each other during our recovery process. This is really quite amazing considering the fact that we have been together virtually our entire adult life. You would think that we knew each other pretty damn well, but we discovered that wasn't entirely the case.

This new knowledge has prepared us and has made us aware should we start to slip back into old habits.

For us, communication is most key. We have learned that we really have to express ourselves - our wants and our needs - on a regular basis. We have

also learned that it's OK to rock the boat every now and then if something pisses us off. No more taking each other for granted!

For example...It's those times when I'm in my man-cave and acting all quiet and detached that make Linda anxious. This rarely happens but when it does it is almost always because I'm preoccupied with a work related matter, but Linda doesn't necessarily know that. In the past I wouldn't say anything about it and Linda wouldn't bring it up and instead quietly worry. Now, she will ask me if something is the matter or I will let her know why I'm acting the way that I am. This helps to get it out in the open and alleviate any anxiety or misinterpretations.

While it's true that this whole experience has been really painful for Linda, myself and our relationship, it has been a huge learning experience. We (especially me) have learned more about ourselves, our relationship and human interactions than you can imagine. All of this knowledge has done nothing but help make our relationship much more special.

I encourage you to also learn from your past mistakes and put in the work necessary to make your marriage the best that it can possibly be.

## Conclusion

As you have discovered throughout this book, if you want to be successful at helping your wife heal from your affair, you have to perhaps do some things that might be uncomfortable, or at the very least, be somewhat against your very nature. Only the truly remorseful and committed person will accept the tasks that I have spelled throughout the previous pages.

Perhaps this all sounds like an impossible task. If you think hard though, I'm confident that you will feel that your marriage and wife are worth it. This is an opportunity for both of you to grow both individually and as a couple.

Keep in mind that with this hard work it may still take you quite some time to overcome your wife's pain and undo the damage that you've caused. However, if you are up for a challenge, are committed and persevere you can be successful.

Remember this as well... Everyone screws up. You screwed up by having an affair. But that doesn't have to ultimately define who you are as a person. It's what you do after you screw up that defines you. You can become a hero if you choose to do so.

## About the Authors

We are Linda and Doug and we're just a normal couple who have been able to survive infidelity and go on to create a much stronger and more intimate marriage.

It's taken a lot of hard work and effort along the way, but we feel closer now than we ever have after almost three decades of marriage.

You may wonder why we choose to not put our last names out there, but it's simply to protect the privacy of ourselves and our family and friends.

Linda is a teacher by trade, and Doug is small business owner. When we're not working, you'll find us in the outdoors hiking, biking or kayaking.

We also blog about our affair recovery experiences at [Emotional Affair Journey](#) and conduct mentoring sessions with other individuals and couples.

Writing the blog and being mentors have provided wonderful learning and growth experiences for us both and we truly enjoy trying to help others survive infidelity.

We hope that you have enjoyed this book and that the information we have provided will be of benefit to you.

Thank you once again for allowing us to share our experiences in healing from an affair. We look forward to hearing from you, and wish you the very best that life can offer!