

CHEATING...DO YOU STAY IN THE RELATIONSHIP OR THROW HIM/HER OUT?

When a girlfriend/boyfriend or spouse discovers that their partner has cheated, a mixture of hurt, anger, fear, disbelief, humiliation, and panic can set in. A girlfriend/boyfriend or spouse may also feel stupid and become unsure of her/his own judgment. How could they have been ambushed?

It may be helpful to remember affairs can be triggered by any number of things, such as the partner feeling unheard and underappreciated, being immature, being filled with resentment, being disillusioned with their relationship or marriage, being unable or unwilling to ask for what s/he needs/wants from their spouse, etc. In hindsight, “red flags” can often be clearly seen that indicated something wasn’t working in the relationship.

WHAT IS THE BETRAYED PARTNER TO DO? The most important thing to do in any crisis is not to over react...what’s called “double drowning”. It is often difficult to think clearly when the affair is first discovered. Strong and changing emotions do not make for good decision making. The first thing to do is stay focused on attending to your feelings until the shock of the discovery begins to diminish. Second, find ways to self-soothe yourself (eg. deep breathing to begin the relaxation response, the use of distraction strategies to not get overloaded by emotions, etc.). Third, the betrayed girlfriend/boyfriend or spouse needs to begin to weigh what course of action s/he wants to take about the relationship. This takes taking into account what s/he values about the other person, their history together, his/her gut level feeling about the possibilities of things changing, and the degree of injury sustained by the betrayal.

Remember, relationships and marriages are like playing tennis. Each person has to be willing to show up at the court. If your partner chooses to leave the relationship or marriage, the decision about reconciling becomes a mute point. If both you and your partner are confused and don’t know what to do, then professional help becomes a necessity, not an option. Remember, it takes time for wounds to heal and trust to be restored. If both partners are committed to the healing process, research has shown that the overall quality of the marriage becomes better.

Suzanne C. Saul, Ph.D.