

# Recovering from Infidelity

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Infidelity is one of the most difficult challenges that any marriage or committed relationship can face. Infidelity is almost universally accompanied by a deep sense of betrayal and a profound loss of trust. The reason is that the one partner experiences the infidelity of the other partner to involve a violation of explicit agreements or implicit assumptions about the nature of the relationship, and a violation of what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable behavior relative to preserving a sense of emotional safety within and commitment to the relationship.

Infidelity can take many forms, and is not limited to sexual intercourse or other forms of sex. In addition to sexual infidelity, there is emotional infidelity and financial infidelity. Infidelity can also take place in person, by telephone or email, or via the internet, as with pornography.

Each form of infidelity involves secrecy and a desire to preserve secrecy. The reason is that the person engaged in the infidelity knows on some level that the other partner would not approve of what is being done and would feel betrayed. That is why the revelation of the infidelity is almost universally accompanied by a sense of shock, disbelief, anger and a loss of trust. Indeed, the discovery of infidelity often results in a trauma-like experience akin to an emotional tsunami.

These feelings are fostered not just by the sense of having been betrayed, but also by a sense of having been lied to. Such an experience typically calls into question the very foundations of the relationship and even the one person's confidence about who the partner really is as a person.

In order for there to be genuine healing in the relationship in the face of all these complex factors, it is vital that both partners openly address both the infidelity and other issues in the relationship. The failure to address the issues and heal the pain from the rupture to the relationship risks either an emotional disengagement and deadening within the relationship, or the eventual dissolution of the relationship.

Addressing the infidelity and other issues in the relationship must be done in a safe environment that permits openness, honesty, caring and compassion. From this vantage point, Relationship Enhancement Therapy for couples is an ideal form of treatment. Its emphasis on communicating skillfully, empathically connecting with the feelings, concerns and desires of one's partner, dialoguing in a highly structured format that preserves emotional safety, and managing potential conflict in a manner that also preserves emotional safety all help create the conditions conducive to the constructive engagement of these emotionally charged issues. As a result, Relationship Enhancement Therapy is very effective at facilitating genuine emotional healing. This is the key to helping couples not just recover from the trauma of infidelity, but also to rebuild their relationship on a solid foundation of commitment, trust and love.

Rob Scuka, Ph.D., is author of *Relationship Enhancement Therapy: Healing Through Deep Empathy and Intimate Dialogue* (Routledge, 2005), and has published a comprehensive article entitled "A Clinician's Guide to Helping Couples Heal from the Trauma of Infidelity," in *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 2015, 14, 141-168.