

NAVIGATING THE TURMOIL AFTER DISCOVERING THE AFFAIR:

- 1) **It's okay** not to know what to do. In fact - don't make any **big decisions** in the beginning while you are emotionally flooded. You are in crisis mode; things seem more permanent and unfixable while in crisis. You are emotionally overwhelmed. Your feelings might range from cold disbelief to anger to desperation to save the marriage. Take space, breathe, but don't decide anything concrete yet.
- 2) **It's okay** to have **opposing emotions**, and to feel up and down. Intense anger and paralyzing fear of losing your partner. Cold hatred and deep grief. Wanting to write them off, to desiring closeness. It's confusing but it's also normal!
- 3) **It's okay** to cry. Cry. Make time to cry if you have kids and work and feel like you won't have time but cry. It's like a shower for the inside, allowing you to clean out some cobwebs and wash out painful emotions.
- 4) **It's okay** to not beat yourself up. Please try something radically different - practice **Self-Compassion**. Practice grace, kindness and mercy on yourself. Take some time for self-care (like meditation, deep breathing, longer baths, walks, singing to loud music, time to cry - whatever *works for you*). It might feel weird, weird is good though. It means you're creating new habits and new pathways in your brain. And self-compassion is a wonderful route to have access to.
- 5) **It's okay** to not feel like you can cope. But do everything you can to **keep safe**. Safety includes all aspects of being: body, mind and soul. Don't hesitate to ask for help, reach out, seek individual therapy – whatever is needed for you to stay survive each wave, each day. Healing takes time so keep breathing. Take one day at a time. Take your meds. Wash your hair. Drink water. Go for a walk. Get out the house. Get alone healing time.

Breathe. I mention breathing often, because deep breathing provides more oxygen to your brain. This helps you physiologically to calm down. And it also allows one to become more involved in now instead of lost in what was or what was supposed to be. When overwhelmed, urgency can take precedent and like mentioned in 1, no big decisions should be made while emotionally flooded.

- 6) **It's okay** to take some time off.
- 7) **It's okay** if you don't know how to fix things, or where to even begin. *You do not need to know how to fix things*, it can *seem impossible* to you. You're in the middle of the collapse, it's very hard to make sense of things from there. It's not your job to know how to fix it, that's where the relationship therapist comes in. The therapist just requires your presence and consent.. There are tools to help make sense of or take direction with regards the relationship crisis.
- 8) **It's okay** to get professional support. Did you know that it takes **courage** to go for counselling? Reaching out for help, asking for support - that takes immense courage!

It can feel shameful when your partner cheats on you, and it can even feel shameful to be willing to give your partner another chance! Fixing what broke takes tremendous courage, strength and compassion. It's hard, raw work. Your relationship will never be the same again. But couples can find they come out stronger than before, having faced such an enormous storm together. Rebuilding your *house* (relationship) has a much better basis if guided by the expert support of experienced, science-based, compassionate professionals, **couples' therapists**.

Get **an individual therapist** for yourself. You *need* some extra, unbiased, professional support. Be careful who you choose though – make sure they are pro-marriage, regardless of what you and your partner decide to do. Both of you could benefit from individual therapy in the process of making sense of why it happened and who you want to be on the other side of the crisis.

If you want to **talk** to someone other than your therapist about the relationship, choose someone you really trust. Don't talk to many people. Remember whoever you choose to talk to will likely be biased and could likely become angry with your partner for hurting you. The more people you tell, the more people you may need to reconvince if you decide to work on your marriage. Facing infidelity is hard work as it is, having your support system cheering you on to leave your partner makes hearing your heart even harder.

- 9) **It's okay** to want to ask questions and know more. There has been discovered that many people who have been betrayed go through PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). If you are experiencing intrusive, obsessive thoughts;

trouble sleeping; flashbacks; agitation; irritability; hostility; hypervigilance – then you know understand why. And I hope you realise it's ok. But I would like to guide the type of questions you ask since, being haunted by flashbacks and obtrusive thoughts, bear in mind you won't be able to 'unsee' things. If you ask for sexual encounter details, the chances are good the very answers will haunt you. It might feel right to ask but trust me when I say – you're actually looking for the meaning behind the acts.

If you want to ask your partner **questions** (which is *very* normal [the hope is often that by understanding there will be sense or possibly even relief]), ask yourself if:

- a. You feel better knowing the answer? (If not, stop asking. Maybe ask your therapist if you can write them to the therapist instead – thereby you have a safe place to let it out and the questions are 'in storage' should you want to ask them in therapy)
- b. The questions are seeking deeper understanding or facts? The difference is, in getting the meaning we ask things like "what did the affair mean to you?" vs fact questions "how many times did you have sex?" Facts often distract us from what we are really needing to heal from this (regardless of if the healing is married or not). Meaning questions are deep, scary and can be very vulnerable. You might need a bit of time before you are ready to ask them. That too is okay.

10) **It's okay** to be confused about what to (if to) tell the children. If you have **children**, please be careful of oversharing or villainizing the other parent. No matter how devastated and angry you are, the children do not have the cognitive capacity (nor emotional distance) to make sense of it. I have spent many years repairing broken children who got scarred by the bitter divorces of their parents, who used them as informants or spoke horribly of their other parent. No matter what – protect your children by not allowing your own rage to taint or stain their relationship with their other parent.

No matter the age of your child(ren), even adult *children* get very hurt when they feel they have to choose sides or protect a parent from another's bitterness, rage or hurt.