

## RELATIONSHIP ADVICE: HOW TO SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE



**INFIDELITY is the ultimate betrayal – but it doesn't have to lead to divorce. Here, relationships expert Richard Cole gives a step-by-step guide to saving your marriage – and deepening your love.**

Emotional and sexual betrayal wrapped up in lies, a partner's affair is one of the hardest blows life can deal. Whether it was a drunken one-night stand or a long-term liaison, most people's instant reaction is to split. But is it that simple? Clearly there was something wrong in the marriage – no one strays if they're blissfully happy – but you've both invested a lot in this relationship and there may be many reasons why it could and should be saved. In fact, this could be a chance for both of you to address issues that have lain dormant for too long, and to emerge all the stronger for it. But there's no one-size-fits-all solution and the first step is to understand what kind of affair it was...

**“He's got a responsible job, been a good husband but then reaches mid-life and realises his needs aren't being met”**

### **The mid-life crisis affair**

Often long-standing partners get into a rut and forget to talk to each other about what makes them feel alive.

The Mid-Life Crisis Affair usually results from a scenario where a man has done the “right” thing.

He's got a responsible job, been a good husband and a family man but then reaches mid-life and suddenly realises his needs aren't being met and thinks,

“Where's the payoff?” Often men in this position feel very split – one part still feels responsible, another wants to go and have fun.

The way through is for him to learn to understand himself and find better strategies for meeting these needs in his existing relationship instead of with a third party.

### **The exit affair**

The Exit Affair takes place when someone wants to get out of his or her relationship but doesn't have the maturity to talk it through with their partner.

They use the affair both as a way to protect themselves – they're going to get some support from someone else – and as an excuse to leave.

They've decided it's over for them, they don't want to work on their relationship and the affair is a way of making a definite statement, "It's over".

Often the affair isn't about them wanting to be with their new partner, they just don't feel strong enough to leave until something forces the issue.

### **The conflict avoidance affair**

People think that infidelity is about sex but it's actually deeper than that.

The Conflict Avoidance Affair is a way of letting your partner know you're unhappy but by acting it out instead of communicating directly.

A typical example would be the guy who goes away for a weekend with friends and ends up in bed with someone.

It might seem that he just wants "a bit of fun", but subconsciously it's about something being wrong in his relationship with his partner, and he actually wants her to find out.

The Conflict Avoidance Affair is an extreme way of communicating which appeals to people who'd rather sweep things under the carpet. Often conflict avoiders are playing out what's happened in their own early family life – if their parents ignored important issues, then that's how they've also learnt to deal with conflict.

They don't know how to kiss and make up, so they avoid being real with each other and saying what they mean.

### **The sexual addiction affair**

The sex addict or serial adulterer is usually male. Men like this use physical affairs as a way of filling up the emptiness they feel inside.

Unfortunately, while being a Lothario may feel manly, and making conquests may massage their egos, their thrill-seeking is merely a quick fix which doesn't solve the real problem.

Often these people are quite stuck in their addiction and unwilling to change so merely getting a serial adulterer to counselling is an achievement in itself.

### **The intimacy avoidance affair**

This one happens when someone is growing closer to their partner but can't risk going that step deeper. It applies especially to men who have a fear of losing their masculinity by making themselves vulnerable.

Intimacy avoiders seek love elsewhere but as soon as their new lover starts saying "What about us? I want more commitment from you" they're off again.

Male intimacy avoiders want to be Jack the Lad but end up settling for crumbs because that feels safer than being close – and therefore vulnerable – in a real relationship.

## **THE STEP-BY-STEP ADULTERY SURVIVAL GUIDE**

### **Take it slowly**

Don't make any snap decisions. If you leave immediately, you will remain angry, possibly forever, and you'll miss an opportunity to learn or repair your relationship.

### **Get the facts**

When your partner has strayed you're entitled to know what happened. You don't need graphic details (don't ask "Is she better in bed than me?") but you do need the basic ones.

Where did it happen? If the sex took place in your bed while you were at work you might feel differently than if it was in a hotel. Also you need to know whether protection and contraception was used.

### **Space and privacy**

Once trust has been destroyed, intimacy may feel impossible. It's OK to sleep in separate rooms for a while but if you go off and stay with your mum for three weeks it will just fuel your indignation and anger.

Try to reach a functional agreement about staying in the same house and being civil to each other while you decide what to do about it. And avoid other people's moral judgments and advice.

## **Get outside help**

People instinctively try to manage their pain by being angry, and they go over and over the events because they're not willing to deal with the issues. Professional help can help you to focus on the bigger picture.

The role of relationship counsellors is to contain and "detoxify" rage so couples can gradually reach an understanding.

## **Let go of the fantasy**

If your partner has cheated on you then your relationship probably isn't what you thought it was. But, once the secrets are out, it's time to face reality.

While it's tempting to hate your partner, it may help to explore what motivated their adultery. Equally, try to consider how you consciously or unconsciously contributed to the situation.

While you're clearly not to blame, examine whether you've failed to challenge your partner or allowed your relationship or sex life to become dull.

## **Working it through**

We're all guilty of neglecting our relationships at some point. People expect them just to work, as if by magic, rather than realising that both parties have a responsibility to keep things alive and fresh and to communicate and deal with crises as they occur.

Relationships are often hard work, but it's through hard work that the greatest rewards come. After an affair, yours is facing its greatest challenge. If you can truly overcome this, it will be deeper and stronger as a result.

## **Making the break**

Even if you do decide to leave, there's still a good way and a bad way to do it. If you can, don't just storm off or disappear without saying a word.

Explain to your partner what was good, what was bad and why you're going, then leave with grace.

Telling the truth will help you identify your emotional and behavioural patterns, which can help to give future relationships a better chance of success.

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