

# A Blueprint to Recover from an Affair Covenant Counseling

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Affair recovery is difficult but not impossible. If a couple can commit to the process of healing before making a decision to divorce, there is hope for marriage recovery.

## Trust Reset:

- i. The offender must be willing to answer the spouse's questions to help build emotional equilibrium.
- ii. The offender must listen, summarize, affirm and be forthright. Avoid the "Safeguarding Blunder." Do not try to protect your spouse from information you feel may hurt. The wounded spouse must decide what details they want to know.<sup>1</sup> Hedging the truth is an enemy to trust building.
- iii. Commit to a recovery process: A written agreement is helpful for a couple to afford them confidence and a safe structure for an attempt toward recovery.
- iv. Commit to Trust Building Components:
  1. *Establish Structure*: The couple agree upon boundaries and rules that protect further erosion and begins rebuilding trust.
  2. *Safety*: The couple establishes communication rules that promote a safe interaction. An example would be, "I am committed to allow you the freedom to share your feelings without retaliation, evaluation, judgment, and minimization or with a reaction of defensiveness, meanness, stonewalling or withdrawing."<sup>2</sup>
  3. *Speech*: When we feel our right to be treated respectfully is violated, we tend to get hostile and harsh with our words.<sup>3</sup> One way to avoid this is by each partner making a commitment to themselves to suspend the right to be treated well. This action is based on the reality you can't control how others treat you. When this is done, it is easier to show meekness in place of harshness. A meek disposition is one of kindness, gentleness and humility showing patience and longsuffering love from the heart.<sup>4</sup> The goal is for our words to encourage, avoiding discouragement.<sup>5</sup> Couples need to be wise in attitude and skilled in speech to grow close to each other.<sup>6</sup> A therapist can help couples learn new skills that advance positive conversation.
  4. *Trust is a journey, not a destination*. It is important that trust is understood as dynamic, not static. Trust fluctuates between couples with changing circumstances. When the trust level increases, safety and vulnerability increases.

## 2. Repairing Phase:

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<sup>1</sup> The wounded spouse needs to pray and contemplate about how much detail about the affair he/she should pursue. Too much detail can be visually haunting and delay recovery.

<sup>2</sup> See James 1:19-20, 3:5-8; Ephesians 4:29-32

<sup>3</sup> See Proverbs 15:1

<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ had this meekness as He gave up the right to be treated as God and became a man to die for man's sin as if He was a sinner, rather than who He actually was, a righteous holy God (See Philippians 2:3-8). The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit makes it more possible to have a heart of meekness (Ephesians 4:22-24, Galatians 5:16-26, James 4:1-6).

<sup>5</sup> See Proverbs 15:4, Ephesians 4:29

<sup>6</sup> See James 1:19-20

- a. **Motivation:** Write out your reasons to pursue the recovery of the marriage. Ask yourself, “Why do I want to stay in this marriage?”
- b. **Assessment:** Ask questions such as, “What dynamics of our marriage led to this affair? What role did I play in this? How has my past and family background contributed to this behavior? What needs to change in this marriage?”
- c. **Forgiveness Procedure:**
  - i. List your offenses you have committed toward your partner.
  - ii. Ask for forgiveness for each offense: “I was wrong when I \_\_\_\_\_. I know this must have made you feel \_\_\_\_\_. I don’t deserve your forgiveness but will you forgive me?”
  - iii. The goal is to give the offended spouse freedom to be honest with the answer. The response doesn’t need to be a yes, it can be a no. If it is a no, thank your partner for the honesty. The yes or no response allows the offender to feel a termination of guilt that drains emotional energy.
  - iv. In addition, the offended partner’s communication emphasis changes from “I’m trying to get you to understand why I hurt,” to “This is what I need from you.”
  - v. Recognize that there is a difference between apologizing, “I’m sorry,” and that of asking for forgiveness. An apology is an ambiguous statement leaving the offended spouse unsure if you really understand how deeply he/she was hurt. Asking for forgiveness is a question, leaving no doubt of understanding and your purpose to take responsibility for the offense.
- d. **Practice Trust Building Behavior:**
  - i. Keep your word.
  - ii. Keep your spouse informed. Avoid catching your spouse off guard with an unexpected surprise.
  - iii. Keep no secrets and avoid guardedness.
  - iv. Spend time together.
  - v. Learn how to emotionally connect by using feeling words: “I heard you say you’re feeling...”
  - vi. Practice being attentive.