

"It was brutally hard to let go and forgive. When I was ready and able to do it, I felt so much lighter, as if a burden had been lifted from my soul." (a client)

The SOLUTION source

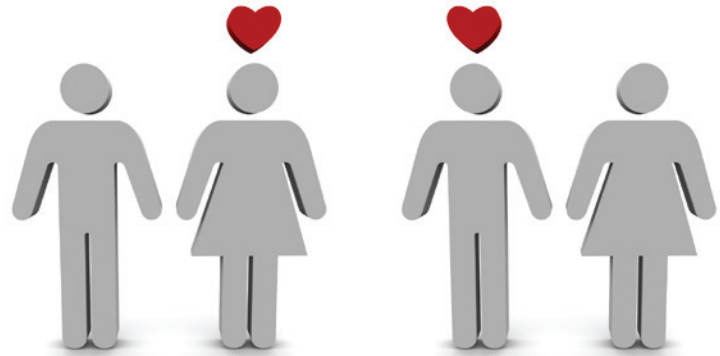
Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

For You & Your Family

Summer 2011

Affairs

What happens when the sacredness and sanctity of a committed relationship is shattered by a partner's infidelity? You may be surprised to know that even those of us who could never imagine themselves being involved in an affair, do. We really don't know what the true statistics are on how many of us have affairs, but one study indicated that 25 percent of men and 12 percent of women do. ■



Just What Exactly is an Affair?

There have been many definitions and descriptions identifying just what exactly constitutes an affair. The definition is really dependent upon the nature of the relationship and what the couple has decided the "rules" are. Hopefully when a couple has decided to make their relationship a committed one that a conversation of this nature takes place. For some couples even the hint of being interested in someone else is taboo. For others it's all about the sex. "Professor's House", an online relationship site seems to be the most helpful and the most respectful of differences:

"What constitutes as cheating in a marriage is quite simply any breach of the individual agreement that the couple has with one another. Cheating is a lot like lying; in that it is something most people try to hide that involves a lot of guilt. If your partner can spend time with another person and not hide it, chances are they are not breaking your agreement on what is right for your marriage. Sometime in the relationship a discussion should involve the parameters of what constitutes as cheating.

No partner wants to come home after having drinks with co-workers and be accused of cheating. Being clear about what you expect, want and won't tolerate at the very beginning can keep both people on the same page.

What constitutes as cheating to one couple may not mean anything to another. It may be that we each share different levels of commitment or that we carry around different ideals about the institute of marriage.

Married people shouldn't feel trapped or deprived of anything in life just because they are married. This doesn't mean that they should have free rein to have sex or spend time with anyone they want; but commonality (based on common sense) should be reached. We all look. Whether or not we touch is something altogether different. We all also think about making love to other people. That is an inherent function of humanity. Acting on that urge is altogether different. To force anyone to deny simply human characteristics is setting a marriage up to breed dishonesty and various levels of infidelity." ■

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Healing From An Affair

When clients attend their first couples session when an affair has happened in their relationship, the first question that is often asked is: Can a relationship heal and move forward after an affair? The resounding answer is yes!

Many people find themselves on the fence when thinking about whether they should stay or leave. Shirley Glass in her renowned book *Not Just Friends* states that “as long as the betrayed partner is still ambivalent, there is still hope, because you haven’t yet made a definite decision. The first decision you need to make is whether you can commit to working on the marriage, it is important that you make an active rather than a passive decision to stay and work on the marriage.”

She has a series of very helpful questions that both the betrayed spouse and involved spouse can ask themselves which include for one, visualizing the future. For more see the chapter. ■



Should You Pick Up the Pieces or Throw in the Towel?

In her book, *After the Affair* by therapist Janis Abrahms Spring, she describes three stages of healing:

The First Stage: Normalizing Your Feelings

The Second Stage: Deciding to Recommit or quit

In the third stage when couples decide to recommit she refers to this as:

Rebuilding Your Relationship:

In this stage she invites couples to:

- Decipher the meaning of the affair and accept a share of responsibility for it.
- Say goodbye to the lover.
- Rebuild trust.
- Talk and listen in ways that allows each partner to be heard.
- Manage your differences and dissatisfactions so that you can stay attached even when you don’t feel particularly loved or loving.
- Invite forgiveness. ■

Faithfulness

Are we asking the right question? Should we backup and look at what constitutes faithfulness instead? In *The Mindful Couple*. Robyn Walser and Darruh Westrup focus on Faithfulness in marriage and ask the following:

1. When you think of faithfulness, what qualities does it have? Use whatever descriptors (metaphors, colours, textures or sounds) you find most helpful.
2. What does it mean to be faithful to yourself? To another?
3. Are there ways your faithfulness isn’t exactly what it could be?

Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Picture in your mind’s eye a field. In the middle of that field stands an oak tree. Imagine that you are that tree – solid, not blown by any winds of temptation. Just rest in this image, letting yourself experience the steadfastness of a rooted tree for two or three minutes. Make a gentle commitment to act faithfully in your words and deeds. Take a few deep breaths and open your eyes. ■

Internet Affairs

What are the warning signs that you (or your spouse) are on the slippery slope to an on-line affair? Take this on-line relationship quiz and see.

Quiz: Is Your On-Line Friendship Too Friendly?

Directions: Circle Yes or No to the left of each statement.

Yes No

- y n 1. Do you find yourself coming to bed later at night because you are chatting on-line?
- y n 2. Do you ever exit a screen because you do not want a family member to see what you are reading or writing to a chat room member?
- y n 3. Have you ever lied to your spouse about your personal Internet activities?
- y n 4. Would you feel uncomfortable sharing your Internet correspondence with your spouse?
- y n 5. Have you ever set up a separate e-mail account or credit card to carry on personal correspondence with an individual on-line?
- y n 6. Has your Internet correspondence had a negative effect on your work or household tasks?
- y n 7. Have you ever lied in response to a question from your spouse about your e-mail correspondence?
- y n 8. Have you ever exchanged photos of yourself with a secret e-mail correspondence?
- y n 9. Since beginning a secret e-mail correspondence, have you experienced either a loss or an unusual increase in sexual desire with your spouse?
- y n 10. Have you made arrangements to talk secretly on the phone with your e-mail friend?
- y n 11. Have you made arrangements to meet with your secret e-mail friend?

Scoring Key:

Two or more yes answers to questions 1,2,3,4 indicate a potential Internet romance is developing. It is time to either share your on-line correspondence with your mate or break off the correspondence and begin to examine how to improve your marriage.

A yes answer to any of questions 5, 6, 7 indicates you are crossing the boundary from an Internet friendship to an Internet romance. Acknowledge this relationship for what it is about to become and take action to preserve and enhance your marriage.

A yes answer to questions 8 or 9 indicates you have begun a fantasy romantic relationship with your on-line correspondent. Even if it never moves to a physical stage, this relationship has great potential to damage or destroy your marriage.

A yes answer to question 10 or 11 indicates that you have taken positive action towards initiating an extramarital affair. Consider the impact this will have on your marriage and your children and take steps to sort this out with a professional. (Shirley Glass, PhD) ■



The Slippery Slope (Shirley Glass, PhD)

"In the new crisis of infidelity, platonic friendships and workplace relationships are turning into emotional affairs, usually gradually, often without premeditation. Parties cross boundaries of emotional intimacy, sharing intimate information with a friend that is usually appropriately the exclusive territory of a husband or wife. When emotional boundaries are overstepped, the partner has taken the first step onto the slippery slope leading to emotional and eventually sexual infidelity.

Even if the infidelity is "only" emotional, it often leads to a double life of deception and sexuality, threatening once secure marriages.

If you recognize that your friendship or your partner's friendship may be in the danger zone of too much emotional intimacy, use this awareness to address concerns about your marriage. This quiz will help you see where you stand."

Directions: Circle Yes or No to the left of each statement.

- y n 1. Do you confide more to your friend than to your partner about how your day went?
y n 2. Do you discuss negative feelings or intimate details about your marriage with your friend but not with your partner?
y n 3. Are you open with your partner about the extent of your involvement with your friend?
y n 4. Would you feel comfortable if your partner heard your conversation with your friend?
y n 5. Would you feel comfortable if your partner saw a videotape of your meetings?
y n 6. Are you aware of sexual tensions in this friendship?
y n 7. Do you and your friend touch differently when you're alone than in front of others?
y n 8. Are you in love with your friend?

Scoring Key:

You get one point each for yes to questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and one point each for no to 3, 4, 5.

If you scored near 0, this is just a friendship.

If you scored 3 or more, you may not be "just friends."

If you scored 7-8, you are definitely involved in an emotional affair. ■

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Women who have been sexually abused or assaulted often experience feelings of fear, anger, shame and sadness. May is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. For information about this issue, or to learn more, contact the Counselling Centre of East Algoma at (705)848-2585.

Did you know...

Sexual assault is one of the most under reported crimes? Less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police. Victims often feel too ashamed or too afraid to report the assault.

83% of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime?

Young women between the ages of 16-21 are at the highest risk of sexual assault? Many people think a sexual assault involves violence. In fact, the vast majority of date rapes involve coercion, not physical violence.

The Counselling Centre of East Algoma has been working with survivors of sexual abuse/assault for more than 30 years. For more information call 705 848-2585