

Sexual Betrayal Recovery Kit	
<p>1. What should I do? (Managing the crisis of discovery)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ After discovery checklist ○ Initial coping plan ○ FAQs ○ Disclosure preparation worksheet ○ Behaviour change plan ○ Boundaries and requests
<p>2. What has happened to me? (Coping with trauma symptoms)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trauma symptoms and 3Rs ○ Trigger action plan ○ Impact letter ○ Dealing with negative beliefs ○ Later stage recovery issues ○ Self-assessment

After Discovery Checklist

Betraying Partner (Your Partner)	Betrayed Partner (You)	Overall Tips				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For your safety, complete a STI test ○ Accept responsibility and express remorse ○ End unhealthy behavior / affair and provide proof to spouse ○ Get rid of any related mementos ○ Answer questions related to the betrayal (leaving out sexually explicit details) ○ Provide ongoing access to technology (e.g., passwords to phone) ○ If there is any new contact, disclose to your partner immediately (no not delete texts) ○ Consider installing a location tracker ○ Do not take your phone into the bathroom alone ○ Consider individual therapy to understand your decisions ○ Install internet filter (for porn issues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For your safety, complete a STI test ○ Expect your partner to complete all the steps in the first column ○ Focus on your own healing by making a plan for self-care ○ Access individual counselling with a therapist who specializes in betrayal trauma ○ Develop a team of support and access online resources <table border="1" style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Initial Resources for Both Parties</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> Books: Not Just Friends State of Affairs What Makes Love Last </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> Internet: Couples trust recovery kit Affair recovery Helping couples heal </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Initial Resources for Both Parties		Books: Not Just Friends State of Affairs What Makes Love Last	Internet: Couples trust recovery kit Affair recovery Helping couples heal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you are able to discuss the betrayal without is leading to destructive conflict, consider setting aside regular time to do this. Seeing a couples therapist who specializes in infidelity can provide some safety and structure to this process. ○ Avoid making major decisions about the relationship for at least 3-6 months ○ Avoid name calling and yelling ○ Be thoughtful about who you tell initially ○ Consider a break from sexual contact for at least a few months to focus on trust building
Initial Resources for Both Parties						
Books: Not Just Friends State of Affairs What Makes Love Last	Internet: Couples trust recovery kit Affair recovery Helping couples heal					

Coping Plan

Goal: To establish safety and stability in the nervous system

Do these activities every day:

1. **Stress reduction:** 20-30 minutes of stress reduction activities (see list below)
2. **Exercise:** 30 minutes of walking in nature
3. **Sleep:** Set aside 7-9 hours for sleep and 60 minutes for a wind down routine, keep schedule consistent (even on weekends)
4. **Eating:** Eat nutrient-dense whole foods such as: Salmon, eggs, avocado, potatoes, blueberries. Limit or avoid alcohol, caffeine, sugar, and processed foods.

1. Stress reduction activities:

Audio tracks	Yoga / Mindful movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Orienting exercise by Irene Lyon ○ Deep breathing exercise (looking at screen) ○ Anxiety release app (safe place exercise) ○ Grounding exercise by Christina Bell (track 4) ○ Bilateral stimulation drum track ○ White noise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 30-minute hatha class with Mel (Yoga Within) ○ Hatha Yoga with David Procyshyn ○ 8 Brocades Qigong practice (Mimi Duo Keemer)

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|------------------------------------|--|
| ○ Relaxation music | |
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2. Resources:

Online resources:	Books (general infidelity):	Books (partners of sex addicts):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Affair recovery youtube channel ○ Beyond Bitchy Podcast by Vicki Tidwell Palmer ○ Bloom for women online community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not Just Friends by Shirley Glass (book) ○ State of Affairs by Esther Perel ○ What Makes Love Last by John Gottman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intimate Deception by Sheri Keffer ○ Facing Heartbreak by Stephanie Carnes, Mari A. Lee, and Anthony D. Rodriguez ○ Moving Beyond Betrayal by Vicki Tidwell Palmer

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I'm so confused about what to do. Should I leave the relationship?

Of course you feel confused - your whole world has changed. Experts recommend waiting at least a 3-6 months before making any major decisions about the relationship. However, that doesn't mean that you can't take breaks or even live apart temporarily. The decision to stay in a relationship may be based on whether:

- The betraying partner takes ownership of their actions and expresses remorse
- They betraying partner makes concrete steps to change and follows through
- The betraying partner shows a commitment to working on the relationship
- Both partners believe that the relationship is worth salvaging
- The betrayed partner can eventually move into forgiveness and develop a basic level of trust and safety in the relationship.

The overall journey of betrayal recovery can feel very slow at times. However, you should feel that overall, your relationship is moving in a positive direction.

2. What is the success rate of marriages where there is infidelity?

The statistics on infidelity tend to vary widely. [One study](#) by *Institute for Family Studies* found that 50% of people who had been unfaithful were still married. John Gottman [found](#) that when couples were open to discussing the affair, 86% of couples stayed together, versus the 59% survival rate of those who did not address the affair directly.

3. Will I ever be able to get over this?

Although everyone is different, couples therapist Stan Tatkin has suggested that it takes approximately one year to rewire the damage caused from betrayal trauma.¹

Many betrayed partners are able to develop sufficient trust toward their partner and diminish their symptoms of trauma. However, ongoing triggers can still occur, I work with clients to find ways to manage them.

¹ Tatkin, S. (2020, May). *Psychobiology of addiction: A poly-theoretical approach*. Presentation presented as the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals, Provided via distance technology.

One of the most important tasks in healing from trauma is the meaning we make from the betrayal. Partners that heal well are able to separate their partner's behavior from their inherent self-worth.

What I notice is that the space between the triggers eventually spaces out, as does the intensity of the responses. Our degree of self-care also helps to determine how we respond to our triggers. For example, if you are dealing with a lot of stress at work, then you may feel more on edge with your partner. Overall, the responses do get better with time.

Even though most people's symptoms of trauma lessen, sometimes they can worsen over time. It's important to remember that this is not your fault or a sign of weakness. The good news is that certain trauma treatments such as EMDR are helpful for resolving the major symptoms of trauma so you can live a normal life.

4. I feel like I'm going crazy! How long will this last?

You're not crazy - you're responding to a conflict between your threat and attachment systems.

First and foremost, we are wired to attach to others in order survive. When that safety is taken away by betrayal, our system moves the fight or flight response.² The threat response system activates hormones like cortisol and norepinephrine, increasing our heart rate, sweating, and breathing. The reasoning capabilities of our brain also go offline.

Your body is faced in an impossible dilemma: how do I get close to someone who also feels unsafe? As a result, you may alternate through times of wanting to be close to your partner then pushing them away. There may be times where you are so angry at your partner you could hurt them, then other times you would do anything to be close to them. This disconnection and connection cycle can make you feel like you're going crazy, but it's normal. Taking a 15-30 break and doing something soothing can help when this threat system becomes activated.

Another innate drive we have is to protect our partner from competition, which called [mate guarding](#).

5. How could my partner do this to me if they loved me? Didn't they know that what they were doing was wrong?

The factors leading to betrayal are complex. We often assume that people who are unfaithful are unhappy, but [56% of men](#) rated themselves as satisfied in their primary relationship (compared to 34% of women). Most

² There are other responses to threat as well, such as dissociation (collapse), and fawning (befriending the abuser).

affairs develop because of gradual boundary crossings based on proximity, with [82%](#) being social acquaintances, neighbours, or workplace colleagues.

Many affairs start with gradually a loosening of boundaries over time, which Fred Humphrey called the “*cup of coffee syndrome*.” This means that many people do not start out with the intention of having an affair, but they gradually become share more information over time, and become attracted to that person. In addition to opportunity, many of my clients were also dealing with personal issues, such as low self-worth, or may have felt an overall emptiness in their lives.

With sexual addiction issues, there are a variety of factors that can influence this. Similar to infidelity, having access to pornography increases the likelihood of use, as we have seen with the advent of flash media in 2007. Other contributing factors include a family history of addiction and trauma.

Many of my clients believe that their partner was unfaithful because they were not attractive enough. In my experience, this is rarely cited as a reason for infidelity. Some authors suggest that betraying partners can be attracted to novelty or someone different than their partner rather than someone better than their partner.

6. Will they ever change?

In my experience, observing someone’s actions over time is the best way to determine if someone is capable of change. Your partner may express shame and remorse and make promises to change, but it is their actions that will verify their words.

I recommend reflecting on whether your partner is:

- Accepting responsibility and expressing remorse
- Taking concrete steps to change
- Attempting to improve the overall quality of the relationship
- Being honest if there are setbacks and making steps to prevent future relapse

Although the betraying partner should be kept to a high standard, it’s also important to look for signs of overall progress instead of perfection. It’s also important that you are taking steps to work with your spouse to move forward.

7. How can I trust again if I had no idea and they were lying to me?

The sad truth is that there is no surefire way to tell if someone is being continually dishonest. However, most people I've worked with commit to a path of change seem to act in good faith.

I know this is difficult to do, but please try to trust your intuition and bring up concerns when something feels off. Sometimes your worries may not be true, but practicing having a voice is an essential skill for overcoming the crazy-making of being betrayed. It's also helpful to have someone you trust outside of your relationship to give you feedback as well. In my experience, continued deception eventually is discovered, and this information gives you valuable information about the relationship, as most relationships can survive infidelity, but not ongoing deception. I would not recommend any client staying in a situation where there is ongoing deception.

8. What about sex? Part of me can't imagine being sexual, and another part of me worries they might stray if I'm not being sexual.

Sexuality is a complicated topic at the best of times, but here are a few things to consider. We recommend waiting at least 30-90 days before being sexually intimate with your partner. This gives the couple time to come to terms with what has happened, and for the betrayed spouse to establish their boundaries.

After this agreed-upon timeframe has passed, sexuality is negotiated based on the comfort levels of both parties. We recommend starting with non-sexual intimacy such as hand holding, kissing, and hugging, moving into more sexually intimate acts. The main purpose of sexuality is to establish a loving connection with each other, not to re-enact fantasy or escape. This process takes time and it's helpful to have a professional support you.

7. Will I ever feel like myself again?

Yes, and no. In several ways, your life has permanently changed. Your trust in your spouse may be permanently damaged, and you may never be able to forget about what has happened. However, many of my spouses report that they have experienced they have found positive meaning in the situation (which Viktor Franyl calls tragic optimism). Although my clients would never want to go through this experience if given the choice, here are some of the positive aspects that have emerged:

- An ability to be more assertive with others
- Better skills at taking care of themselves and having boundaries
- A stronger connection with their spouse
- Being happy and independent (if the relationship ended)
- The ability to connect and support others in pain

- A deeper connection to their faith or spirituality
- An opportunity to address childhood wounds or past trauma

Disclosure Preparation Worksheet

It is difficult to rebuild trust if you do not know what has actually occurred. Below is a list of preparation questions, as well as room to write out your questions. One caveat to info sharing is asking sexually graphic questions (e.g., what was she wearing?) as these can exacerbate the trauma symptoms. It is recommended to complete this exercise with the help of a therapist as this can be an intensely emotional process. The questions are usually asked in couples therapy.

This is a difficult process but most betrayed partners find that it was worthwhile. When you ask these questions of your spouse, they should remain patient, express remorse, and take responsibility for their actions.

Preparation Questions

1. How much do you believe you know of what your partner may be hiding?
2. What will your thoughts, feelings, and responses be if you discover if it's more than you anticipated?
3. What is your worst fear?
4. If you think about your relationship with your partner over time, are there episodes where you felt suspicious that your partner may have been lying?
5. What is your plan for self-care after you ask these questions?

Questions:	
Was there sexual contact?	
When did this happen and how often?	
Has it stopped?	
Why do you want to work on this relationship?	

Did you discuss our personal lives with this person?	
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Additional Disclosure Questions (for Sexual Addiction)

Risk:

- Were there times or situations in which your professional career or reputation was put at risk due to your acting out?
- When our children were younger, did you ever leave them unsupervised in order to act out?
- Have you ever looked at sexual images or videos of underage girls?

Categories of acting out:

- Have you ever contacted an ex-girlfriend? If so, what was the nature of the contact and your purpose for reaching out?
- During our relationship, have there been times when you flirted with (online, via text, or in person), made inappropriate comments toward other women. Can you expand on that?
- During our marriage, have you had an emotional affair? An emotional affair is confiding in another person about your personal life at a similar level to a romantic partnership without the primary partner's knowledge. Can you expand on that? (with who, how long did it last, how far did the feelings go, how much emotional intimacy was shared)
- Were there forms of sexually acting out other than what I'm aware of (internet porn, masturbation, two trips to the strippers)?

Clarification / timeline questions:

- When is the first time after we got into a relationship that you sexually acted out?

- Were there times you told me you had to work late or go into work on weekends when you were planning to use the privacy to sexually act out?
- When you stayed up late to play video games, were you sometimes viewing porn?
- Approximately how much time per week was spent looking at porn and masturbating before you got sober?
- Were there other places (than work and home and the shower at camping) that you sexually acted out?
- Did you look at porn and/or masturbate in our bed?

Financial impacts:

Did you spend money on your sexually acting out? If so, approximately how much and in what capacity?

Integrity abuse related

- What are the ways that you deceived me? (e.g., secret email address, lying, gaslighting, blame shifting, removing or bypassing internet filters)
- When you said that you weren't interested in sex because I had gained weight, was this statement true or were you using this as a distancing strategy?
- Did you pick fights with me to give yourself an excuse or justification to act out?

Behaviour Change Plan

<p>We agree that the following behaviours are considered off-limits for our relationship:</p>	
<p>Honesty With Setbacks</p> <p><i>If a setback or new information emerges (e.g., unsolicited contact from an affair partner), the betraying partner will notify the betrayed partner within 24 hours.</i></p>	
<p>Verification / Accountability / Safety Agreements</p> <p>In order to help re-establish trust and safety, we agree to the following verification / accountability actions:</p>	

Boundaries and Requests

Boundary = an action or decision which you have control over. The purpose of a boundary is to create space to promote your wellbeing, rather than achieving a certain outcome. Boundaries can change over time, and are very specific to each situation.

<i>Physical and sexual boundaries:</i>	<i>Communication boundaries³</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Receiving a sexually transmitted infections test ○ Abstaining from sexual contact until you have proper information about the nature of the betrayal ○ Sleeping in separate bedrooms ○ Separating finances or bank accounts ○ Limiting or eliminating contact with family or friends who participated in your partner's deception ○ Limiting time spent together as a couple ○ Therapeutic separation (living separately in the same home or apart) ○ Not showering or undressing in front of your partner ○ If you are sexual with your partner, not engaging in sexual behaviours that make the other person feel objectified or uncomfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Taking a time-out from conversations when interactions are experienced as out-of-control or deceptive ○ Choosing to confront your partner when you believe that there is a discrepancy between their words and actions ○ Protecting yourself from harmful details about your partner's deception ○ Deciding how much to share with outside people about your situation ○ Being honest with your partner about the impact of their behaviour on you

³ Credit given to the work boundary work of Pia Mellody in influencing this material.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The clients I work with will often agree to a 90-day abstinence agreement in order to establish some stability in the relationship 	
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Requests = asking someone for help in meeting a need. In healthy relationships, you have the right to ask your partner for what you need. When someone has been betrayed, this skill becomes even more important.

You may ask your partner to:

- Obtain a STI test and share the results with you
- End all unhealthy acting out behaviours and show you proof
- Provide access to electronics and share passwords
- Inform you within 24 hours if there have been any setbacks or contact with affair partner
- Engage in therapy and read relevant books
- Ask permission before touching you
- Attend couples therapy
- Check-in with you regularly to discuss your relationship
- Block access to certain websites, social media platforms associated with the betrayal (internet filtering software)
- Respond to questions non-defensively

How to Discuss Boundaries and Requests

1. Make a list of some of the most important boundaries and requests. It's a good idea to discuss this list with a therapist to get feedback.
2. Schedule a time to meet with your partner or discuss it in a therapy session.
3. You can start by saying, "In order for me to start to feel a sense of safety, here are a few boundaries and requests I'd like to discuss."
4. Have a sense of your boundaries but also be open to hearing your partner's perspective. This is a process that involves several discussions and revisions.
5. Share what will happen if those boundaries or requests are not honoured (e.g., I may decide to limit contact further).
6. Give your partner some time to process the information and respond.

What to Avoid

- *Making demands.* We cannot control the behavior of other adults, we can only invite them to change. If your partner is not willing to respect any of your boundaries or requests, this gives you information about the health of the relationship.
- *Repeatedly expressing rage or taking revenge on your partner.* It's natural to be hurt and angry at your partner and want them to experience the level of pain you have endured.
- *Relentless discussion of the betrayal.* It is very understandable to need to discuss the details of the betrayal to gain clarification at the beginning. However, sometimes betrayed partners can stay stuck in this state and it can be exhausting for both parties. I recommend that couples create boundaries around discussing the betrayal, which typically involve only discussing it at couples therapy and pre-designated check-in times.

Trauma Symptoms and the 3Rs

When someone we love betrays us, our threat system can remain in the “on” position, leading to the symptoms described below. Although these symptoms can be confusing, it’s important to understand that it’s your body’s way of trying to keep you safe. Try to practice the 3Rs when you experience some of these symptoms.

Common Symptoms of Betrayal Trauma ⁴	3Rs Coping Plan for Triggers
<p>1. Hypervigilance: The sense of impending doom or feeling on edge that results from ongoing fears of being betrayed again.</p> <p>2. Re-experiencing: Reliving the experience (e.g., dreams, replaying discovery over and over again, body sensations).</p> <p>3. Avoidance: Avoiding the places that remind you of the betrayal (e.g., beaches, restaurants).</p> <p>4. Negative self-beliefs: (e.g., “If I were more attractive, he wouldn’t have acted out”).</p> <p>5. Emotional Dysregulation: Increased emotional activation (e.g., quick to anger, mood swings, racing thoughts, anxiety).</p>	<p>1. Recognize: Slow down and put what is happening into words. Saying to yourself: “Right now my husband is 15 minutes late from work and I’m worried that he may be acting out” has a soothing response on the nervous system and puts some distance between your immediate activation.</p> <p>2. Regulate: It takes at least 15 – 30 minutes to move out of the threat response. Delay taking any action until your body has calmed. Try to let the rapid thinking go and stay present in your body. Here are some options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grounding: Looking around the room, touching something and noticing the physical sensations ○ Breathwork: Breathing in and out for 5 counts ○ Movement: Getting up and walking around, shaking your arms, cleaning up <p>3. Return: Now that your body is less activated, try to use your mind to analyze the situation. Is there evidence to support your fears, or is this a false alarm? What do you</p>

⁴ Adapted from Kevin Skinner’s [Treating Trauma From Sexual Betrayal](#)

	<p>need to do to feel better? (e.g., ask your partner for what you need in a calm way).</p> <p>It's important to note that it takes time and practice for this exercise to work.</p>
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Trigger Action Plan

Common Triggers	Trigger Assessment	RAIN Strategy ⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TV or movie scenes ○ If your partner looks at someone attractive ○ Times of day, anniversaries (e.g., Friday evenings) ○ Being unable to reach your partner ○ Hearing details about the betrayal 	<p>Top Triggers:</p> <p>1. _____ (___ / 10)⁶</p> <p>2. _____ (___ / 10)</p> <p>3. _____ (___ / 10)</p> <p>Physical Reactions:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p>	<p>1. Recognize: Similar to the 3Rs, when we can identify what is happening and name our emotions, it helps to calm the nervous system.</p> <p>2. Accept and allow: This part involves making space for your emotional reaction in order to prepare you to process it without judgment. Accepting and allowing means that you meet your emotional edge and soften into it. This does not mean that you accept what has happened.</p>
<p>Common Responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asking your partner questions repeatedly ○ Phoning or texting their partner ○ Checking your partner's location ○ Checking your partner's phone ○ Searching for information online ○ Worrying/ruminating ○ Running over details of the betrayal in your mind 	<p>Thoughts and Beliefs:</p> <p>1. I'm not good enough</p> <p>2. I can't trust anyone</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p>Emotions:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p>	<p>3. Investigate: In this phase, we explore the reaction by asking the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What am I feeling right now? What is that feeling telling me? ○ What is the evidence that supports my reaction? Is it significant enough? ○ What do I need? <p>4. Nurture: In this phase, we take action to do something caring for ourselves, or take action in some way. In this phase, it also involves installing a</p>

⁵ This strategy was popularized by Tara Brach

⁶ Severity rating out of 10

		mental resource that helps us to cope with the trauma. Examples include: compassionate statements, doing something calming like having a cup of tea.
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Impact Letter ⁷

Writing is a powerful way to organize and process our experiences. [James Pennebaker](#) and colleagues found that writing about a traumatic incident for 20-minutes per day over 3-5 days has been associated with improved health outcomes, improved mood, and lowered stress levels. However, initially participants felt an increase in negative mood, as they were exposing themselves to stressful incidents they may have been avoiding.

After the crisis of the betrayal has subsided, I recommend that my clients engage in some writing to help make sense of their experience. The impact letter exercise can be completed by answering the questions below, or writing out a narrative in your own style. Because writing an impact letter can be emotionally triggering you receive support from a therapist in writing this letter. If you decide to share this letter with your partner, it is recommended to do so in a therapeutic environment to offer you the best support and safety.

Questions for reflection:

1. Many people start with a brief sentence about the purpose of the letter. For example: "Dear _____, I am writing this letter to express some of the ways I have been impacted by (the betrayal). The purpose of this letter is to express and clarify my thoughts and feelings, but also to help you be able to understand and validate my experience."
2. Tell the story of how you found out about the betrayal. What feelings and reactions did you experience early on?
3. What have some of the negative consequences or impacts been on your day-to-day life?
4. Reflecting on the betrayal trauma symptoms, which ones have you experienced the most and why?
5. If your partner has lied or intentionally deceived you (gas lighting), please explain what this has been like for you.
6. Many people experience self-blame, self-esteem, or body image issues. Elaborate on how this has unfolded for you.
7. How has this experienced changed your sexuality?

⁷ This exercise can be completed in a letter format or discussed in a counselling session.

8. How has this information impacted your trust?
9. What aspects of this situation have been the most painful for you?
10. What do you most want your partner to know about this situation and its impact on you?
11. What are your deepest longings/hopes for your relationship?
12. What are your deal breakers for the relationship?
13. What do you need from your partner in order to be able to start to move forward? Any boundaries you would like to put in place?

Tips

- Avoid blame, name calling, and criticism
- Show this letter to your therapist or a trusted friend for feedback before sharing

Here's a brief example of an impact letter⁸:

I am writing to express some of the hurt and pain I have experienced since finding out that you were still texting your ex. I share this in the hopes that you can understand some of the pain I have experienced.

When I saw the message come up on your phone in the middle of the night, I thought it was a bit strange. Maybe one of your friends was drunk texting you? When I saw it was her, I took your phone and went into the bathroom. I will never forget the shock when I saw all of the pictures and texts you had sent. There I sat the bathroom floor, reading a string of texts, heart emojis. I threw up and went numb.

When I saw you in the morning, I felt so much rage. I'm sorry I threw your phone, but something just came over me. Ever since then, it's been hard to tell if anything you say is true or not. Thoughts and questions are constantly racing through my mind. Do you even love me? Is anything we experienced together valid? Do you want to be in this relationship? Can I trust you again?

So many assumptions I had about our life were shattered that day. I thought we were a happy family. I thought you would never do this to me. Emotionally, I'm on a crazy rollercoaster of rage, hurt, and numbness. Sometimes I want to hurt you as much as I've been hurt.

I know that you have been getting counselling and have apologized multiple, but part of me still has difficulty trusting you. I worry sometimes that I never will.

⁸ This letter was written by Christina Bell and does not include any client information.

My hope is that we can continue to build trust as a couple and that you are still able to allow me access to your phone when I feel worried.

Dealing with Negative Beliefs

Negative Beliefs and Letting Go of Self-Blame

One of the most damaging aspects of betrayal is the negative beliefs that can take hold. Some of these include:

- I'm unlovable
- There's something wrong with me

It's very common for betrayed partners to blame themselves for their partner's behavior, thinking if only:

- I had been more attentive
- I was more attractive
- I wasn't so needy

Assigning blame is a very common trauma response to cope and make sense of a difficult situation. The truth is, your partner's decisions were their choice. Your relationship may have had issues, but their decision to betray the relationship is not a reflection of your worth. A fundamental turning point toward healing is when the betrayed partner can see that their partner's behavior was a manifestation of their own internal issues and choices. Externalizing the betraying partner's behavior is a major step in separating your self-worth from their choices.

Here are a few ways to reframe the situation when you may be blaming yourself for your partner's acting out:

- Every relationship has issues, and no one is perfect. However, having an affair or acting out is making a choice to turn away from the relationship, where there were other options available (e.g., addressing their unhappiness, ending the marriage).
- Many attractive and intelligent women and men have been cheated on. There does not appear to be a relationship to attractiveness and infidelity, meaning that less intelligent or attractive people are cheated on. The factors usually have to do with the betrayed partner

gradually letting down their guard and loosening their boundaries or having unresolved issues.

Negative Beliefs About People and the World

Another impact I hear about is negative beliefs about certain genders, or the world in general:

- All men / women are cheaters
- You can't trust anyone in this world
- I can never trust anyone again

I don't blame anyone for their opinions, especially if they have been betrayed by multiple people. This has been their experience. However, I also encourage people to see the world in shades of grey versus black and white categories.

Here are some beliefs that are more balanced:

- Some people are cheater, but the majority do not
- I have been hurt by some people who have betrayed my trust, but I'm learning to take care of myself and am capable of trusting again

The psychological concept that describes seeing things in a different way is known as reframing. It's an important concept in the process of healing because it changes the way we see things. It often requires repetition of the new way of thinking before it becomes more automatic. For example, when you find yourself thinking in those old ways, you can notice it, pause, and practice reframing. You can also try the 3Rs or RAIN exercises above to cope with being triggered as well. Sometimes it can be helpful to try some trauma therapy exercises to help shift some of these negative beliefs, as they can often be very stuck inside of us.

Later-Stage Recovery Issues

Once my clients have established some stability with their trauma symptoms, they often turn address other issues, such as:

- **Relationship issues.** Many of my clients start to evaluate their overall satisfaction in the relationship, as well as some of their underlying patterns. Here are some questions for reflection:

- What are some of the challenges you are facing in your relationship *now*?
- If this betrayal had not of happened, would I want to be in this relationship?
- What is your comfort level with sexual intimacy?
- What is your comfort level with emotional intimacy?
- What has your overall experience been in this relationship?
- What has kept you in the relationship?
- What have you not been paying attention to in your life?
- What has prevented you from expressing your deepest needs?

- **Boundaries.** Many people in recovery from betrayal trauma decide to make changes in how they take care of themselves and others. This can include setting boundaries, which are decisions we make about how we participate in the lives of others. Feel free to read my [boundary starter kit](#) for more support in this area.
- **Assertiveness** (i.e., having a voice). It can be challenging to express dissatisfaction in a relationship or confront a spouse when you are noticing suspicious behavior. However, these skills are essential to keep you and the relationship healthy. My [boundary starter kit](#) also addresses ways to make requests of our partners.
- **Health issues.** Researchers have found that relationships with conflict and betrayal have been associated with **higher incidents** of respiratory issues and lower lifespan. Many of my clients have

struggled with auto immune disorders or other health concerns that need support to heal.

- **Emotional regulation and stress management:** Addictive behaviour can be an attempt to manage emotion. Learning how to cope with life without addiction requires new tools and coping strategies.
- **Underlying trauma.** Researchers have found that difficult childhood experiences are associated with a higher incidence of addiction and mental health issues ([see the ACE study](#)). Unaddressed childhood abuse and neglect can create issues of self-worth, boundaries, emotional regulation, and intimate relationships. adulthood.
- **Creating future goals.** Many of my clients have spent many years caretaking others that it can be exciting to have new energy to devote to hobbies and educational goals.

Although everyone's treatment plan is unique, this stage typically involves:

- Optimizing lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management
- Utilizing specific therapeutic approaches, such as [EMDR](#) (a commonly-used trauma therapy)
- Medical interventions such as medication or supplements
- Learning how to regulate and manage emotion
- Developing skills to be vulnerable, communicate, and set boundaries
- Improving self-worth by addressing negative beliefs

Can someone abstain from heal from betrayal *without* addressing deeper issues?

I have seen many clients make lasting changes without ever understanding their deeper psychological issues. However, I do recommend that clients with trauma and mental health issues receive proper treatment, as these issues can cause unnecessary suffering.

Self-Assessment

Area of healing	Rating	Notes
Understanding your main triggers for emotional activation (e.g., times of day, social media)		
Coping with the symptoms of betrayal trauma (e.g., emotional waves)		
Naming your thoughts and feelings		
Expressing boundaries and requests to your partner (i.e., having a voice)		
Taking care of yourself (e.g., engage in regular exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep)		
Developing clarity about the direction of the relationship (i.e., whether you want to stay or go)		
Identifying your negative beliefs about yourself and beginning to heal them		
Developing a “good enough” body image		
Being able to trust your intuition		
Being able to trust your partner again (if they are making positive changes)		

Understanding your personal goals as you move forward in your life		
Read books and materials on betrayal trauma		
Feeling comfortable with your sexuality and having sexual contact		
Understanding family of origin issues and healing past trauma		
Understanding how you may contribute to the relationship in positive and negative ways (* not to imply responsibility for partner's betrayal)		
Evaluating overall satisfaction in the relationship and goals		
Addressing overcontrol/co-dependence issues if		

Resources (Betrayal Trauma)

Books

- *Not "Just Friends"* – Shirley Glass
- *Getting Past the Affair* – Douglas K. Snyder, Donald H Baumcom, & Christina Coop Gordon
- *State of Affairs* – Esther Perel
- *What Makes Love Last?* – John Gottman and Nan Silver
- *Living and Loving After a Betrayal* – Stephen Stosny
- *Intimate Betrayal* – Michael Don Howard
- *How to Help your Spouse Heal from Your Affair* – Linda MacDonald

Other Resources

- View videos I have uploaded on my [website](#) (christinabell.net – videos – trust and betrayal heading)
- [Beyond Affairs Network](#) has groups for betrayed partners
- [Bloom](#) for women has online courses for betrayal trauma
- [Affair recovery](#) (online groups and resources)
- Podcast: [Helping Couples Heal](#)

Online groups and communities

[The Partner's Healing & Empowerment Online Community Forum](#) is a confidential, online space for partners anywhere in the world to connect with other partners 24/7 to share experience, get support, and exchange ideas and information.

[Center for Healthy Sex: Facing Heartbreak online class](#)

[Daring Ventures – Online groups for betrayal trauma](#)

Podcasts

[Betrayal Trauma Recovery](#)

[Top infidelity podcasts article](#)

Partners of Sexual Addiction (As of July 2020)

Group Information

1. [Facebook group](#) run by Michelle Mays
2. Free online support group Mondays 5-6 PST by Lauren Dummit with [Triune Therapy](#) in Los Angeles. Contact lauren@triunetherapy.com or 310-210-7934.
3. [Sex and relationship healing](#) has free online meetings.

Online Courses / Community

1. [Dr. Sheri Keffer's Brave One](#) (online community)
2. [Vicki Tidwell Palmer](#) (courses and an online forum)
3. Kevin Skinner's [Bloom for Women](#)
4. [Carol the Coach](#) (online course post traumatic growth)
4. [Vicki Tidwell](#) and [Kevin Skinner](#) both have some great online platforms.

Other Notable Websites

Free e-book: <https://partnerhope.com>

[Partners of Sex Addicts Resource Center](#)

Books For Partners of Sex Addicts

- *Moving Beyond Betrayal – Vicki Tidwell Palmer*
- *Intimate Deception – Dr. Sheri Keffer*
- *Treating Trauma from Sexual Betrayal – Kevin B. Skinner*
- *Sex Addiction: The Partner's Perspective – Paula Hall* (try abebooks.com)
- *Living With a Sex Addict - Linda Hatch*
- *Deceived - Cynthia Black*
- *Intimate treason – Cynthia Black & Carla Tripodi*
- *The Storm of Sex Addiction - Connie A. Lofgreen*
- *Facing Codpendence – Melody, Miller, & Miller*
- *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse – Barbara Steffen & Marsha Means*
- *A House Interrupted– Maurita Corcoran*
- *Letters to a sex Addict – Wendy Conquest & Robert Weiss*
- *Mending a Shattered Heart – Stephanie Carnes*
- *Sex Addiction – Catherine Elliott*
- *Surviving Disclosure – M Corley & Schneider*

- *Living and Loving After a Betrayal* – Stephen Stosny