

## Trust Recovery Kit: Initial Tasks

<b>Task</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Handouts</b>
<b>Discovery</b> <b>(1. Attone)<sup>1</sup></b>	<i>A plan is created to manage the initial crisis of discovery</i>	Initial checklist and FAQs Resources
<b>Information sharing and clarification</b>	<i>The betrayed spouse seeks answers to unanswered questions</i>	Information and clarification worksheet
<b>Boundary Plan</b>	<i>A plan is put in place to help to rebuild trust based on honesty, transparency, and reliability</i>	Behaviour change plan Daily check-ins
<b>Managing triggers</b>	<i>The betraying partner learns about betrayal trauma and how to comfort their spouse in times of difficulty</i>	Betrayal trauma symptoms Identifying triggers Trigger action plan Making a repair What to Say
<b>Deepening repair and trust building</b> <b>(2. Attune)</b>	<i>Once the initial crisis has subsided, the betraying partner is better able to understand the factors that led to the betrayal. The betraying partner is also able to express remorse and take responsibility from a deeper level</i>	Disclosure letter Impact letter Amends letter
<b>Relationship building</b> <b>(3. Attach)</b>	<i>The couple builds a stronger connection by maintaining healthy boundaries and working on underlying issues</i>	Attending weekend intensives Spending regular time together Addressing conflicts early Developing sexuality

<sup>1</sup> The 3As model (attone, attune, attach), is based on the research of John Gottman. For more information on this model, please see Appendix B.

## **Initial Check List**

### **Betraying Partner**

- o Immediate behaviour change (e.g., ending of contact with affair partner, providing proof)
- o Get rid of all mementos and reminders
- o Negotiating of access to technology
- o Answer all unanswered questions (question format or disclosure)
- o Betrayed partners often have to ask questions repeatedly until they no longer feel the need, and this is an acceptable part of the process and should not be rushed over
- o Continual expression of remorse
- o Discuss triggers and how to manage them
- o Boundaries with affair partner for future contact
- o Immediate honesty if betraying partner has contact with affair partner

### **Betrayed Partner**

- o Trauma education for partner and betraying spouse
- o Individual support for spouse
- o Develop self-soothing and boundaries
- o Request ending of contact and proof
- o Write down a list of questions to be answered
- o STD test
- o Have access to technology ongoing

### **Other Points**

- o Avoid making decisions about ending the relationship
- o Limit any damaging or abusive interactions

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. *How setbacks will be handled if they occur?*

- o Immediate honesty with partner
- o Creation of a new or more intensive boundary and treatment plan

### 2. *What about sexual activity?*

- o Most couples take a break from sexual activity to focus on establishing trust and safety in their relationship. This is negotiated between the couple, but it is not uncommon for couples to cease sexual activity for at least a few months
- o **A sexually transmitted infection test is recommended for both partners if there has been sexual contact with partners outside of the relationship**

### 3. *Whom do we tell?*

- o Select individuals you both agree on, and the level of information to be discussed
- o Selected confidants are trustworthy and supportive of the relationship
- o Avoid telling people out of revenge or to hurt the betraying partner, as those individuals may not be supportive if you decide to stay together

### 4. *How often do we communicate about the betrayal?*

- o An agreed-upon format and ritual can be helpful (e.g., brief check-in daily)
- o Avoidance of specific details, as these can trigger trauma reactions for the betrayed partner
- o If there is conflict or intense emotion between the couple save the discussion for couples therapy
- o If the conversation is productive still be sure to set some limits or breaks around the conversation to engage in self-care
- o Avoid name calling and yelling

### 5. How do we handle certain questions about the betrayal?

- o Avoid asking specific sexual details as these can be traumatizing (e.g., what clothing was s/he wearing?)

### **Books** (some are available in an ereader or audio format)

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

### **Other Resources**

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

## Information Sharing and Clarification Worksheet

It is difficult to rebuild trust if the betrayed partner does not understand what occurred. Although being honest is difficult, most partners would rather know the truth. In the presence of your therapist, the betraying partner must provide candid answers to the questions about the surrounding events of the incident. One exception to this approach is asking specific details of sexual activity (e.g., what was she wearing?) as these can cause the betrayed partner to ruminate or exacerbate the trauma symptoms. The betraying partner must remain patient, express remorse, and take responsibility for their actions.

Sample Questions	Additional Questions
Was there sexual contact?	
How often did you communicate?	
Why did it continue?	
Has it stopped?	
Why do you want to work on this relationship?	

## Behaviour Change Plan

<p><b>Off-Limit Behaviours</b></p> <p>We agree that the following behaviours are considered <b>off-limits</b> for our relationship:</p>	
<p><b>Honesty With Setbacks</b></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><b>Verification / Accountability / Safety Agreements</b></p> <p>In order to help re-establish trust and safety, we agree to the following verification / accountability actions:</p>	

## **Daily Check-Ins**

### **Betraying spouse:**

1. Today I've been feeling (e.g., sad, anxious, ashamed, happy):

2. Some challenges I encountered were (triggers):

3. Coping skills I've been using:

4. One thing I have learned about myself is:

5. I'm grateful for:

**Betrayed Spouse:**

1. Today I've been feeling:

2. Some challenges I've encountered were (triggers):

3. Self-care or coping I've been utilizing:

4. One way that you could help me would be to:



## Symptoms of Betrayal Trauma<sup>2</sup>

*“A **trauma** is a major negative event or set of events that destroys important assumptions or fundamental beliefs about the world or specific people - in this case, your partner and your relationship. Traumatic events disrupt all parts of your life - your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.”<sup>3</sup>*

Symptom	Examples
1. <i>Hypervigilance</i> : The sense of impending doom that results from ongoing fears of being betrayed again. Often results in safety seeking behaviours like checking and questioning.	
2. <i>Re-experiencing/flashbacks</i> : Reliving the experience (e.g., dreams, replaying discovery over and over again, body sensations).	
3. <i>Avoidance</i> : Avoiding the places of discovery; avoiding places that remind you of the betrayal (e.g., beaches, restaurants).	
4. <i>Negative beliefs</i> : “If I were more attractive, he wouldn’t have acted out”, “I can’t trust anyone now”, “how could I be so stupid!”	
5. <i>Emotional Dysregulation</i> : Quick to anger, mood swings, feeling numb, exhausted, depressed, racing thoughts, anxiety, shame)	

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Kevin Skinner’s [Treating Trauma From Sexual Betrayal](#)

<sup>3</sup> From [Getting Past the Affair](#) by Snyder, Baucom, & Coop Gordon (p. 10)

## **Behaviours to Avoid**

- o Verbal and physical abuse
- o Constant monitoring or checking (however, access to your partner's electronics is often part of rebuilding trust)
- o Searching for specific details about the trust breach (can increase trauma symptoms)
- o Making hostile threats to leave partner
- o Trying to control you partner's behaviour
- o Inappropriate disclosures to family and friends
- o Self-harming behaviour (e.g., cutting, binge eating, consuming alcohol)

## **Strategies**

- o Grounding exercises ([Mindfulness Meditations for Anxiety](#): Track 4)
- o Practicing mindfulness – becoming a curious observer to your experience with non-judgment
- o Deep breathing: Take 6 deep breaths and focus on relaxing muscle tension (especially in your jaw and shoulders)
- o Calling a friend (if they are supportive of your relationship)
- o Prayer
- o Exercise

## Identifying Triggers

**Trigger** = a reminder of trust breach often accompanied by intense emotion and traumatic reaction (e.g., intrusive thoughts).

Specific Triggers	How does this apply to your situation?	Action plan
Seeing attractive people (with or without partner)		Hold your partner's hand if in public
Sex scenes in movies + TV		Change the channel Research programs before watching
Inconsistency/unreliability of partner (e.g., being late)		Express concerns to partner gently
Times of day Days of the week (e.g., weekends, late nights)		Plan ahead to do something relaxing
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

### Trigger Coping Plan for Couples

<i>The main triggers in our relationship are:</i>	
<i>Strategies for managing triggers:</i>	
Time-out / alone time	
Making a request (e.g., for a hug, reassurance)	
Talking about it (using “I” statements)	
<i>Behaviours to avoid:</i>	

## How to Make a Repair (Betraying Partner)

### *1. Listen non-defensively to the impacts of the injury*

#### *Questions:*

- o Help me to understand how I have hurt you...
- o What are the most upsetting parts of this situation for you?
- o Is there anything I'm missing or not fully understanding?

### *2. Convey understanding and provide validation*

- o From what I'm hearing, I hurt you by...
- o I can understand why you felt \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_
- o It makes sense to me that you responded with \_\_\_\_\_, because you were trying to \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., protect yourself)

### *3. Take responsibility and affirm the value of the relationship*

I am sorry that I hurt you because I love you very much

### *4. Take steps to change future behaviour*

#### *Questions:*

- o What do you need from me in order to be able to rebuild trust?
- o What behaviours do I need to avoid?
- o What actions help you to feel special and important?

## What to Say When Your Partner Is Triggered

<b>Avoid saying:</b> <sup>4</sup>	<b>Try Instead:</b>	<b>Overall tips</b>
<i>I thought you were over this already! (invalidation)</i>	I will do whatever it takes to make it up to you	Apologize often without making excuses (especially in the first two years)
<i>I've said I'm sorry and I don't know what else you want me to say (defensiveness)</i>	I was wrong and I deeply regret hurting you	End all ties with affair partners and set boundaries with competing attachments
<i>Don't you think you're overreacting? (minimization)</i>	I don't blame you for how you're feeling	Be open and honest in a non-defensive manner
<i>You've hurt me too! (defensiveness)</i>	I feel horrible for how badly I've hurt you	It may be tempting to leave the situation, but moving toward them and offering physical comfort can be very healing. If your partner asks for space, honour their request, but check in with him/her after 10-15 minutes
<i>If you can't get over this then maybe we shouldn't be together (threats to relationship safety)</i>	I love you and I never want you to be hurt like that again	Share information with partner that could be seen as threatening (e.g., unsolicited texts from affair partner)
<i>I'm sorry <b>if</b> I hurt you/for whatever I did (insincere apology)</i>	Let me try to understand the hurt I've caused you. Can you tell me what it's been like for you?	Try to let any verbal attacks go, and focus on your partner's feelings. Often the betrayed is very hurt and anger is an expression of that hurt

<sup>4</sup> Material from this page adapted from [Linda MacDonald \(2011\)](#)

## Disclosure Worksheet

### 1. Purpose

The reason I'm disclosing the following information to you is because...

I want to be completely honest with you and repair our relationship. I am hoping our relationship can reach a new level of intimacy as I engage in this recovery process

Are you willing to ready and willing to hear my disclosure?

### 2. Brief summary of acting out that pre-dated the relationship

*Before I met you, I...*

### 3. Acting out summary since the start of the relationship

- Includes objectification, pornography use, inappropriate contact with others, sexual contact with others, strip clubs, prostitution.
- From \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ , I...
- From \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ , I...
- From \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ , I...

### 3. Summary of expenses (including costs related to lost productivity at work).

**4. Integrity abuse.** I have engaged in the following deceptive and harmful behaviors in our relationship (please provide examples: "When you asked me about \_\_, I lied and said \_\_\_\_."

- Gas lighting (intentionally manipulating the other person's reality)
- Lying by omission

- o Blame shifting
- o Ignored your boundaries
- o Engaged in partial disclosures and implying that you knew the full truth
- o Callous treatment toward you
- o Ignoring you
- o Intellectualizing (using terms or jargon to distort the truth)
- o Being aggressive or angry toward you
- o Picking fights with you
- o Withdrawing or refusing to speak
- o Threats of abandonment
- o Verbal abuse or name calling
- o Violating agreements or commitments

#### **4. Permission for self-care**

Thank you for your willingness to come today to hear my formal disclosure. I want you to know that my behaviors are 100% my responsibility and I take full ownership of my choices and of their consequences. My betrayal and lying are not a reflection of you, and you are not in any way responsible for what I have done.

I acknowledging that this is hard to hear and that you may need time and space to process this information.



## Impact Letter <sup>5</sup>

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.

This handout is separated into two sections. The purpose of the first section (preparation) is to generate examples of what you have experienced, and the second section is where you will write a narrative of your experience to potentially share with your partner.

### Section 1: Preparation

#### Analysis of Consequences<sup>6</sup>:

Type	Description	Thoughts	Feelings
<i>Health consequences</i>			
<i>Friendship/relationship consequences</i>			

<sup>5</sup> This exercise can be completed in a letter format or discussed in a counselling session.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Carnes' *Courageous Love*

<i>Financial consequences</i>			
<i>Psychological consequences</i>			
<i>Spiritual consequences</i>			
<i>Professional consequences</i>			
<i>Consequences to children</i>			
<i>Other</i>			

## Analysis of Integrity Abuse

Dr. Omar Minwalla created the term [integrity abuse disorder](#) to describe the ongoing pattern of emotional, psychological, and relational harm that occurs from ongoing deception and/or abuse. These behaviours may include gaslighting (deceiving someone in a way where they question their own reality), lying, expressions of rage, and defensiveness. For many partners, the deception they experience is more harmful than the problematic behaviours, because the deception and integrity abuse leads them to mistrust their partner and their own intuition.

In the section below, select the types of integrity abuse you experienced and make notes of how it has impacted you:

<b>Type</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Impacts</b>
<i>Lying</i>		
<i>Lying by omission</i>		
<i>Gaslighting (“you are crazy; why are you so sensitive”)</i>		
<i>Rationalizing (“all men are sexual”)</i>		
<i>Assuming the role of the victim</i>		
<i>Stonewalling (silent treatment)</i>		
<i>Blame (“if you gave me sex I wouldn’t have to look at porn”)</i>		
<i>Demonstrated lack of remorse</i>		

<i>Demonstrated lack of empathy</i>		
<i>Verbal abuse</i>		
<i>Yelling</i>		
<i>Shaping the narrative</i>		
<i>Intimidation and threats</i>		
<i>Physical abuse</i>		
<i>Obstructing another from leaving</i>		
<i>Partial disclosures</i>		
<i>Other</i>		

**Analysis of Sexual Impacts**

After your partner’s disclosures, you may have feelings about the specific information you heard. You can also include information about how your body image has been impacted.

<b>Your partner’s behaviour</b>	<b>Your thoughts</b>	<b>Your feelings</b>

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**Broken Promises and Vows**

<b>Broken promise or vow</b>	<b>Your thoughts</b>	<b>Your feelings</b>

## Section 2: Writing the Letter

Below is the structure for writing the letter, based on your responses from the section above. Some general recommendations:

- o Share your specific examples and feelings
- o It's important to have support as you write this, both personally and professionally
- o Avoid name calling or criticism, as this can make it difficult for the participating partner to provide helpful responses

**Introductory statement:** *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."*

**1. Evaluation of the disclosure process.** Comment on the overall disclosure of information by your partner. Was it a staggered disclosure that came out in pieces? If you completed a formal disclosure, how has this impact you? Describe how the disclosure of this information may have been disappointing or emotional for you.

**2. Description of consequences.** Describe the most important components of the first section of the preparation section.

**3. Evaluation of integrity abuse.** Include the important pieces from the section above.

**4. Self-blame.** You may have blamed yourself for your partner's behaviour. Provide specific examples of ways that you have felt negatively about yourself as a result of your partner's betrayal. It's important to note that although you may feel responsible for your partner's behaviour, your participating partners' issues are their responsibility. Many people with problematic behaviour find that it pre-dated the relationship.

**5. Sexuality.** Include your thoughts from the table above, as well as include any ways that your body image has been impacted by your partner's behaviour.

**6. Fear and shame.** Describe any fears or feelings you have about being judged by others, and the shame and embarrassment you have felt within yourself. How has this shame impacted your relationships? Mental health? What impact has keeping secrets had on you?

**7. Impact on the relationship.** Describe how the betrayal has impacted the relationship. Do you feel safe in the relationship? How has your trust been altered? How do you feel about the relationship moving forward?

**8. Boundaries.** In this section, you will outline what you need to be able to take care of yourself. Are there any new boundaries that you will need to put in place? What are potential deal breakers for you? Outline any special needs you have at this time.

**9. Closing.** Acknowledge that this may be hard for your partner to hear. If it feels authentic, you may want to include any positive changes you have seen in your partner, or the relationship.

## **Amends Letter (After Disclosure and Impact Letters)**

### **1: Take ownership for deceptive behaviour**

- o Describe the ways in which you lied to your partner and how you manipulated him/her into believing you
- o Identify the ways you took advantage of your partner's silence or trust to engage in deceptive behaviours
- o Identify the ways in which your partner demonstrated overt or covert objections or resistance to your lying
- o What lies did you tell yourself?
- o What excuses did you make for your behaviour?
- o What entitlement or permission did you give yourself to lie?

**2: Validate your partner's confusion and acknowledge that you have created this emotional state. Describe what actions could have been done differently in the past.**

### **3: Reassure them that:**

- o All partners do not behave as you did
- o Identify someone you know who is healthy in their behaviours
- o List areas of your life where it would be unsafe for your partner to trust you without the consideration of accountability

**4 Identify social impacts:** Your partner may feel abandoned or unprotected by his/her family or friends. Identify the ways in which you may have tried to keep these individuals from knowing what was going on, or ways in which you have portrayed him/her in a negative light.

**5 Acknowledge guilt:** Your partner may feel guilty for their reaction to your behaviour. Validate their concerns and their reaction.

**6: Validate your partner's need for boundaries,** even if your partner's response to you has been hurtful or short sighted.



**7: State what you plan to do to make sure you act differently in the future.**

**8: Let your partner know that they may have more questions, and they are welcomed to ask them.**

*Name*

**Tips**

- o It's important to convey as much empathy as possible for your partner's situation (e.g., I can't imagine how hurtful it was to...)
- o Try to stay avoid over-apologizing and talking about how you bad you feel. Instead, focus on your partner's experience
- o Show this letter to your therapist or a trusted friend for feedback before sharing

## Appendix A: Trust Violations

- o **Sexual infidelity:** Sexual activity outside of the relationship that is not agreed upon (can include pornography use)
- o **Emotional infidelity:** Relationships or exchanges that involve intimacies typically reserved for a romantic relationship. Often, the information being shared would not be liked or accepted by the partner (e.g., sharing intimate details of your relationship and personal with outside parties)<sup>7</sup>
- o **Competing attachments:** Outside influences that weaken or threaten the relationship bond. May include: excessive working, leisure time, or prioritizing family of origin over your partner. The partner feels last on the list of importance.
- o **Mental infidelity:** Spending significant amounts of time thinking about situations outside of reality (e.g., romantic infatuation, sexual fantasy)
- o **Flirting:** Behaving as though you are trying to attract someone (e.g., long eye gaze, behaving in an overly-familiar way, checking someone out, failing to mention spouse when in social situations)
- o **Financial infidelity:** Financial activity not known and agreed upon to by both partners (e.g., withholding info about excessive spending)
- o **Unreliability:** Broken promises, not able to access partner by phone, not following-through on tasks, lateness, forgetfulness
- o **Lying:** Purposeful withholding, distortion, or omission of information, minimizing, gas lighting (denying the partner's reality and suspicions)
- o **Abuse:** Name calling, insults, threats to safety, destroying property, yelling, pushing, hitting, controlling finances, mocking, forcing sexual contact, humiliation
- o **Attachment injuries:** Abandonment of a partner in a time of intense need
- o **Relationship insecurity:** Regular threats to end the relationship, continual "auditioning" of partner, ambivalent about commitment

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<sup>7</sup> Information adapted from [Debra Kaplan](#)

## Appendix B: The Gottman's Trust Recovery Method<sup>8</sup>

### Part 1: Atone

**Clarification and information sharing.** Unless there is a thorough airing of the misdeeds, mistrust will remain a perpetual issue. Most people would rather know the truth even though it may be painful. In the presence of your therapist the betrayer must provide candid answers to questions about the other party and events surrounding the incidents. *Important exceptions to this tell all approach.* If the betrayal was sexual, it is not good to describe specific details of the sexual activity (e.g., “what was she wearing?”). Knowing what happened behind the bedroom door can lead the betrayed partner to obsessive ruminations that retrigger or exacerbate the trauma symptoms. It is a normal urge to want to know the lurid details, but please know that it may not be as helpful as you imagine.

**Behavioral Change, Transparency, and Verification.** A commitment to continued scrutiny is important to build trust.

**Create proof you are no longer engaging in betraying behaviour.** Giving access to your electronics and finances can be a helpful way to rebuild trust. This invasion of privacy may seem unfair, but is necessary. Trust will not return without ongoing evidence of transparency.

**Verification: Keep to your promises and create a way to verify this.** This means doing as promised and arriving home at predetermined times may be necessary. The betrayer must restrict activities and relationships that were connected with the trust breach. It also needs to be explored about what was said to others about the betrayed party. If the betrayer put down the partner to family and friends, this needs to be rectified. Were these people rooting for the

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<sup>8</sup> Information adapted from Lawrence Stoyanowski and Darren Wilk at [Best Marriages](#) from the research of [John Gottman](#)

demise of the relationship or complicit? If so, the betrayer must sever those friendships.

**Continual expressions of remorse.** The betrayer must remain patient and accept responsibility. Understand that this breach of trust has impacted every part of the your partner's relationship house and possibly led to the development of trauma symptoms.

**Complete acceptance of responsibility.** Atonement cannot occur if the betrayer insists that the victim take partial blame. Comments like "you did not pay much attention to me" are only going to make this worse. Yes, there is always a context, but this is not the time to discuss it. It may seem unfair for you to take all the blame. But, it is important, if you want to move forward. Healing requires the betrayer to hear the others pain and understand what they are going through. Eventually the two of you will come together to create a new relationship.

**Understand what went wrong.** Both parties need to grasp what went wrong in their relationship. Why did the betrayer turn away, engage in negative comparisons, invest less in the relationship and become less dependent on getting needs met through the relationship?

Likewise, why did that partner engage in thoughts unfavorable to the others character, blame him or her for the unhappiness, stay open to or even encourage flirtation, and give oneself permission to cross that boundary?

The betraying partner must avoid accusing the betrayed partner. The goal is to understand what went wrong, not to shift blame.

We are the masters of our actions. Accepting responsibility is part of the healing. All of this should lead to more vulnerability related to feeling needed and wanted as well as loneliness and feeling abandoned.

**Explore the betrayer's reasons for returning.** Why do they want back in? What is compelling him or her to rebuild the relationship? The key is often in the betrayer's longing to feel necessary and wanted.

**Expect a high cost for future breaches of trust.** The betrayer must accept that any future betrayal will mean the permanent end of the relationship. No second chances! The betrayer needs to know the catastrophic cost to any subsequent deceit.

**Begin to forgive.** This is the last step of atonement. The hurt party accepts the apology and begins to pardon him or her.

**Forgiveness does not mean absolving the betraying partner.** Forgiveness means the deceived partner is willing to cooperate and trust, even in the face of uncertainty and the atoning partner's occasional slip ups. An "acceptable" slipup is not the return to the betraying behaviour or new indiscretion, but an invasion of the past that produces a regrettable incident. For example, buying flowers from the same store he bought flowers for the other party, or lover. Part of forgiveness is acknowledging that anyone can be untrustworthy at times.

### Overall Thoughts

- o The betrayed partner must work at keeping the door to forgiveness open. The wounded partner must agree to cooperate as long as the betrayer is making some effort.
- o Atonement is a painful process, but the couple should emerge with new understanding, acceptance, budding forgiveness and hope.
- o According to Gottman Research, when the betrayer agreed to answer questions, the couple stayed together 86% of the time. If the betrayer refused to answer questions, the relationship's survival rate was only 59%.

### Phase 2: Attune

**Tentative forgiveness.** After atonement, you should now have tentative forgiveness in place to build a new relationship. The old one did not meet both your needs, and the betrayed partner should not be blamed for this past deficiency, but rather work cooperatively to construct a new one.

**Building friendship.** This means working on the friendship part of your relationship, which has been shattered. You really do not feel like you know each other at this stage, and you both must rebuild this love map of each other's world. This means asking curious questions like you used to when courting, and updating current information about who you are today. This also means being more vulnerable about your current feelings of sadness, stress and worries. This should include going into your the darker areas of your background that still

affect you today. This takes a lot of courage but sharing these ‘enduring vulnerabilities’ is key to getting closer.

**Managing conflict.** Learn to handle conflict better so it does not overwhelm you and create distance. Conflict is simply an opportunity to get closer and have conversations rather than fights about past and current hurts. Use the tools you have learned from your counsellor to help with this phase.

**Presenting a united front to friends and family.** Finally, remember to go public with the “new normal” of your relationship. Alert the people closest to you such as children, in-laws and close friends that you have recommitted and are working towards rebuilding trust. According to the Gottman research, this idea of getting the word out helps establish this new relationship as “real” and garners support from those closest to you.

### **Phase 3: Attach**

**Development of sexual intimacy.** At this point, it is imperative to talk about sex, which is normally a topic many couples neglect to discuss. The following excerpt from the book *What Makes Love Last?* by John Gottman and Nan Silver (2012).

“In the Aftermath of betrayal, the victim often does not want to risk physical intimacy with the straying partner. There is too much fear, anger, and vulnerability. But if the couple is determined to stay together, the ability to attune has to reach the bedroom as well. Without the presence of sexual intimacy that is pleasurable to both, the relationship can’t begin again. In a long-term love, sexual intimacy is founded on a healthy interdependency that satisfies the longing for connection... The keystone to this pleasurable and meaningful sex life is a steady diet of intimate conversations as presented in chapter 7. Learning to communicate about sex is not just for couples healing from sexual disloyalty. It is crucial for couples recovering from all forms of betrayal.”

**Trust building is a process with many ups and downs. As stressful as this process is, it can be an opportunity to build a stronger relationship and connection.**

**For the betraying partner, being open and accountable are opportunities to build trust with your partner. Trust is built in small increments where your partner can build faith that you will be there for them when they need you.**