

LifeSkills

How to restore trust in your relationship

Trust is essential to a happy intimate relationship.

Have you thought of this?

Trust in a relationship is usually based on reciprocal expectations as to how both partners will behave towards each other.

To the extent these expectations are met, trust is strengthened.

Some common expectations

In their relationships, couples expect and assume, for example:

- That they will share and share alike.
- That they will tell each other the truth.
- That they will be faithful to each other.

Of course, nobody is perfect and there are few if any relationships where one partner has not, at one time or another, failed to meet the other's expectations in one or more ways.

The shock of infidelity

Although it is expected that both partners committing in an intimate relationship will be sexually faithful to each other, extra-marital affairs do happen.

For a partner, knowledge of their mate's infidelity is a terrible emotional blow. For the other one, guilt and shame may be the dominant emotions. The following strategies help couples rebuild trust and renew their commitment to each other.

Trust is not static

Trust is based on behaviors, and behaviors do change. Because human behaviors are not set in stone, neither are our levels of trust in others, especially in those closest to us.

Affairs do not only happen in bad relationships

Many people assume that affairs happen only in bad relationships. The reality is that many things can lead to an affair. For example, the unfaithful partner may feel an important element in the relationship is not there. In such a case, a more realistic

response would be to find out what is missing and decide what needs to be changed to make the relationship healthier.

Reactions to infidelity

People have many different reactions when they learn of a spouse's infidelity. Some feel hurt. Others are angry. Others feel their lives have been shattered.

These are difficult emotions to deal with. They are also normal.

People in these circumstances ask themselves questions to which they have no answers.

They often find themselves vacillating between anger and hurt and at the same time are vulnerable to any reminders of the infidelity. They are, in short, in an unstable emotional state.

Rebuilding trust

Trust has been compromised and the relationship has been damaged. For couples who choose to rebuild trust, it means hard work for both partners.

Talk about the infidelity

You will have to talk about what took place and this will not be easy. You both might feel you just want to sweep it all under the rug. However, the first step on the road back is to face the facts of the situation and talk to each other frankly about what happened.

Ask each other questions and listen to the answers. Share your feelings with your partner and listen to what they tell you. If the two of you have a hard time doing this on your own, arrange to see a professional counsellor. If one partner is not willing to seek professional help, the other partner could see a counsellor on their own.

Time to move on

Once you have shared your feelings about the infidelity and both of you feel you understand and are

understood, it will be time to move towards something else. There is a point when both of you will be ready to bring closure to this part of your relationship and to move on.

Recommit to each other

Couples can express their commitment to each other in many ways. For example, talk to your partner, give him or her a special gift that will symbolize your recommitment to your life together.

Talk about what you both want for yourselves and for your relationship as well as how you will make it happen.

Give yourself time

Healing will take time. For the "injured" party it could be months. This is normal. You have both survived a major emotional crisis. Painful as the experience has been, you can use it to strengthen yourself and your relationship.

Plan to do more things together

Do the things you did when you were first a couple. Have friends over for dinner. Go to a movie. Take long walks together. Plan a camping trip. In other words, live your lives as a couple.

Suggested reading

Do you want to read more about this topic? We suggest the following book: Weiner-Davis, Michele. *Divorce Busting*. New York: Fireside 1992.

La version française de ce document sera disponible sur Internet sous peu. Vous pouvez vous la procurer en composant le 1-800-668-4125.

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