

WEISE WORDS

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR HEALTHY LIVING

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: Learning to Trust After Infidelity

Trust is a fundamental ingredient to every healthy marriage and nothing is more devastating than discovering your spouse has been unfaithful. The shock and betrayal of infidelity experienced by the hurt partner can be compared to the trauma similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that impacts the wounded spouse in almost every area: physical, emotional, and spiritual. They can experience significant sleep disturbances, fear, helplessness, poor concentration, irritability and intrusive or distressing thoughts/images associated with the infidelity trauma.

FORGIVENESS AND TRUST

A misunderstanding about the relationship between trust and forgiveness often presents a major obstacle to healing. When people fall in love, they easily give trust as a part of the building of the relationship. With no evidence that their beloved is not trustworthy, each assumes an attitude of trust toward the other. This trust contributes to the closeness the couple experiences. The sense of trust and safety is enhanced and solidified in the exchange of wedding vows to be faithful to this one partner “so long as (they) both shall live,” allowing them to fully invest themselves in the marriage and in their spouse.

When infidelity occurs, which is defined as the sharing of sexual or non-sexual behavior with an extramarital partner, the trust that was so easily given is shattered. After infidelity, rebuilding trust is a much more difficult process.

Frequently, the unfaithful partner seems offended by the length of time the hurt partner needs to be able to trust again and by the effort required to regain trust. Often, the offending spouse will interpret the hurt spouse’s inability to quickly regain trust as an indication of unforgiveness. *“I have said repeatedly that I am sorry---I have promised it will never happen again---what more can I do? S/he just won’t forgive me and move on.”* is a common complaint.

Often, the hurt partner has made the decision to forgive but forgiveness does not automatically restore trust. Forgiveness opens the door to regaining trust. It will take considerable work on the part of both spouses to regain trust.

LEARNING TO TRUST AFTER INFIDELITY (Continued)

WHAT MORE CAN I DO?

Healing the pain and disillusionment of unfaithfulness requires work and sacrifice by both spouses. Both spouses must agree on what will be the appropriate emotional and social boundaries for the future. They must commit to maintaining these boundaries. The couple must be able to discuss and address potential threats and vulnerabilities to their relationship. It is best to do this with a pastor or experienced marriage counselor, as both spouses feel very vulnerable after infidelity, and may have very different views of what is fair and reasonable.

Hurt partners often want a great deal of information about the affair and the extramarital partner. Many hurt partners later regret having demanded so much detail because they have to live with the knowledge for the rest of their life. However, it is important that their requests be honored with complete honesty.

The unfaithful partner must be willing to allow the hurt partner to test behavior in order to re-establish a sense of security and rebuild trust. This may include the hurt partner verifying the unfaithful partner's whereabouts at any given time. That process should also include having complete access to all cell phone bills, credit card statements, individual and joint bank accounts, investments, retirement funds, assets as well as full access to all social media sites and internet history.

Such fact checking is a necessary part of regaining trust and it is important that the offending spouse not attempt to dissuade the hurt partner from checking up on him or her. While this degree of fact checking may seem unnecessary or intrusive to the unfaithful partner, the truth is if there are no secrets, there is no need for secrecy. The unfaithful spouse has created fear in his/her partner. Encouraging the hurt spouse to do whatever checking and validating they need to do to feel safe in the relationship is evidence of taking responsibility for the infidelity and ministering to the needs of the hurt spouse so that reconciliation can mend the wounded family.

Healing the effects of infidelity is an enormous task but trust can be regained. **God's power can restore every marriage.** The key is ending secrecy and sinful behavior and choosing to consistently apply the Biblical principles for healthy relationships and committing to walk through the healing process no matter how long it takes.

Hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption.
Psalm 130:7 (NKJV)

Excerpts adapted from an article written by Arlene Creswell, MHR, LPC, *Learning to Trust after Infidelity*.

May God bless you as you work on your marital issues and reconciliation. For more information about this article or to receive help with reconciliation, please contact me at pwcounseling.com or call 813.643.2600. I am here as a resource for you.