

Finding an Affair Recovery Specialist



Affair Counseling: A Specialized Focus

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Imagine a man with high blood pressure being hit by a truck while crossing a street. He smashes to the pavement, broken and bloodied, and a nearby doctor rushes to his aid. The doctor quickly assesses the situation and then exclaims, "Man, you're in poor health. You need to eat better and work out more!"

Ridiculous? Sure. But I'm surprised at how many times a couple in crisis will come to me and tell me essentially the same story about their previous counseling experience. Even though they had just experienced the trauma of an affair, the counselor spent one or two sessions asking questions about their condition and then began to focus on issues like communication and conflict resolution. In fact, some counselors went so far as to tell the couple that it would not be beneficial for them to focus on the affair.

And so the couple tried to do what they were told; they struggled to practice the fundamentals of healthy relationship while their marriage continued to bleed out. When I hear stories like these, I am infuriated because I know someone failed to give the help they needed. Focusing on relationship basics is certainly an important part of the counseling process, but only after a couple is stable enough to do so.

Why do some counselors deal so poorly with affair issues? I assume that most of them just are not knowledgeable enough or comfortable enough with such messy situations. They turn so quickly to the basic skills because they feel more confident in these areas. But their effectiveness is usually no better than a doctor who prescribes blood pressure medicine to an accident victim without treating his wounds.

Be intentional about finding a therapist who has expertise in the area of affair recovery.

Here's what one client had to say about her initial counseling experience:

"The first counselor I went to really confused me. She wanted us to process the whole affair in one or two sessions and seemed to place all the responsibility on me. She said I needed to forgive him right away in order for our marriage to heal. It felt like I was being asked to ignore all the pain and confusion I was feeling."

If your marriage needs a tune-up, then most counselors are going to be able to help you find your way to a more satisfying relationship. But if it has experienced affair trauma, be more intentional about finding a therapist who has expertise in the area of recovery. Make sure the wounds have been treated before you return to the "diet and exercise" of your relationship. ■

Comments from Other Authors

In her book, *Not "Just Friends"*, Shirley Glass lists the following guidelines for assessing whether or not you have the right therapist for your situation. ***Is your counselor...***

- ***Lacking in direction?***
Are things improving, or do you feel hopelessly stuck? If stuck, are you gaining insight into the reasons? Does your counselor sit back and listen, or does she/he provide structure and direction?
- ***Judgmental?***
Does your counselor let personal values dictate their counsel? Is your counselor either adamantly against divorce under any circumstances or strongly opposed to remaining with an "adulterous" partner?
- ***Minimizing?***
Does your counselor dismiss the pain of the distress partner, insisting that he/she move on? Are emotional problems viewed as over-reactions?
- ***Unwilling to focus on the affair?***
Is your counselor uncomfortable with the betrayed partner asking questions about the affair? Are they willing to walk with you through the processing of information, or do they want to move on to "working on the marriage" instead of focussing on the affair?
- ***Blaming?***
Does your counselor focus on either partner as being the cause of the affair, blaming them for what happened? Does she/he attack rather than encourage insight by exploring the reasons for the affair?
- ***Impatient?***
It takes many months to rebuild a relationship after an affair. Your counselor should not be encouraging you to quit the process early on just because you don't feel in love, or aren't happy, or your needs aren't being met, or because you're only doing it for the sake of the children. These are all common feelings, but a good counselor knows that their permanence cannot be determined until enough work is done over time.

57% of betrayed spouses said that their therapy was mostly frustrating because the counselor focused on general marital problems instead of dealing directly with issues about the affair.

-Results of a survey conducted by Peggy Vaughan

Questions to Ask a Counselor

If you need help with affair recovery, here are some important questions to ask a potential counselor:

- **How long have you been counseling?**
- **Faith-based or faith-independent counseling?** If either of these is important to you, ask the counselor if he/she brings any particular faith-based perspective into their counseling.
- **What are your areas of focus?** Ask this before you tell them what you need. That way, you'll get a more realistic perspective of their expertise.
- **Do you do counseling for affair recovery? If so, can you give me an idea of your approach to helping clients work through affair recovery?** Pay attention here. If a counselor spends 1 or 2 sessions on the affair and then wants to move on to "regular" marriage or individual counseling, you likely will be frustrated with them.

What Results Should I Expect?

That's a great question to ask, but you should begin by considering these questions: *What do I expect? Would that expectation necessarily result in a healthy outcome?*

These are important questions because the measure of "successful affair recovery counseling" is often based on the betrayed partners assumption that the only right outcome is keeping a marriage together. However, the healthiest choice for a betrayed partner *who is in a marriage with a spouse who shows little commitment to working toward change* likely needs to consider what boundaries need to be established. From a therapeutic perspective, helping a client establish clear boundaries (even if that leads to separation or the end of a relationship) is an important part of their work.

Here's what you can expect from a good counselor who knows how to work with you through the various stages of affair recovery:

- If both partners agree on wanting to work on reconciliation and relationship renewal and are both willing to work on change, your counselor will be able to help you get there.
- If either partner is uncertain about what they want or unwilling to do any of the necessary work, your counselor can help lead each partner toward greater clarity regarding what their next steps will be.
- If the involved partner continues in untrustworthy behavior, the counselor will help the injured partner discern healthy choices and whether recovery is a joint effort or an individual one.
- If the injured partner is unwilling to move toward eventual forgiveness, the counselor will help the involved partner discern healthy choices and whether recovery is a joint effort or an individual one.
- If an affair has resulted damage that is irrecoverable (either because the involved partner continues in their behavior or the wounds of the injured partner run too deep), the therapist will help the couple consider their options in ways that encourage healing while avoiding damage.

Online Resources

AffairHealing.com (stories, podcasts, articles, Q&A)

BeyondAffairs.com (free and paid resources)

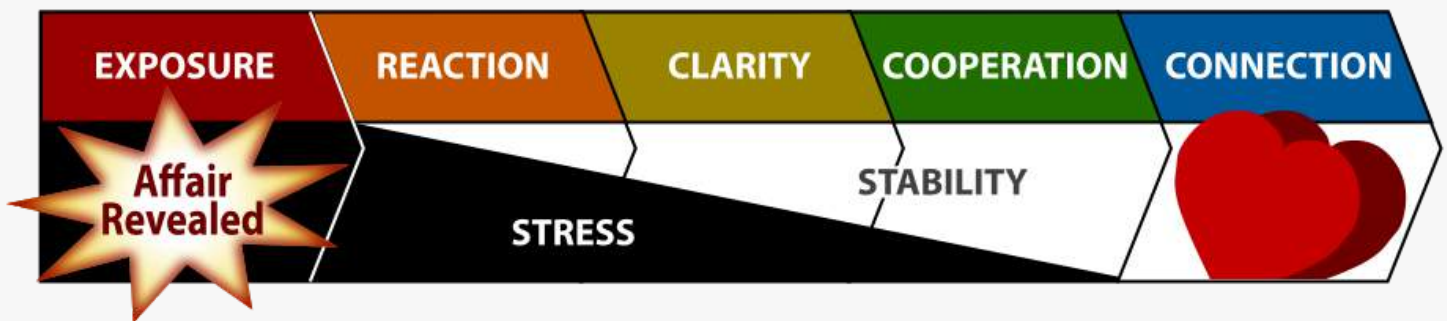
BeyondAffairsNetwork.com (website for B.A.N. groups: local support groups for betrayed partners)

Community.AffairHealing.com (free online support forum)

EmotionalAffair.org (blog, free and paid resources)

MarriageBuilders.com (free and paid resources, faith-based)

Tim Tedder: Specializing in Affair Recovery



Tim Tedder carries a passion for helping clients move through the stages of affair healing and offers specialized skills necessary for infidelity counseling. His services are available through Renewal Counseling in Carmel, IN or through phone/video coaching with clients anywhere. For information, visit the Services page at TimTedder.com. You can email him at: timtedder@therapist.net.