

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAPINTO AN AFFAIR

“If ever any one of your clients even thinks of having an affair, tell them to phone me!” joked Brian, while we reviewed the remnants of his former life.

Quite a dramatic statement but the sentiments of many who have strayed and suffered in the currency of personal and financial chaos.

The harsh reality, according to Robert Huizenga who calls himself an Infidelity Coach, is that “someone, somewhere, in an extramarital affair always loses”.

When she looks back in bewilderment at the events of the last two years, Denise’s response is a fairly typical one “I don’t know how it happened.”

Does it just happen? Why didn’t you see it coming? Probably because you didn’t want to. So how do you recognize if you are in danger of having an affair?

The Stages of an Affair

In **stage 1** you are attracted to the person, start to make an emotional connection and want to get to know them on a more personal level. This is made easier if you work together. Often the relationship deepens through mutual support.

You start to switch off to all the warning signs that you are about to do something risky. This is when the part psychologists call the “observing part” of you shuts down. Why? Probably because you know that you are doing something you shouldn’t....

Stage 2 is reached when the connection with this person is kept a secret. A boundary has been crossed. You are keeping it a secret because there is a deepening sexual and emotional attraction. The clandestine nature of the friendship increases the risk of an affair.

“I really believed that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the fact that my wife did not know about this friendship – after all she was just a colleague that I really liked.” recalls Graham. “I did not stop to think that my wife knew all about the other women I worked with and that I frequently discussed other friendships.”

In **stage 3** of the affair you will find compelling reasons to make regular contact with the person. This is called the ‘dating’ phase. If you have met around a common purpose (work, sport) this will be easy to do, while all the time believing this is necessary and legitimate contact. However you are probably creating opportunities like business trips to make this contact more possible. You will still defend that you are good friends even if others start to ask questions – and probably believe it.

However if you find yourself becoming more vigilant about erasing sms messages, lying about where you are going, and who you are meeting, you are in denial. The fantasy is strong. You are about to embark on an affair. *You are in deep now but there is still time to turn back.*

Oops! That late night meeting was not meant to end in sex. You only went for coffee to discuss the difficult client, husband, or tomorrow’s agenda. What on earth happened there? You have just entered the **4th stage** of an affair – and the potential for an intense sexual and emotional relationship has started. In all likelihood it will happen again, especially if your circumstances throw you together on a regular basis. The forbidden, intoxicating and energizing nature of an affair make it very addictive. Once you are in, it becomes very hard to get out

It occupies your mind, whether through guilt, anxiety, fantasizing, planning your next meeting or spending time together. It shifts energy from your children, your marital relationship, your career and your other interests. The attachment to the affair may become very powerful very quickly.

Living parallel lives can continue for many years. However the average person becomes less vigilant and sometimes even a bit careless. There are the telltale signs that give you away. It becomes harder to hide the changes in your behaviour. You are elated or irritated, depending on how well you maintain this balancing act. Let's assume you are more likely to be caught out.

Is Recovery after an Affair Possible?

If you and your spouse decide to work on the marriage, you can realistically expect to do some hard work. You are dealing with loss of trust, respect and self esteem as well as betrayal and emotional devastation. That's quite a few challenges.

Studies on affair recovery cite 2-4 years to work through the affair but the damage is in the background for many years.

Your partner will probably want to know every detail of what you did with this other person. They will probably be insecure, tearful and depressed for a long time. This will alternate with rage, anger and mood swings. Trust is broken and your freedom may be restricted. Affairs are seldom cleanly amputated. Strong feelings of longing persist and often result in re-contact. If you want to make a go of your marriage you have to make a total break with your lover.

Alternatively your spouse may be the one wanting to leave you and you may just be the one feeling desperately insecure and trying to win them back.

Marital counseling is probably vital to do damage control while rebuilding the relationship. The end result may be a stronger, richer relationship but not without time and effort.

The other option is divorce. Divorce is always messier when there is a third party involved. The hurt and anger of divorce is compounded by betrayal. It gets much more complicated and much more expensive

How do you prevent an affair?

Simple. It depends on whether you want to or not. The highest risk people are those who say, "I don't know what happened... I'm not the kind of person to have an affair"

We have to acknowledge that anyone has the potential to have an affair – despite our backgrounds or moral beliefs.

Monogamy is not necessarily easy and has to be worked on. We all love to be flattered and desired. Be aware of when you are thinking about someone frequently and fantasizing about them. Once aware of an attraction, take a conscious decision to walk away from it.

Before you embark on an affair take time out to THINK of the consequences. Make sure it is worth the chaos if you decide to go ahead.

Put the effort into making your marriage exciting again if it has got stale or you are at risk. Communicate with your partner. Get professional help if needed.

