

What's next when you're the one who cheated on your partner

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February 26, 2019

(CNN)Whether it's the workplace or the Internet, there's no shortage of temptation for folks in monogamous relationships. And infidelity appears to be on the rise: According to one estimate, the number of people who are unfaithful to a partner has increased 40% since 1990.

Though the wronged partner typically has plenty of support in the aftermath of an affair, there are far fewer resources for cheaters themselves. Yet there's both a need for more information for unfaithful partners and an opportunity for couples to navigate beyond an affair.

"As infidelity has become increasingly common, so does the lack of understanding surrounding the reasons and motivations that people have when they decide to have an affair," said sex therapist Tammy Nelson, author of the new book "When You're the One Who Cheats." I asked her and some of my other colleagues to weigh in on some common concerns of couples coping with infidelity.

Motivations differ

People don't always cheat for the reasons we might think, experts say. "In my research for this book, I found that men cheat for relationships and connection, and women cheat for sex. This goes against the narrative that we have been told that women cheat for love and men cheat purely for sexual reasons," Nelson said.

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What's more, motivations for the ultimate outcome of an affair can differ.

"Some people cheat because it's a can opener, a way to get out of a relationship. Some people cheat to stay in their marriage," she explained.

"There are as many reasons for an affair as there are people."

If you're the unfaithful one in your relationship, it's worth determining why you cheated, what you hoped to get from it and whether those reasons preclude reconciliation.

"You should be asking yourself questions like, 'should I lose someone I love for someone I like? Am I looking at the full scope of our relationship, or am I just highlighting the bad times? Do I really want to end my marriage, and how will

that affect my kids, family and my partner?" " advised infidelity recovery strategist Renelle E. Nelson. "If you stay in the marriage, what would that look like? What do you need to reconnect to your partner?"

More details may not be better

If you're feeling guilty -- or if you want to stay with your significant other -- it can be tempting to spill the beans. But you'll want to consider what your motivations are for confessing. "I don't recommend they disclose the details of the affair if they are only doing it to make themselves feel better," Nelson said.

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Though the wronged partner will no doubt have a lot of questions about the affair, it may not be healthy to hear the answers, especially all at once, sex therapist Sari Cooper said.

"I ask couples to make a list of questions about the affair" before answering them, she explained. "As they progress through therapy and their initial rage has begun to calm down, they can decide whether the information they're looking for will make a difference in the healing process."

Trust takes time

Re-establishing trust is one of the most important yet difficult tasks lying ahead of a couple in which one partner has been unfaithful.

"The truth is that there are times when a relationship becomes stronger after an affair," psychologist and sex therapist Rachel Needle said. "After an affair, partners can learn to communicate in a healthier way, become more connected and be more honest." But that can come only after both partners do some difficult work.

You must both discuss the sexual and emotional reasons that led to the infidelity; otherwise, you may not fully recover and grow. "Some partners want to return to the way things were without doing the hard work of discovery of what each partner needs from the other," Cooper said.

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And you should expect that process to take longer than you might imagine, therapist Deborah Fox said.

"It's not unusual for the one who's been cheated on to unexpectedly have a flashback six or even 18 months later, when their partner is a bit late getting home," she explained. "For the cheater who's been trying so hard to be trustworthy, it's very frustrating, and they're likely to say, 'are you still thinking about that?' But simply responding with 'I'm so sorry I hurt you' goes a long way in reassuring their partner and avoiding the painful resurgence of a heated exchange."

Regardless of whether your relationship survives, doing the work to navigate past an affair can benefit both partners -- and help prevent a similar situation

in the future. When looking at infidelity, there's always more to the story than just cheater and cheated-upon.

Regardless of the outcome, it's the couples who remain curious about the story of their relationship who have the most to learn.

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