

Dr. Sandra's Advice

THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN CAUGHT CHEATING:

1. **Blame your partner.** Defending your decision to step outside your relationship because you weren't happy, there wasn't enough sex, or your partner is "too controlling/judgmental/fat/messy/unavailable, etc." will only further injure and infuriate your partner. The fact is that no one is responsible for another person's decision to be unfaithful.
2. **Suggest that what you did was not cheating.** Rationalizing that, "*it was only an emotional affair, never physical,*" "*only online, never in person,*" "*just pornography,*" is not helpful. If your partner did not know about what you did and is upset by what they learned, then you broke their trust, which is the fundamental harm and trauma of infidelity.
3. **Continue to cheat.** If you are continuing to contact affair/sex partners, be on dating sites, viewing porn, etc. then your relationship will not be able to repair. Partners intuitively know that "something isn't right" even if they don't know exactly what is going on.
4. **Ask for forgiveness.** Your partner may be able to forgive you eventually, but coming to a place of forgiveness is a process that happens over a long period of time, by working together to understand not only *what* happened, but also *why* it happened and why it won't happen again.
5. **Tell "white lies" or not do what you promised, no matter how small.** If you lie about getting a parking ticket, or say you will take out the trash but don't, it will make your partner wonder what else you aren't telling them and make them feel they can't trust your word.
6. **Buy gifts.** This may be one of your "love languages," but it is not helpful here. It will not help your partner heal or forgive you, and may lead your partner to feel you are trying to "buy your way out of the doghouse".
7. **Ask, "When are you going to get over it?"** Discovery of infidelity is traumatic, and recovery is a slow process. There is no time table for healing, although the first year is generally the most difficult. Every special day or place now has a new meaning, such as, "*the first (holiday/birthday/ anniversary) since I found out you cheated,*" or "*we were at this restaurant last year when you were having your affair.*" The relationship you had with your partner before discovery is over, and your partner is grieving for "*the relationship I thought we had*". Grieving a loss takes time and support.

THINGS TO DO TO HELP HEAL YOUR RELATIONSHIP AFTER INFIDELITY:

1. **Make sure you want to do the work it takes to repair.** If you cheated because you wanted out of the relationship, then you will need to have that conversation with your partner. If you genuinely want to save the relationship, be ready to do whatever it takes. There will be some days when you wonder if it will ever get better. It will, if you do the work.
2. **Find trained professionals to help you.** Repairing a relationship after betrayal trauma is not a DIY project. Online resources where people share their personal experiences with infidelity are usually populated by people who are either in a crisis or those who have not been able to heal themselves or their relationship and move forward in a healthy way. If you are looking for online advice, carefully review the credentials and training of those offering it (see below for some helpful resources and authors).
3. **Choose your confidences carefully.** Telling people about your infidelity and your partner's reaction can be dicey: some people will be supportive and know that relationships are difficult, people make mistakes but can take responsibility and change, and can be forgiven. Others may be judgmental or minimize the cheating, or look at you and your partner differently once they know. You may not be able to influence who your partner tells, but you can be thoughtful about whom you choose to confide in. Be sure to choose people who can be compassionate with your partner for being upset, and who support your relationship.
4. **Take responsibility and express empathy.** Tell your partner that you know you caused their pain, that it was wrong and only you are responsible for your behavior. Tell them it makes sense to you that they cannot trust you right now, and it makes sense that they are angry, sad, deeply hurt and may not be sure they want to be with you. Listen, accept responsibility, validate their feelings, and repeat, repeat, repeat.
5. **Agree to disclose everything they need to know, but only when you can both be supported and guided by a professional trained to help couples with disclosure after betrayal trauma.** Your partner may say they want to know *everything*, but once your partner has a mental image of you cheating, it is stuck in their head forever. General details are necessary for disclosure: over what period of time did you cheat, who did you cheat with, e.g., a stranger or coworker, and was it physical and expose your partner to diseases, and so forth are things partners need to know. There is a specific process for a therapeutic disclosure with a trained, professional guide which will help ensure that disclosure is helpful, not traumatizing for your partner or shaming for you.

6. **Make sure your words and actions match up consistently.** Trust is lost in buckets and regained in drops. Small things count: if you say you will be home by 8:00 but it is 8:10, you need to call and say why you are late and when you will be there. If you say you will take the trash out, do so.
7. **Do your own work.** Working with an individual therapist will help you sort through the underlying reasons you broke your partner's trust. It is critically important that you understand why you did what you did, so that you can know how to address the wrong and make sure it doesn't happen again. Until you can give your partner a satisfying explanation for why this happened, you won't be able to reassure them that it won't happen again. Being able to share what you are doing to make changes, like seeing a therapist or attending a recovery group, will help your partner feel safe again.

For couples dealing with infidelity from affairs:

After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust When a Partner Has Been Unfaithful.

Janis Abrams Spring

Out of the Dog House: A Step-by-Step Relationship-Saving Guide for Men Caught Cheating.

Robert Weiss

Other helpful resources for coping with Sex and Porn Addiction:

Sex Addiction 101: A Basic Guide to Healing From Sex, Porn And Love Addiction.

Robert Weiss

In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior,

P. Carnes, Delmonico & Griffin

Facing Heartbreak: Steps to Recovery for Partners of Sex Addicts,

Stephanie Carnes, Mari Lee, Anthony Rodriguez

Help.Her.Heal: An Empathy Workbook for Sex Addicts to Help Their Partners Heal,

Carol Juergensen Sheets

