Journey to Trust

Rebuilding Trust After an Affair

By: Linda & Doug from Emotional Affair Journey
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Disclaimer

This book is intended to provide useful advice and exercises to help individuals and couples rebuild trust in their relationship after infidelity. It is not a substitute for professional counseling or therapy. The authors are not professional counselors or therapists, and the advice contained herein should be considered educational only and applied at your own risk. If you need professional counseling, please seek a licensed professional therapist in your area.

Aside from all this legal stuff, enjoy the book and best wishes!
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Introduction to Your Journey to Trust

Experts and laypersons would agree that trust is the very foundation that a successful relationship is built on. We’ve all heard that before.

However, when infidelity invades your relationship, that very foundation is destroyed as if hit by an earthquake.

Infidelity invaded our marriage over two and-a-half years ago and recovering from it has been a very long, emotional and stressful road. There have been many hurdles on our road to recovery, and probably one of - if not the largest - hurdle to get over has been that of trust.

Trust is not just believing that your spouse will never stray again. It’s also about understanding the affect that mistrust has had on you and your relationship.

It’s about learning to trust yourself and your ability to make sound decisions and allowing yourself to trust again.

And yes, it’s also about reestablishing the trust in your wayward spouse/partner so that you can go on to rebuild your relationship and live the happy life that you’ve envisioned.

After writing and interacting with hundreds of people on our Emotional Affair Journey blog, it became quite evident that restoring trust in their relationships was the number one aspect that they are struggling with.

In fact, we conducted a survey on our blog and nearly 70% of those who responded indicated that rebuilding trust was the number one issue that stands in the way of recovering after an affair.

Since we have been able to successfully rebuild the trust in our own marriage, we decided to put together this guide to assist others along their own road to rebuilding trust.
We are not therapists or counselors or relationship “experts.” We’re just a couple that has traveled the same road as you and wish to share what has been successful in our journey to rebuild trust after an affair.

Though both of us have collaborated on and effectively written this book, it is presented to you from Linda’s perspective and voice.

We’re so happy that you have decided to take a step closer to a trusting relationship, and we know that after completing this book you will have a better understanding of what it takes to regain the trust in your relationship.

Congratulations for being proactive and for taking this step!

How to Use This Book

_Journey to Trust: Rebuilding Trust After an Affair_ begins with a Trust Assessment. This is your starting point and it should give you a fairly good gauge as to your current level of trust in your relationship.

We actually performed the survey twice ourselves. Once based on our perceptions of trust prior to the affair, and then again based on our current situation. Then we compared the differences. You may choose to do this as well, but if not, no big deal.

After the assessment, you can begin to delve into the various pillars of trust that are so important: Mistrust. Trusting Yourself. Trusting Your Spouse.

After each section, there will be worksheets that provide helpful exercises for you and your spouse to complete. We know that some folks have a tremendous fear of relationship exercises, but we
recommend that you do your best to complete them, as they can be quite valuable.

You don’t have to spend hours and hours on them, but try to do a little at a time until you work your way through them all.

At the end of the book we provide some additional selected resources that you might want to check out to further your knowledge.

Don’t forget to check out the bonus items that were sent to you when you purchased the book (in separate files). These bonuses will give you additional perspectives from experts as well as others who have been able to rebuild trust in their own relationships.

*We highly recommend that you print the book and worksheets out so that you can take notes in the margins as you work your way through the material. We’ve purposefully left extra room in the right margin for note taking.*

OK. Enough of this stuff. Let’s get started!
Assessment of Relationship Trust

What follows is a general assessment of the trust within your relationship. Its intent is to give you an overall idea of the level of trust that exists between you and your partner at any given time.

You may find some value in doing this exercise twice. Once, based on your relationship prior to the affair, and then again based on your relationship after the affair. Then you can go back and compare and analyze the differences. If you don’t want to do it twice, that’s up to you.

Both of you should read each of the following statements carefully and decide whether or not you agree that it is true for your relationship with your partner. Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree by circling the appropriate number on the scale below each statement.

Scoring: Simply add up your total points based on your choices from 1 to 7 and then divide by 34 (the total number of questions). This will give you an average number. The higher the score, the higher the level of trust.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = moderately disagree
3 = mildly disagree
4 = neutral
5 = mildly agree
6 = moderately agree
7 = strongly agree
1. It gives my partner pleasure to make me happy and to return the love that I give to him/her.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

2. I sometimes have concerns that my personal identity must be compromised to make our relationship work.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

3. Resolving conflicts in our relationship is a give and take procedure. Though neither of us may be completely happy with any given solution, I’m usually satisfied that any action we take is in the best interest of our relationship as a whole.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

4. I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

5. My partner is not someone who can always be relied on to keep a promise.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7
6. I feel extremely confident that my partner loves me.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

7. When we are dealing with an issue that is important to me, I feel confident that my partner will put my feelings first.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

8. If a better alternative were to come along, there is the possibility that my partner would at least consider leaving the relationship.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

9. My partner is truly sincere in his/her promises.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

10. Even when my partner and I are very angry with each other, we still know that we love each other fully and unconditionally.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7
11. My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

12. I often wonder if my partner is trying to manipulate me in order to gain his/her own ends.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

13. At times I feel as though my partner and I share an “emotional soul”, a special bond.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

14. It is sometimes difficult for me to be absolutely certain that my partner will always care for me. Too many things can change in our relationship as time goes on.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

15. My partner and I are compatible enough that my personal needs can be realized in our relationship.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7
16. At times I am uncomfortable when I think about how much I have invested in my relationship with my partner.

1.....2.....3.....4......5......6.....7

17. In our day-to-day interactions, my partner consistently acts in ways that are very positive.

1.....2.....3.....4......5......6.....7

18. There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.

1.....2.....3.....4......5......6.....7

19. I am never concerned that conflicts and serious tensions can damage our relationship because I know we can weather any storm.

1.....2.....3.....4......5......6.....7

20. My partner is not necessarily someone others consider reliable. (S)he can’t always be counted on.

1.....2.....3.....4......5......6.....7
21. My partner is deeply committed to our relationship.

1.2.3.4.5.6.7

22. Issues in our relationship don’t seem to sort themselves out over time. They seem to build up, mushrooming into concerns that are out of proportion to the problem at hand.

1.2.3.4.5.6.7

23. My partner treats me fairly and justly.

1.2.3.4.5.6.7

24. My partner has proven to be a faithful person. (S)he would never be unfaithful, even if there was absolutely no chance of being caught.

1.2.3.4.5.6.7

25. I feel my partner does not show me enough consideration.

1.2.3.4.5.6.7
26. When problems have surfaced in our relationship, we have shown considerable ability to work through them successfully.

   1......2......3......4......5......6......7

27. My partner is a thoroughly dependable person.

   1......2......3......4......5......6......7

28. I feel that I can trust my partner completely.

   1......2......3......4......5......6......7

29. Our two styles of dealing with conflicts makes me concerned about our capacity to confront problems that arise in our relationship.

   1......2......3......4......5......6......7

30. My partner typically behaves in ways that are very rewarding to me.

   1......2......3......4......5......6......7
31. Our relationship could easily be explained in terms of “(s)he contributes this” and “I contribute that.” At times I don’t feel like were in it together.

1…..2…..3…..4…..5…..6…..7

32. Through our concerted efforts at problem solving, we have managed to cope with the stresses on our relationship very effectively.

1…..2…..3…..4…..5…..6…..7

33. My partner has not always proven to be a trustworthy person in the past. I am sometimes hesitant to engage in activities with my partner which make me feel insecure.

1…..2…..3…..4…..5…..6…..7

34. My partner has always been responsive to my needs and feelings.

1…..2…..3…..4…..5…..6…..7

Mistrust

*Mistrust:* Lack of trust or confidence arising from suspicion. To regard without trust or confidence. To be wary, suspicious, or doubtful.

After your life has been shattered by infidelity, any trust that was present in your relationship is also shattered and destroyed. It’s thrown out of the window in the blink of an eye.

You’re Not Alone

When couples are going through such a crisis as infidelity, they feel things and they think things. Those who aren’t going through what you are going through, may not understand it.

But those that are going through it can. They may have had similar experiences, but they didn’t have the words or the label to put on it to where they could make sense out of it.

Each of us, when we go through a painful experience are plagued with these thoughts and we think we’re the only one this has happened to and that we’re the only one who has been hurt this bad.

When you realize that other people have gone through this, that other people have gone through the difficulty of trusting, whether it be as a cheater or the betrayed spouse, you feel validated – “Somebody has gone through it. I’m not losing my mind.”

It’s at this point when you start gaining trust in your own thoughts - when you hear that other people are feeling the same way you did.
When you get to the point where you know that you’re having all these experiences or going through whatever kind of hell that you’re going through, to hear that other people have gone through it, it gives you hope.

First of all, you might think: “I can make it through this if they can make it through,” but also it validates that you’re not losing your mind.

**It Can Be Done But You Have to Want It**

Studies show that when couples do want to go ahead and work on things after an affair, about half or a little over half are successful in their recovery.

In other words, there are some couples that when they discover the affair don’t want to work it out, so those get weeded out. But of those that do want to work things out, there’s a large number that are successful at making it work after an affair if that’s what they choose to do.

Let’s face it, people are people. Sometimes people are in such pain that, in their minds, it’s not worth trying to rebuild; it’s not worth trying to trust again. They say things such as: “They’ve hurt me so many times, there’s no way I’m about to let them do it again.”

It’s not necessarily that you want to run up the white flag and just give up – you simply get tired of hurting. I can certainly understand that. I’ve felt that way myself at times.

But if you truly want to trust again, and to heal from the affair (and I think you do or you wouldn’t be reading this book), know that it can be done. We have been where you are and have had success - and so can you.
My Experience With Mistrust

In terms of understanding mistrust and how the trust got destroyed, you might question yourself if it was the fact that your spouse lied or was it because he/she broke the promise, vows or sacred trust related to the marriage.

For me, it was more that Doug would look me in the eye and lie to me. That was the major thing. The fact that he broke his promise and commitment to the marriage was also very important to me.

I felt that I was committed for life, for better or worse. No matter what came upon us, I would be there. It’s so hard to face things when you know that your partner doesn’t feel the same way.

I remember after I discovered Doug’s huge cell phone and text usage with the other woman, I was in denial. I couldn’t believe that he would betray and lie to me.

For months however, I pretty much put that to the side and kept believing everything he said to me and continued to trust him. Eventually, it would come out that he was lying to me all along.

After I had pretty hard evidence and I found out that he had indeed been lying to me, it was devastating. I lost trust in myself and everyone around me. I began to believe I was going crazy and paranoid. By paranoid, I mean wondering what else had Doug lied to me about in the past.

I started to go through our whole marriage and tried to find other instances where he may have been lying. I questioned everything about our marriage and our life. Did he lie to me when we got married? Did he lie to me when we were dating?

A word that is very close to trust that has a big bearing on it is truth. A big part of trust is that you want to believe the truth that the
person is telling you. With the affair, the truth that I believed in was no longer there.

**I’m a Trusting Person by Nature**

I had always been very trusting and felt that everyone was good and always had good intentions. Then I started thinking, “Well, maybe it’s not that way.” Yes, I guess I started looking at people differently, which killed me, because that’s not my personality. I didn’t like being that way.

I believed that everyone would hurt me, was lying, or not following through on their commitments. I tried to pretty much remove myself from people for fear that I would be hurt again. I doubted anything that anyone said was true. I lost trust in myself to make good judgments.

I felt that maybe I was too trusting, too vulnerable, too naïve. I felt that I needed to stop being that way and to clue in more to what people’s agendas were.

It’s almost like I put some x-ray spectacles on all of a sudden, I saw the evil side of everyone around me.

That is certainly mistrust – in a big way!

**An Emotional and Physical Hell**

At its worst, it was very bad. I didn’t know how I was going to get out of bed each morning. To function was very, very hard. I didn’t know how I would get through the day. I just couldn’t believe that someone could lie to me that way.
In my eyes, trust is so important. It just took away everything I believed in.

I lost 20 pounds in a month and a half, and I’m only five foot tall. I didn’t weigh much to begin with. I still don’t know how I could have lost that much weight!

I went to my job every day, but I don’t remember being there or doing it. I just would go through the motions, go to bed hoping in the morning when I’d wake up, everything would be a dream. Then I would face it again.

My life was consumed with it.

It’s as if I didn’t even have an island of safety that I could go to, and I found myself having all that confidence suddenly gone and never knew if the people around me were hurting me or not. That’s very hellacious.

It’s almost like suddenly being dropped into a foreign country and not able to speak the language, never knowing if you can trust people or not trust people.

One thing that happens when we’re hurting is we tend to paint with a broad brush. In my case, I painted with a broad brush by thinking all women were not to be trusted. Similarly, I know of cases where husbands had wives who have cheated and they start thinking all men cannot be trusted.

It’s like suddenly, after your spouse cheats, you are a charter member of the “I hate women” or “I hate men” club. And that can be a struggle.

For me I didn’t want to believe (this is silly) that Doug had just as much part in the affair as she did. I wanted to believe that he was manipulated, which manifested my overall mistrust in women.
I’m not one to think that people do things purposely to hurt anyone. I just never believed that. It was very hard for me to understand that yes, people are selfish and will do things for their own satisfaction or pleasure.

Throughout my life I’ve had a hard time understanding evil and how people could be selfish and wrapped up in themselves, that they would actually plot and plan to do mean things and spread rumors. That was a hard thing for me to grasp. I think a lot of people have a hard time grasping that.

The truth is each of us as humans have the capability of doing both good and evil, but when we’re hurting, it’s almost like we still want to put them either in the all good box or the all bad box. Part of growing up is realizing that there’s a little bit of each of them.

I never wanted to make Doug feel that I was superior or that I had these high expectations, because I don’t. It’s just the way I always felt.

It’s real easy for some people after they’ve been hurt to go running to the church, for instance, and develop some self-righteousness – “I’m better than you because I didn’t cheat. You let me down and you’re a bad person.” It’s hard to re-develop the trust as long as that kind of thinking is there.

We like to trust people who we feel are equals, especially with a marriage. If one party starts seeing themselves as superior to the other one, it creates more of a competition as opposed to a relationship where there’s cooperation and where trust can develop.

I mention that because I know that some people, when they’re hurting, want to go to a place for comfort. The church or religion is a good place for that, but the danger is if you start developing self-righteousness, it can come back to bite you because it’s going to be hard to develop trust in a relationship with somebody who you see
as your inferior. It’s not good to feel that since they hurt you they no longer deserve to be loved, that they deserve to be treated like a dog; not like a person.

I Was Alone

What compounded things even more was that I felt as if I was alone. I chose not to tell anyone – my family or my children – and I felt as though I didn’t have my spouse anymore. I was all alone in this. There was no one to help me or to guide me that I felt safe with.

Though I chose not to tell anyone about the affair, mistrust unfortunately, is one of those things that does not stay contained. It does spread and it affects everyone around you. It affects your relationship with everyone you come in contact with: your kids, your extended family, your own parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, co-workers, etc.

A person cannot function that way. For that reason, we do have to get to where we can trust again, because when we lose the trust it’s almost like you switch between seeing people as either good or evil.

When you suddenly can’t trust someone, you suddenly think that everyone is evil and out to get you. That’s hard to live there for very long.

So for that reason, we do need to start rebuilding trust again. Not necessarily with your spouse right away, but you can start with yourself, a friend, or even with your children.
Trust Starts With You

In my opinion it’s most important to start the trust building process with your own core; trusting yourself, trusting your God or whatever higher power you believe in. But you have to have that inner core of yourself be something solid that you can trust in.

Let that spread to where you can trust in yourself, because you’re going to have to have a foundation to start rebuilding on, because literally, you’ve been destroyed and taken down to the foundation – if not beyond there – and you’re rebuilding.

Doug Suffered From Mistrust As Well

What also became evident is that after the affair, was that not only did I suffer from a loss of trust, but so did Doug. We both went through the trauma of dealing with mistrust, but dealing with different forms of it in different ways.

Prior to the affair, Doug questioned whether or not I loved him. You see, we acted a lot like we were just roommates. We didn’t talk a whole lot. We didn’t do a lot of things that we should have been doing together as man and wife. At times we tended to go our separate ways.

After the affair was revealed, I went nuts and started to change everything that I did. I changed the way I acted and I realized the mistakes I had made previously in our relationship and set out to change myself - to make things better.

Doug had a hard time trusting that I loved him and cared for him and believed the reason why I made these changes and wanted to save
our marriage wasn’t just because he had found another woman; it was because I did love him.

He was afraid that the changes would not hold or I would go back to the way I was prior to the affair. He had a hard time seeing that the connection was that we both were changing and it was feeding off of each other and was making our relationship better.

The changes I made were because I loved him and I wanted to spend more time with him. I think he had a hard time trusting that the changes I made, the way that I was acting and the way that we were getting along at the time wasn’t just a temporary fix and that it wasn’t genuine and it was just more an act out of desperation more than anything.

He thought I was just making changes because I was in panic mode and that these changes were not going to last.

It took a long time for him to trust me to know that I cared for him and to see that the changes that were made weren’t just my changes, they were our changes.

A Formula For Rebuilding Trust

One of the formulas that we often give to people in terms of rebuilding trust is:

Trust = Honesty + Communication + Commitment + Time

Those four elements all together seem to be what we build trust on. When a person says something and they’re honest, that goes a long way. When there’s communication and you’re talking to them, that goes a long way. Likewise with the commitment and the time.
When there is this mistrust or a lack of trust, you do tend to have a breakdown in communication. There does tend to be this breakdown instead of honesty. There’s dishonesty both in terms of the lying and also in terms of the mishandling of the promise of marriage.

The word “trust” is also used when a person has a special account where you assume that the trustee is going to be looking after things in your best interest. Likewise, that same word is used in a marriage because you want to think that your spouse is looking out for your best interest all the time.

When that special relationship has been handled roughly or not respected or has been violated, it’s a major upheaval.

Likewise, there’s distrust when there’s a lack of commitment.

Some couples, they’ve got the communication; they’re just not always wanting to follow through with the commitment. They get tired of the hurting, tired of the frustration and they give up.

Rebuilding Trust Is Not a Quick Process

People often ask me, “Linda, when you were going through this difficulty rebuilding the trust, how long did it take you?” The answer is that it was a long time. It’s difficult to give you an idea of how long to expect. Six months out, twelve months out, eighteen months out?

In my experience, the first three months I was in emotional hell. I was trying to deal with all the emotions and the act of infidelity itself, plus trying to do everything I could to save our marriage. Trust at this point was just not something I could really even think about, much less consider.
After six months I was still trying to sort everything through and still trying to figure out if Doug was still lying or still in the affair. At twelve months, I started learning to trust myself. At some point after that, I got to the place where I could trust Doug again.

Obviously, your time frame could be shorter or longer.

Recovering from an affair is a process. Part of that process is rebuilding trust. Trust cannot be restored until both parties are willing to give all their efforts into saving their marriage.

It’s a two way street. Certain things have to be in place by both parties. The cheater has to do things in order for you to start gaining trust. There can be no contact with the other person. They have to be transparent. You have to communicate with them how you’re feeling. They have to understand how you’re feeling.

The details of the affair need to be discussed until the betrayed spouse is satisfied with the answers. There also needs to be a realization that the old marriage will not work again. You need to figure out why the “old” marriage broke down and you need to begin new ways of communicating your needs to one another.

The cheater needs to be cooperative in giving the betrayed spouse the safety needed to begin the trust again.

Trust must be earned. Therefore, the cheater needs to display through their actions and words that they deserve to be trusted again.

It depends on what kind of work you’re doing as a couple. If you’re not talking about it or communicating, then it will take a long time. If your spouse isn’t being transparent and still hiding things from you, then it takes a lot longer than I think people want it to - and expect it to.
All those things have to be in place before you can start trusting yourself and trusting your spouse. This takes time.

At first I read books – tons of books. But I didn’t get to the chapters on trust in most of them. Trust always seemed to be at the end of the book. I was just trying to get through the beginning of how to deal with the affair, what an affair was and what it meant.

Trust was something I couldn’t... I wasn’t ready for, for some reason. I guess I should’ve read about it before, but survival was a higher priority than trust.

After an affair you’ve lost all that consistency and stability. Nothing is the same. And you’re needing to find some, even if it’s not great stability. Some stability is better than no stability. Going through the mistrust is a painful thing, where if you find yourself feeling lost or feeling afloat or out to sea, those sensations are natural because the foundation on which your relationship has been built has been damaged and you are still searching for what you can hold on to.

There is a way out of it, and we’re going to be talking about that later in this book, but it’s important for us to talk about mistrust and understanding what is involved, what keeps the mistrust going and how the hostile environment with blaming, attacking, self-righteousness and stuff like that destroys any kind of trust.

The next section will deal with learning how to rebuild the trust in yourself. Before we move on however, you should complete the exercises that pertain to this first section on mistrust.

After doing so, you might want take a half hour or so to share this information with each other.
Exercises: Mistrust

In most cases of infidelity there was a fundamental breakdown of trust prior to the affair. It could be that one partner didn’t trust the other enough to communicate their displeasure in certain aspects of the relationship for fear of being rebuked, laughed at or argued with.

Think back prior to the affair and list any instances where you feel there was mistrust in your relationship.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

How do you feel that this lack of trust contributed to the deterioration of your relationship?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Once the affair was discovered, trust in your spouse was certainly destroyed. What element of the betrayal most affected your loss of trust? For example, was it the lying, the broken vows, etc.?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In what ways did you lose trust in yourself?

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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What was the effect of this loss of trust on you both mentally and physically?

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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
How has the loss of trust affected your marriage/relationship?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
I firmly believe that before you can rebuild trust in your spouse, you need to rebuild it in yourself. Though the two processes should work concurrently.

What’s interesting is that many people who we communicate with on our blog have no idea that they lost trust in themselves to begin with. In my opinion, most everyone does lose this trust in themselves after an affair, but they simply just don’t realize it.

So what exactly does it mean to not trust yourself? What are some of the characteristics of someone who has a problem with trusting themselves?

To not trust yourself deals with how you expect there to be harm or pain concerning yourself and concerning the future. When a person does not trust themselves, it’s almost like the world becomes a very scary place and they’re expecting a lot of negative things to come their way. It’s almost like they’re on the lookout for bad things and painful things to start happening to them.

It’s not a real good place to be.

But keep in mind, when something as foundational as a marriage is damaged, it rips out your whole foundation. It’s almost like everything that you had built your life around is suddenly gone. That leaves people with no foundation to build on.

It’s natural that you go through a period where you have difficulty trusting yourself and trusting anyone else, because you wonder, “Who can I trust? What is real?”

That leads me to the second question: What are the characteristics?
When people don’t trust themselves, they tend to withdraw. They’ll pull into their shell. One person I talked to recently used the term that they went “turtle” on people. Their head is in their shell, so to speak.

There’s a lot of self-doubt and difficulty trusting not only yourself, but other people. There’s a sense of hopelessness because once you lose the ability to trust, any sense of hope about the future is gone and you don’t have anything to look forward to or even anything that would invite you to get out of bed in the morning.

When people are into it real bad in terms of not trusting themselves, the only kind of security they have is rituals. This may be where a lot of obsessive-compulsive stuff starts to come in to play. They start putting trust in their rituals as opposed to actually feeling secure.

When your world crashes down around you, you look for things that can provide you with something stable, something to hope in. When you can’t place your hope in people, or events or even look forward to the future or look forward to your next payday, the only thing you’re left with are a lot of rituals.

By rituals, it can be something as simple as ritualistic housecleaning. A lot of times, people hide their obsessiveness in what seems to be healthy facades.

Some extreme examples are where people go so far beyond the picture straightening to things like polishing doorknobs and getting very extreme with stuff like that. That’s not totally uncommon when people are at that point of not trusting themselves.

It also affects your judgment, your ability to assess what’s going on around you, and skews your observations. It’s almost like there’s a breakdown in some mental function, but there’s also a breakdown in terms of the heart.
What I mean by the heart is that emotionally, they no longer trust their internal sensations or their own emotions. They don’t trust themselves in their heart and they don’t trust what their brain is telling them either.

There’s also, in some cases, some paranoia. In some cases, the clinical term would be narcissism, but most people know that in terms of extreme selfishness.

It’s almost like the person gets to the point where all that matters is internal sensations. They don’t care about what else is going on around them.

Self-confidence and self-esteem has been crushed.

Not everyone goes into this stage at the extreme level. The reason why it gets so extreme is because some spouses literally build their world around their spouse.

Let’s say, for instance, a wife builds her world around her husband. When the husband has an affair, everything she’s built her world around has crumbled. It’s not just a matter of losing self-confidence – it even gets to the point of losing her sense of identity. For years, she considered herself Mrs. Joe Smith, and when Joe Smith has an affair, she’s lost her identity there.

It doesn’t happen to that extreme all the time, but it can.

**It Was Extreme For Me**

As I touched on earlier, I think the implications of the betrayal and the affair caused me to lose balance in my life and everything that I had believed that I was.
It affected me because I was afraid to make any decisions of any kind because I felt that they wouldn’t be right.

I used to feel very confident as a mother, a wife, a teacher, a person. After the affair, I started questioning everything that I was doing. Things as simple as cleaning the house every week. Did that cause the affair? Was I too fanatic about that? Or making a snack for a road trip. Should I have done that? Was that free-spirited enough? Was I too much of a planner?

Every minute of my life was consumed with trying to decide what I was doing and how it affected Doug having an affair or his perceptions about me.

I wasn’t really sure what caused the affair and what my part was in it. It was like everything that had defined me before the affair was thrown out the window. I questioned everything that I did as a wife, a mother, a teacher.

That’s pretty extreme.

On one level, it does indeed sound extreme, but the reality is that it does happen to many others in much the same way.

I basically went on what amounts to a witch hunt—I had a lot of questions and I looked for answers everywhere.

You may have felt something similar.

Was it because you didn’t wear deodorant? Was it because you didn’t put on enough lipstick or perfume? These kinds of questions become almost morbidly introspective. It’s almost like you focus so much on yourself and, “What did I do wrong?” that eventually you start finding bad things about yourself. It can take you into a real negative spiral.
At one point, I really couldn’t think of anything good about myself. I kept a notebook where I would remind myself, among other things, that – “I’m educated. I have a good job.” I would have to make a list to remind myself of my purpose and who I was because all that was taken away from me.

I don’t think a lot of cheaters recognize that it’s not just a physical thing; it’s a slap in the face to the point where a person’s whole identity is ripped away from them.

**Barriers to Trusting Yourself**

When an affair strikes and trust is lost, there are almost instant walls, or barriers, that are thrown up that prevent one from restoring trust in oneself.

We recently conducted a survey with our *Emotional Affair Journey* blog subscribers asking them what barriers stood in the way from them rebuilding trust in themselves after an affair. Perhaps you can relate to some of the barriers mentioned by people in the same situation as you:

- Outside influences – critical friends, relatives and co-workers
- Childhood experiences – barriers formed by parental influences
- Feelings of self-doubt or lack of confidence
- Fear of making mistakes
- Low self-esteem
- Always playing the part of a victim
- Tendency to make assumptions and/or being judgmental of people
- Being untrustworthy
• Self-loathing and negative self-beliefs
• Self-blame
• Overall lack of trust in others

It’s important to note that while this list is not all encompassing and you may be able to think of other barriers within your own self, it should give you a pretty good idea of many of the roadblocks that exist to self-trust.

Managing or overcoming these barriers, many of which may be self-imposed and have no basis in fact, is essential for rebuilding trust in yourself.

**How to Rebuild Trust in Yourself**

In this section we’re going to get into the nuts and bolts of how to rebuild trust in yourself. We’re first going to touch on ways to do so based on some research, and then we will touch on how I was able to trust myself again.

There are many resources available that can give you some pretty detailed, psychological input on how to regain trust in yourself. Sometimes these professorial reference materials can be quite hard to understand to a layperson. Therefore, we’ve tried to break it down for you in an easy to understand way – the way that we would want to read it.

**5 Steps to Trusting Yourself**

First off, let’s talk a bit about what trust is.
If we get into the word itself, it comes from the Danish. The original root word is “tröst.” That literally means to console or comfort. It can also mean to strengthen or encourage.

That’s what’s missing and that’s what you’re looking at trying to rebuild. That’s going to give you the clues to it. You’re going to rebuild trust through a series of steps that comfort yourself, that strengthen yourself, and that encourage yourself.

There’s a therapist who likens trust to the shade of a tree. The tree itself he calls commitment. When a couple has a commitment and they’re able to rest in the shade of that commitment, that shade is trust. I like that picture. That’s a good picture. That’s a good goal to shoot for.

Here are the 5 steps to rebuilding trust in yourself:

1. Take good care of yourself
2. Allow confidence to build in yourself
3. Be honest with yourself
4. Give yourself time to heal
5. Forgive yourself rather than punish yourself

Step One: Take good care of yourself. The person needs to console themselves. They’ll need to take care of themselves. That’s going to be basic things like eating right, getting enough sleep, starting to exercise and also protecting themselves.

One of the things some therapists like to do early on is to teach clients about healthy boundaries and trying to help them establish
some healthy boundaries with themselves, because that goes along with the taking care of themselves.

Then once they start taking care of themselves and they’re safe – physically safe; that they’re waking up and there’s no suicidal ideation – then they can move on to the next step.

**Step Two: Allow confidence to build in yourself.** What I mean by this is since they’re in a state where it’s almost like they’re shell shocked where they didn’t want to believe anything that’s going on around them, they have to start paying attention. “What is going on around me? What am I seeing? What am I hearing? What am I experiencing?”

With affairs, there are so many rumors and half-truths. You have to sometimes go back to the drawing board. “What do I know for sure? What have I seen? What do I know?” because there will be enough rumors to drive you nuts.

During that time, it’s also going to be important to avoid fearful people. There is a great deal of importance in having good friends. Those negative friends, especially the fearful people, you want to stay away from as you’re going through this whole idea of rebuilding trust because all they’re going to do is make you think that there’s nothing in the future that is good going to happen - the future is full of bad things. Stay away from those people.

Of course, the opposite of that is it’s going to be important to surround yourself with encouragement. Encouragement can come in the form of words or people. This is a good time to put up plaques around your apartment or house that will build you up; maybe mementos that remind you of your accomplishments or pictures of people that you admire and find encouragement from, or perhaps poetry or a religious reading that would give you encouragement.
During this time it’s important to also apply this stuff to what you’re feeding your mind with – the movies and television programs that you watch. If you’ve got a steady diet of network news, you’re going to be scared all the time and that’s going to work against rebuilding your trust.

Likewise, if the only movies you watch are these horror flicks, yeah, you’re going to have some problems with fear. When you’re going through this process of rebuilding trust, you want to only watch those types of shows and programs that are encouraging and build you up.

Many times, when we talk about friends, we’ll forget that the books we read and the things that we watch also contribute to it either positively or negatively as well.

**Step Three: Be honest with yourself.** Trust and truth often go hand in hand. When you can start to be honest with yourself and tell yourself the truth about what’s going on, trust develops.

This goes back to the idea that we can only trust people that are honest. It’s not just a matter of trusting other people; it’s also a matter of trusting your own self and your own gut.

Many times, when we’ve mentored with couples who have been caught up in affairs, one of the things we ask is, “Have you been trusting your gut?” and they say, “No, I quit trusting that a long time ago.”

When we go into it a little more, “How many times has it led you astray?”

“Never.”
Getting them to trust those reactions is a big step. Oftentimes, they sense something was wrong in their marriage within their gut long before they knew about the affair. Had they listened to their gut, it would have led to avoiding a lot of problems or they would have been able to deal with problems much sooner.

It’s not just a matter of trying externally; it’s also a matter of rebuilding the trust internally as well. When you start to tell yourself the truth, you start to develop some objectivity. That’s where the turtle starts getting out of its shell.

**Step Four: Give yourself time to heal.** This is especially true before making major changes. After there’s been an affair, a lot of times, people will press you to try to make decisions quickly and to try to set timelines. How long should I give him or her to come back? When should I start divorce proceedings? When should this happen? When should that happen?

Through this time of healing, before you make any major changes in your life, before you make a major move, before you decide to totally kick someone out of your life, get well before you do.

If you start making those major changes before you get your own stuff together, it often leads to a lot of regret down the road. That’s why you need to give yourself time to heal.

With an affair, although you may be able to get back into your regular routine of going to work, cleaning the house, making lunches – whatever it is that you’re doing – that doesn’t mean you’re well and that doesn’t mean you’re whole. It’s going to take time to heal.

With affairs, it’s a major trauma and it may take, at a minimum, at least 18 months to heal – more than likely, years rather than just months.
Step Five: Forgive yourself rather than punish yourself. Many times, the person who’s struggling with rebuilding the trust wants to punish themselves and they need to give up on punishing themselves and instead, to forgive themselves.

During this time, as they start rebuilding trust, a key question to ask is, “On what or who do you trust?” It’s important to push a little bit on this one in the sense that a lot of times when people are really fearful, they’re still able to trust – they’re just trusting that bad things are going to happen rather than good things. It’s wise to confront them and find ways to redirect that trust.

I think you’ll find that trust and truth end up being the building blocks of hope, because as you have more trust and truth in your life, you have more of a sense of hope.

As I look back, the hardest part for me was forgiving myself. That took the longest. I felt that it was all my fault. I carried that around for a long time. When I went to the therapist we discussed this often. He really helped me through that. I now know that’s what I was holding on to… not being able to forgive myself.

That’s a big one. A lot of times, I don’t know if it goes back to when we’re little toddlers, but we still have this mindset we want to pin the tail on the donkey. We want to find somebody to blame things on and punish.

If your main goal is to heal your marriage and heal yourself, this is one thing that you need to focus on as opposed to figuring out where to put the blame.

I am to the point where I feel that I can be confident that when I make a decision to do something, I trust myself that I’m making the correct decision – or at least a good decision.
At the beginning – and this is probably what everyone in affairs does – you’re thinking, “What would she (the other person) have done?” You’re trying to model what your husband or wife had during the affair and how he/she would have acted in that situation. You’re basically trying to become the other woman or man. I’m past that, and I’m still gaining confidence in myself. I write down everything that I feel good about. It’s a long process when you’ve lost all that.

With all these five steps, I need to add you don’t have to take them in order of one, two, three, four, five. You may find yourself one, three, two, bouncing back and forth. I need to clear that up, because so many times we get in the mindset of, “I have to do this step before I do the next one.” But you don’t.

How I Managed to Restore Trust in Myself

Much of what you just read, I did myself, though I certainly had my own way about doing it. In other words, the principles are basically the same, but my method may have been somewhat different.

I don’t think rebuilding trust in myself was something that I ever thought about. I just knew I had this feeling of floating up in the air and not knowing what to do or where to go. I didn’t put a label on it at the time. I soon began to understand what those feelings were.

One of the first things I did was to start a journal. In this journal I wrote all of my thoughts, emotions and feelings, amongst other things.

One thing I did in my journal was write down positive reminders about myself. Things like, “I’m a great mother. I’m educated. I have a good job. I’m honest and hard working. I’m loveable.” This list
served to remind me of my purpose and who I really was. I would encourage you to do the same.

**I started doing the things that I used to do.** One of the most important things that I did was to just start going back into my routine of my life before I found out about the affair.

For a long time I questioned…Did I spend too much time on my job? Did I spend too much time cleaning the house or with the kids? What did I do wrong?

So I stopped doing so many of the things that were part of our life beforehand and that were part of me. I think the most important thing I did was I started where I felt the most confidence, and that was going back and focusing on my job.

Basically, that helped me to get back some of my self-confidence. My self-confidence and just putting in the routine - figuring out that it was okay to do that. I gave myself permission, and then I realized Doug was still here and we’re still doing okay. It gave me the security to then move on to other areas that I had questioned beforehand.

**I started thinking about our life and thinking about the good memories.** So many times we would have a great weekend and afterwards, I would just lose it. I would feel so insecure.

The great weekends were almost like déjà vu to me. Those great weekends were just like the weekends that we had experienced before the affair. We did similar things and we had similar interactions. And that scared me, because I thought if it wasn’t okay then, why is it okay now? Is it okay to act that way or feel that way?

I needed to become comfortable knowing that how we were before the affair was okay. We had good times. The majority of our life together was very intimate, and we communicated and we were best friends. I brought that confidence back.
I celebrated the times that we were having at the time, but also celebrating the times that we had in the past and we talked about them. “We used to do this and that was fun.”

On D-day, as the cheater rewrites history, they can’t remember many good times about their marriage and about their spouse. It helped to remember and celebrate these good times.

When I asked Doug about our past history while he was in the fog, he really couldn’t remember many things that were great about us. I know I spent a lot of time trying to remind him of those things which really didn’t have much of an effect on him.

I hoped as the fog lifted and we started doing things together that he would remember, “Oh yeah, we used to do that.” That also helped Doug to remember our history.

In my own mind, I was separating fact from fiction and then justifying to myself that was okay, there was nothing wrong with that. That was good.

I trusted my gut. I had lost trust in my instincts and my gut. Once you start getting a little confidence in yourself and in your relationship with your spouse, then you start listening more to your gut because at times nothing makes sense at all.

So you have to start thinking, “It doesn’t make sense because it’s not right; it’s not true.” So you have to have the competence to trust what you’re thinking is correct.

Honestly, I trusted in my gut from the very beginning. But during that time, Doug was lying to me, which was really a trust issue. I trusted in my gut, but I was trying to believe what he was telling me at the same time, so then I stopped trusting my gut.

This is the bind that a lot of spouses find themselves in, because your gut will tell you one thing, the spouse says something that doesn’t
line up with it and then you end up believing your spouse rather than believing your gut.

But you’re afraid to trust your gut. You want to believe the spouse because if you trust your gut, there are so many implications. You’re in a bind that way, too.

In the beginning, my gut was almost like having an angel on my shoulder steering me through everything. I would have a feeling that this is what happened that day and I would be right. For months, my gut was like my sixth sense; almost like I had ESP or something.

I think it was probably scaring Doug how much I was really understanding and knowing as the affair was going on because I was so in tune to what was happening, which made him want to lie even more to cover it up.

This is the reason why some cheaters try to find a way to get their spouse to ignore or silence the gut, because so many times the gut gives them away - or makes the betrayed think they’re going crazy!

**I started doing things for myself that helped me gain confidence.** I took an exercise class. I spent time with friends; someone who could be around people who could put me in my place and say, “You are a good wife. You are a good mother.” Things like that helped reassure me of who I was before all this happened.

Spending time with friends was helpful as it gave me a comfortable place and I was confident around them. As I said earlier, a routine and a sense of security is important.

I think anything that gave me a sense of safety helped, because I lost all my security as a result of the affair. I didn’t have that at home. Other things on the outside that gave me a sense of being safe really helped.
One thing to note about friends is that I made sure that who I confided in was able to consider what was in Linda’s best interest, and not a member of the Doug-hater club. The friend I confided in allowed me to see both sides.

Honestly, I never really bashed Doug. I never said anything negative about him. I really did talk about how I contributed to the situation: “I did this; I did that.” My friend never really had to say, “Oh, Doug’s terrible. You should dump him!” I just was not a wife to do that.

The reason this is important is that many times when people are hurting they’re looking for someone to build them up. There’s a big difference between building you up and somebody that joins with you to tear down your spouse.

Also, the tearing down of the spouse can energize you as a negative kind of energy that typically takes you to some really nasty places. It gets you out of the pain, but it’s going to end up delivering even more pain in the end.

Fortunately, my friend’s concern was mainly with me and my wellbeing. We really didn’t talk much about the dynamics between Doug and I and what was happening. She just wanted to make sure that I was okay and that she was there for me. She didn’t try to boost my ego or anything.

Tread carefully though, as sometimes people who are hurting tend to want to find people that are going to see their side of the story and build them up and make them feel like they’re right and then they become spouse-bashers on the backend. At that point it is really more destructive than helpful.

Both types generate some energy. The kind of friend that builds you up is generally more of a positive type of energy than the type that puts you out of pain by tearing other people down.
It will get you out of pain, but the negative energy becomes a vortex like a rollercoaster. Once you’re on it, you can’t stop until the end – and the end is not a pretty place, because all that venom and stuff like that is going to come out and it’s going to end up being an obstacle to getting things worked out between the couple.

What happens when you start sharing the negativity, a lot of times the other people start taking it as their own.

For instance, if I was mad at Doug and I started talking to somebody about Doug and how he hurt me, it would be real easy for those other people to become a member of the Doug-haters club, even though Doug has not done anything to them.

Those members of the club get in the way of healing for the relationship when it comes time to heal. It’s almost like you’ve got a whole crowd of people that have their own agendas as opposed to just helping the spouse who was hurt.

So it’s very important to choose your support group very wisely.

**I educated myself.** I also feel that the immense amount of time spent researching affairs and reading about them gave me a sense of control and a sense of power. When I read all of the books, they confirmed in my own mind that I was okay. That my gut was right.

But I caution. I think that I focused too much on the research and reading. I should have spent more time doing some things for myself.

I would go through a book a day. I spent every minute that I had reading books on affairs. I would be in the car stopped at a red light reading. I would spend my free time scouring the library and the bookstores. It consumed my life trying to gain as much knowledge as I could.

I highly recommend reading books and websites, but you need to limit how much you do.
Like anything else. Too much of a good thing cannot be good. You’ve just got to temper it and focus on maybe just a few authors and a few of their techniques and not try to read 40 different books every week.

I was trying to find the answer. I kept thinking, “This book is going to be it. This is going to give me everything... I’m going to understand everything now.” I’ll clue you in: you will never understand, so stop searching.

**We began to really talk.** One last very important thing that helped was that when Doug started coming back, we increased our level of communication. We would talk about things that I was insecure about, “I’m worried. Should I clean the house; shouldn’t I?”

Doug would reassure me things were okay and that I didn’t need to worry about those things. Simply communicating my fears and discussing them with Doug helped to bring my self-confidence back.

So you see that there are elements of each of the previously mentioned 5 steps there, because I found the friend who built me up, I went and exercised, I surrounded myself with encouraging people as opposed to fearful people. I started telling myself the truth about a lot of things by reading all the material I could on affairs. And I gave myself the time I needed to make it happen.

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**How the Cheater Can Help You Regain Trust in Yourself**

After that last step, you might wonder if there is anything that the cheating spouse can do to aid the betrayed spouse with this whole rebuilding of trust thing. Absolutely.
As I mentioned, when Doug starting talking to me, he started building me up and it helped make all the difference.

The thing is our husband or our wife has a unique ability of being able to build us up or tear us down like nobody else can. They are in a unique position. Even though they have violated the trust, they can still build us up. Likewise, they can throw some hand grenade in the air and tear us to shreds.

It’s going to be important during this time that both spouses work on trying to rebuild each other and rebuild the relationship. If you go off on a witch hunt looking for faults, you’ll find them. I can guarantee you that.

But in healing, you need to look for things that you can build on. A key question, although simple, it’s profound, “Will this bring healing?” Before you jump in and say things, if it’s not something that’s going to bring healing, it probably doesn’t need to be said right then.

This is very true. I know a lot of you who are going through this have experienced this. I know I begged Doug, “Please, I need to hear that I’m attractive, I need to hear this.” At one point, he just really had trouble with that. He didn’t understand why I needed to be reassured or why I needed this or I needed that.

He couldn’t understand why I was so insecure and why I needed him. I didn’t want to ask for things like that, but I didn’t know what else to do.

I just felt a yearning for him to tell me, “You are fun. I enjoy being with you.” Just little things after we spent a day together. “I just had so much fun with you.” Just little things – I needed that so desperately.
When Doug finally got to the point where he was able to say things like this to me without me begging him, my healing began.

It’s important that the betrayed spouse communicate their needs and wants because they need something to hold on to.

Many times, when you start getting that honesty...Honesty about the emotions, honesty about stuff in your head and the heart – not the judgments, such as, “I had a fun day today, You really are a good cook,” and stuff like that, it starts setting the stage for intimacy and a closeness between the couple.

That closeness is part of what’s essential to bring trust and healing.

It also helps you begin to trust yourself and your instincts.

As I said, your spouse is the one person who can do that for you and if you’re not getting that boost of confidence, then you don’t have little steps to build on. If you feel “I am doing a good job at this,” it gives you the confidence to keep trying other things – going back into your life again.

You can only run on your emotional energy for so long, and then your fuel tank gives out. We have to be built up. The person who can build us up most is our spouse.

I think this is one reason why some spouses are highly vulnerable to affairs after their spouse has had an affair, because they are in such a desperate need to be built up.

Sometimes they make foolish choices as to where they look for that building up and that gets them in trouble.

I remember feeling that if I could just find someone who thought that I was a wonderful person, I would feel better. I yearned for someone to do that. It was hard to find anyone who would help me with that
though, except for my friend. People have their own lives to live and they don’t know what’s going on with yours.

It’s a very strong, powerful force because nobody wants to be treated and told, “You have no value, you have no worth, I have no use of you; I know you thoroughly and there is nothing positive in you.” That’s a hard message.

I don’t know if the cheater actually realizes they’re portraying that to their spouse, but the affair itself, the lack of commitment, the lack of feelings they have for the spouse after the affair, that all just pretty much tells you that you are replaceable. I didn’t realize that could happen to me...that I could be replaced so easily. Didn’t I have any value? Was I worth anything?

What About the Cheater Trusting Themselves?

I think I would be remiss if I didn’t touch on the subject of how the cheater also lost trust in themselves somewhere along the way.

Do cheaters have just as hard of a time dealing with trusting themselves as the betrayed spouse does?

When you’re going through an affair it’s an ego boost for the cheater. Certainly they have all kinds of confidence at that point in time. After it’s over, they think, “Wow, I was really stupid.”

As a result, many cheaters can lose a little bit of trust in themselves to make good decisions and do the right thing in the future.

As a betrayed spouse, we tend to look at it a bit differently. From my perspective, I would think the cheaters would have a really difficult time with trusting themselves again, trusting that they could adhere to boundaries or even ask themselves, “Why was I so stupid?”
What I suspect is that depending upon what the motive was for cheating, some will have a high amount of trust and confidence and others will have a low level depending on the dynamics of what’s going on. Some people get caught up in the cheating and they didn’t plan on it.

For instance, let’s say the businessman out of town whose deal didn’t go the way he wanted it to, he’s feeling down on himself and some girl starts hitting on him. All of a sudden, he feels a little better. In that case, that’s somebody who didn’t have a lot of trust and got into an affair.

The idea of misplaced trust wouldn’t apply to a person like that, but it all depends on what type of affair it was and what triggered it.

Personally, I feel that after all this is said and done and the cheater looks back at how they felt during the affair and what they see now as far as faults or manipulations that existed in the affair relationship, that they too might have a hard time trusting themselves, primarily in the way they judge people or in trusting themselves with their actions.

Doug has said that in the initial phases of his affair, that he probably did not feel a sense that he didn’t trust himself because he was feeling good about himself for the most part. His confidence was at an all time high.

But once he was removed from the affair and analyzed things he thought, “What the heck happened?” and “What was I thinking?” and he was able to learn from that and figure out what made him so vulnerable, and is now better able to trust himself to make good decisions and to do what’s right.

It is a learning process. At the time the affair was going on, it wasn’t something that was really going through his head.
Typically, the cheater does indeed have some confidence in themselves - the ability to trust. Otherwise, how could they have the affair? How could they get into somebody’s head, somebody’s heart? It takes a certain amount of confidence to be able to do that.

However, they have a problem with misplaced trust and misplaced confidence and they have to learn how to reprioritize their trust and reprioritize their confidence. I think they have trust; it’s just that they’re using it in the wrong way.

So what if the cheater feels that they can’t trust themselves...that they might go out and do it again or they might get themselves in a situation? Do they not establish or adhere to boundaries? What are the implications?

With that type of mindset, it’s more serial cheating or the sex addict where you talk about not being able to trust themselves. A lot of times, they are so used to seducing people they don’t know if they can be trusted alone with some individuals.

It’s almost like this drive suddenly comes up inside them and they feel like they have to act out on it. This doesn’t apply to every case of cheating, but just in the types that are more driven by sexual addiction type of stuff.

In these cases you have a whole different dynamic. When you’ve got a spouse who’s an addict and they’re having difficulty with control, you’re dealing with more of a disease going on as opposed to somebody who is unhappy with the way the house is, or unhappy with the way their wife looks and they go out and find a younger model – a whole different dynamic and it would require a whole different response.

I’ll put this caveat on this though. This is more typical of the case where a spouse goes out and actually has a physical affair with another person. That does take a certain amount of confidence.
That’s very different from somebody who’s sitting at home on the computer and starting an affair with someone online. That’s a whole different set of dynamics.

It can be very difficult for the cheater to understand what is happening to the betrayed spouse as far as trusting themselves again goes. This is probably foreign territory to them. They don’t understand exactly what the betrayed spouse is going through so it’s very hard for them to do the things that are needed or even understand the feelings because they are in such a different state of mind.

It’s like the couple almost becomes an organism themselves. It’s almost like where the cheater has all this confidence, the anti-type of that is found in the betrayed spouse where she or he has lost that same amount of confidence.

Getting them to talk to one another is often a challenge because they literally are living in two different worlds. It’s almost like what one spouse is missing, the other has. They really do need each other; they’ve just not been able to talk about it and find ways to do it.

I think this is also part of what’s implied where after the affair, the person who was hurt keeps wanting to replay the affair over and over in their head because they’re having such a hard time accepting it. The cheater is thinking, “Why can’t they just get over it and go on?” They really can’t understand at that point what is making it so hard for the person who was hurt to accept what happened.

They can be so far apart on their feelings and everything that it’s really hard to bring them to a common place. And in some cases, it is. And although it’s hard to understand, the very thing that the cheater has is what the betrayed spouse needs.

This is especially true when you’re talking about couples that have been together 10, 20, 30 years. With younger couples you have
different dynamics. But the older ones, they’re so plugged into each other, they really are sides of the same coin.

This is why it was so difficult for me. We had been together almost 30 years. The separation was so great. The things that he had, I was lacking, but then I had the honesty and the commitment, which he was lacking. It was like we were just way on two different ends of the Earth. And there was someone right in the middle between us putting that big wall up.

**How Trusting Myself Again Affected Me**

When all was said and done, and I began trusting myself again, with it came a renewed sense of confidence.

I was able to make decisions again; simple decisions and more complex decisions. I knew I had choices. Before that, I was in limbo. Should I go to the grocery store or should I stay here? If I leave, will he contact her? Should I clean the house or does that mean that I spend too much time cleaning the house?

Simple decisions I couldn’t make before. It was almost like learning to walk again. Okay, you fell, but you’re going to get up and you’re going to be okay.

I started trying things and being a little bit more daring and realized it was okay. Life will still be going on tomorrow, even if I failed or if something happened. It was just a matter of taking the risk. I was afraid to do anything different.

I was also much stronger both mentally and physically. I knew that no matter what came my way that I could handle it. Good or bad. Should our marriage end, I knew that I was strong enough that I could make it on my own.
I think that’s important for you to know. Regardless of what happens, you need to get yourself in a position where you can work on yourself and get strong enough so that you can be prepared for anything that’s going to happen.

As we know, recovering from an affair is difficult and the percentages – I don’t know what they are exactly – but there are a large percentage of marriages that fail after this. You have to be ready for what comes if it doesn’t work out.

With trusting yourself comes the realization that you do have a choice. It’s not just the cheater’s choice to leave the marriage. You also have a choice on what you want to do. For a long time, I didn’t feel that I had a choice. I soon realized I could leave the marriage if I’m not comfortable... or if I feel that I’m not being loved the way that I should... I can do this.

I think that started building my self-confidence, too. For a long time, I didn’t feel that I was good enough or capable enough of moving on. But I also had a choice of whether I wanted to stay in the marriage or not. I think everyone needs to make that clear to their spouses.

So now that I’m trusting myself and have all of this confidence back, it was time to move on to rebuilding the trust I had lost in Doug.

Again, I feel you need to trust yourself first before you can trust your spouse again, but you can’t wait to fully trust yourself to begin trusting your spouse. I think it’s a process within itself.

Trusting yourself takes a long time, as does trusting your spouse again. It’s not something that will happen within a month. It took over a year, year-and-a-half, for me to truly begin trusting my instincts and myself. You can’t wait to totally trust yourself before you start trusting your spouse. I think it goes hand in hand.
Okay, now that we have spent considerable time in discussing rebuilding trust in yourself, you should grab the exercises that pertain to this section and work on them before moving on to rebuilding trust in your spouse.
Exercises: Rebuilding Trust in Yourself

In what ways do you feel that you have lost trust in yourself as a result of the affair?

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What feelings and emotions about yourself do you now have as a result? What changes do you see in yourself as a result of not trusting yourself?

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How has not trusting yourself affected your judgment?

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What are your own personal barriers that might prohibit you from trusting yourself?
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In what ways can you think of that you can better take care of yourself, both mentally and physically?
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What are some things that you feel you are confident in doing?
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What can you do to surround yourself with encouragement? What words encourage you? What people encourage you?

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Do you trust your gut? In what ways have you not been honest with yourself now or in the past?

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Think of ways that you may have rushed the healing process too much. Jot them down. Are you giving yourself time to heal?

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How have you punished or blamed yourself for the affair?

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What are some good memories of yourself and your marriage before the affair?

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What other resources (besides this book) can I read or research in order to gain more knowledge about affairs, relationships, marriage and human interactions?

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In what ways can we as a couple increase our level of effective communication?

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How can my spouse (the cheater) help me in my efforts to trust myself again?

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How have you (if you are the one who had the affair) or your spouse (the cheater) lost trust in himself/herself?
How has the experience of the affair affected your (the cheater) ability to make good judgments and set sound boundaries?

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As the betrayed spouse, imagine how you would feel about yourself and others when you get to the point where you can trust yourself again. Write down how you envision that to be.

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If you haven’t already, start a journal at once. Use the journal in your trust building efforts to document your thoughts and emotions about yourself and then analyze them for trueness and accuracy. Defend yourself and disprove any false or inaccurate thoughts. Review your journal frequently.
Rebuilding Trust in Your Spouse

Now that you hopefully have a decent grasp on what it takes to trust yourself again, we will now turn our attention on the difficult task of regaining trust in your spouse – the cheating spouse that is.

By now you should have a pretty good idea of how I lost trust in Doug and how it affected me. The loss of trust is a very painful experience. I felt a lot of hurt, confusion, anger and sadness.

When someone is severely betrayed, such as being cheated on in a relationship, we tend to feel like we have lost everything that means anything to us. Once trust is lost, what is left?

Losing trust in someone can have a devastating effect on your relationship, as well as your sense of self-worth, but building trust in a relationship again is possible.

It takes a willingness to work on the part of both yourself and your betrayer, but trust can be won back. And when trust in a relationship is regained, it is truly healing. Trust me on this one!

That said, trust in your relationship was hard to build in the first place, and it will be even harder to rebuild after infidelity. Trust always has to be earned.

Hopefully, your spouse understands that his/her violation of the trust that binds your joint world together was terribly painful to you. It shattered the rules you thought you were both living by. Further, that pain gets awakened every time his/her time or feelings are unaccounted for.
Barriers to Rebuilding Trust

Just as there are barriers to rebuilding trust in yourself, there are barriers that exist when trying to regain the trust in your spouse who betrayed you.

To determine what some of those barriers are, we conducted a poll that asked readers of our blog what the biggest hurdles that existed for them in their quest to rebuild trust. The following list shows just some of these barriers. Many of them you may be able to relate to:

- The betrayed spouse has put up “walls” due to the pain. Does not want to be hurt again
- The betrayed spouse feels they are not a priority to the cheating spouse
- Fear that an affair will happen again
- Past or continued lying
- The cheater is still in contact with the affair partner
- The betrayed spouse has not forgiven the cheater yet
- Lack of commitment from the cheater
- Lack of transparency from the cheater
- The cheating spouse refuses to talk about the affair
- Fear of being hated or abandoned
- Past issues in the marriage
- Family history – issues from childhood and parents
- Past disappointments
- The cheater isn’t doing anything to help repair the marriage
- Lack of intimacy
- Afraid of being made a fool again
- Feeling that the cheater is only still in the marriage because of kids or finances
- The cheating spouse won’t acknowledge or admit to the affair
- General sense of insecurity
• The hurt spouse is not seeing any substantial change in the cheater. The cheater won’t fix what’s wrong with them
• Cheater’s refusal to go to therapy
• Fear of falling back into old marital patterns

This is quite a list, and I’m sure that we could probably come up with a bunch more barriers if we tried.

What I want to do though is generalize these barriers a little more for you, in the hopes that you can get a better grip on them and how to overcome them.

Let me go ahead and start with saying that in dealing with barriers to trust on the surface, it looks very simple, but it ends up being more complicated than that. Let me explain...

Some of the barriers that typically exist can be generalized as things like honesty, commitment, communication, fear and safety issues, and finally impatience.

Let me go ahead and start with the last one first:

**Impatience.** When couples get together many times when they start talking about what lead up to the affair and start working on their relationship, they become impatient. They want the relationship that they had before the affair and they want it quickly. I know I did.

The thing is they have experienced major damage to their relationship and emotions are hurt and it would be nice if they healed that fast, but they don't.

It would be a miraculous doctor if you went in for repairing broken bones, if they could heal those bones and all those fractures as fast as some couples want their relationship healed after an affair.
Having patience is also about allowing you to see your spouse as a human being, as opposed to a robot. You can expect fast answers from Robots.

When you remember that your spouse is human and that they have feelings and many times it takes time for them to talk about their feelings, it's a way of validating inner humanity.

Some feelings we may want to talk about, but we can't even find a way to put them into words. With some of the hurts that will need to be talked about, you can only go a little bit at a time because it hurts so badly. It would be nice if you could go faster, but emotionally a lot of people cannot handle it.

It’s the old adage about it being a marathon, not a sprint.

**Fear and Safety.** I lumped fear and safety together because safety is always a concern. If you are going back into a relationship where your spouse was beating you up and threatening your life with weapons or with their fists, that is a barrier that you need to wake up to and realize that this is potentially a dangerous situation.

I know it sounds redundant to say those things, but some women and some men, even after they have been beat up, they go back into a dangerous situation. That barrier should be there to wake them up.

If you have that barrier that should be like rattle on a rattle snake, you should look at the warning and back off and try not to break that barrier. Others you can; but that one, no.

Safety issues are barriers that you want to stay in place. The other barriers you can remove, but safety leave alone. If those things are happening, don't try to jump in there until the whole relationship is safe.
I never felt physically unsafe with Doug – ever. But I thought this should be addressed as it does happen quite frequently in many relationships.

With fear, many times people are scared of what might happen. That gets in the way of rebuilding the trust because they have images of what may happen a month, two months, a year, two years, rather than taking it one day at a time.

It's almost like they have more confidence that something bad is going to happen then they have confidence that good is going to happen. And along with that, when an affair happens they tell themselves, “I will never let that son-of-a-bitch do that to me again.”

If a person has told themselves that, it operates like computer programming. It gets in their head, it gets in their heart, and it’s going to create a barrier that they’re going to have to overcome when they want to start talking.

I mention this with fear because usually when you first find out about the affair you’re scared of things and that is when you say or program yourself with statements like that. You have to be aware of those and deprogram them before you can move on.

**Communication.** A lot of couples know how to talk to each other; they don't know how to talk with each other. When I mentor with individuals or couples it amazes me how many times they say, “I'm a good communicator.”

As I listen to them, I want to say, “No, you're not.” They may be good at talking, but they’re not very good at listening. They don't connect with the other person.

Communication is more than just talking to them; communication is about also listening and not just hearing the words, but managing to get to the heart of the matter.
It often takes practice to really tune in to your spouse and what they’re really telling you. One story a mentoring client told me can serve as an example. Years ago, Mother’s Day was approaching and my client (they were a young couple at that time and did not have a lot of money) made the comment to her husband, “Hey, don't worry about getting me anything for Mother’s Day,” and the husband thought, “Oh, she said not to get her anything for Mother’s Day.”

And then when Mother’s Day came and the husband didn't have anything, it was not good. Whoops!

I'm giving this as an example that when you listen, there are times when you have to listen for what’s at the heart of things. Don't just latch onto the words and think that is it.

This story was kind of a humorous way of showing it, but it was very painful for this couple going through that experience. But I bet that Mother’s Day is always recognized from now on!

Communication involves listening and listening for the heart of what you’re getting at. And some couples, they put up a lot of barriers to their communication and the ability to talk to each other.

One of the biggest communication barriers is getting the cheater to talk openly and honestly about the affair.

Here, the betrayed spouse needs to develop a mindset where they are willing to listen and hear the cheater out. That's the biggest factor. They will also need to make sure that wherever they are talking about it, it will be safe – physically safe and emotionally safe. People don't open up unless they feel safe.

If you’re hanging a divorce over their head and expecting them to be honest about the affair, and feel safe doing it, they're not going to feel safe. There is a threat and you’re going to have to approach this without threats.
When you’re talking to them, understanding is more important than agreement.

What I mean by that, when you hear something from your spouse, rather than say, “That's a lie; you're lying to me, buster,” or “Ma'am,” don't dispute with them, find out what they mean by things.

Try to understand rather than attack or confront or make fun of or any kind of ridicule that will make people shut down.

That would be the first place I would start, creating that whole atmosphere of safety – physical safety and emotional safety – because you have got to be safe before you can talk.

I must admit that this worked wonders for me when trying to get Doug to talk about the affair. I always tried to create a safe environment. When Doug would talk about his feelings or details of the affair, I made sure that I acknowledged what he was saying. I always remained calm and didn't get all up in arms and irate about things.

Don’t get me wrong, I didn't feel good about it, but I always presented an atmosphere of safety and understanding and I think that helped a lot to get Doug to open up and talk about things.

Then I would go upstairs and cry my eyes out!

One thing to note though, when we were having such an emotional conversation, I really felt like I only heard a portion of what Doug was saying. That’s why I would ask the same questions over and over again, because I couldn't grasp it all in one conversation.

So after we would finish a conversation I would go and start writing down everything we talked about, everything he told me, and then I would go back and review it later just so I could understand and get a better grasp of it.
Commitment. It’s hard to repair a relationship if you don’t know where you stand. Is your husband or your wife committed to you?

If they are committed, how committed are they? Are they going to stay in the marriage or are they only going to be there until times get tough and they get the chance to bail again, or are they just there for the sake of the kids?

You need to know what type of commitment you’re dealing with in order to be able to talk. If you’re not committed to it, it’s going to be hard to grow closer or to rebuild any kind of trust.

With the trust, you want to be able to talk to them and you want to make sure that they are going to be there tomorrow and the day after.

If you have to run around not knowing if they’re going to be there at the end of the day or if they’re going to leave you by the end of the week, it’s going to be hard to trust them.

Honesty. Here you’re going to have to take that whole idea to where you are honest about the relationship, you’re honest about your emotions and you’re also honest about your partner’s emotions; being able to talk about them and also being able to hear them.

Often we’ve seen difficulties in this area as many times the hurt spouse has a very hard time of handling the honesty of the cheater. When the cheater starts getting honest about emotions, the hurt spouse hits the roof.

They can handle the honesty about what hotel room the cheater was at or what they did, but for some reason they have a real hard time with the emotional honesty. This has to be addressed.

It’s a hard barrier to get over because it is so emotionally painful to hear the honesty about a cheater’s emotions while they were in the affair.
My Toughest Barriers to Trusting

For me, the two toughest barriers to trust were honesty and commitment.

With Doug being dishonest for so long it was very difficult. Not knowing where our relationship stood and not being sure if he wanted to stay in the marriage or how he felt about definitely hindered my ability to begin trusting Doug again.

Even though Doug said many times that he wasn’t just in the marriage for the kids, it was hard to believe that at face value.

This leads us into the next section about how to actually rebuild the trust that was lost as the result of infidelity. Before we do however, this would be a good time to do a quick exercise pertaining to the barriers that exist in your own relationship.
Exercises: Barriers to Trust

What were some of the barriers to trust that existed in your relationship **prior** to the affair? Take a moment to list them below.

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What would you say are your barriers to trusting again **after** the affair? Take a moment to list them below.

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How do you feel the barriers with trust prior to the affair compare to those after the affair?

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Brainstorm some ideas for ways to overcome your barriers to rebuilding trust after the affair.

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How to Rebuild Trust

Now we’re going to get into specific ways that you can utilize to help you regain the trust in your spouse after the affair. Specifically, how the betrayed spouse can trust the cheater again.

Keep in mind that this requires a joint effort from both parties. The betrayed cannot trust without the cheaters help. In fact, you could say that the overwhelming lion’s share of the responsibility in this process lies in the hands of the cheater. Hence the challenge.

The cheater has to prove that they are trustworthy, but the betrayed spouse also has to allow them to do this. They have to open themselves up to the possibility to trust again.

If you’re already of the mind that there is no way that you will ever trust your cheating husband/wife again, then you either need to just stop right now, or make a radical shift in your thinking.

So let’s get started. First we will discuss some of the common ways that one can begin to rebuild trust, and then we will talk about how we were able to do so.

Laying the Groundwork

In terms of steps or groundwork to rebuilding trust after your spouse has had an affair, each of you has to get into the mindset of listening to the other for understanding rather than agreement. We touched on this before and it’s a good place to start.

Once you get that in place, then you have to hear each other out, even as unpleasant as it is, hear what they have to say.
What are Their Needs?

Once you hear what they have to say, then you can explore what needs are not being met. When you listen to the spouse who was cheated on and what they went through, listen to them in terms of not where to put the guilt, but what are their needs?

When you’re listening to what the cheater was doing and what they were looking for, you don't look at what they did wrong, though that is going to jump out at you. You want to listen for what they need. They definitely made the wrong choice in it, but the need is legitimate; how they met the need is the problem.

Then once you hear that need, then you can begin trying to rebuild the foundation.

Be Committed

I talked a little bit earlier about how typically it tends to be important to rebuild the foundation on honesty as opposed to trust, because when you first got married, you can trust them at their promises and everything was fine and dandy. Now you’ve got to show them.

You’ve got to show that you really are committed to the relationship. That’s where you get into making a commitment to the relationship and also starting that whole process of forgiveness.
Be Open to Forgiving

In some cases, you may not feel very forgiving. You may not want to forgive, but it’s going to be important to forgive. With an act of your will, to go ahead and make that choice that you’re going to forgive them eventually and that you are going to commit to the relationship.

More on forgiveness in a minute.

Spend Time Together

Once all those steps have been taken, then you have to start making time for each other.

Through our mentoring, it still blows my mind how there are a lot of couples who will spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars on therapy trying to get their relationship back on track and then they still try to maintain these super busy lives and they never make time for each other and that sets the stage for the whole problem to come up again. I can't believe it.

You have to set aside time for each other. One little simple thing that you would be surprised by how many people don't do is eating meals together. A simple act. It starts to create some time together, but many couples don't even sit down and have a meal together.

Sure, they'll order pizza and eat pizza or get the take out meal. That’s not the same as sitting down and having a meal together. It's going to be important for them to make time for each other.

Meals are a place to start, but there are other things to do to make time for each other, because if you do all this work on trying to
rebuild trust, you have got to have the both of you there and be emotionally available to make any headway with it.

Then you can start working on intimacy once you have trust, but I see these as the basic building blocks to get that trust.

**Building Our Own Foundation**

In our case, the most important thing we did, immediately, was started to spend more time together. Even though our schedules were very busy, instead of dividing and conquering things like we used to do, we just did them together.

We went to sporting events together. We went to the grocery store together – everything – instead of trying to save time and doing things separately. I really think that helped our relationship grow. It did more than just breed trust, too. It created a whole new connection between us as well.

**A Note About Forgiveness**

I mentioned forgiveness briefly above, and I’m going to get a little off track here, but one question that comes up a lot is whether or not forgiveness is a necessary predecessor to trust. Do you have to have forgiveness before you can trust?

That’s one of those which came first, the chicken or the egg things. Because both of them often go hand in hand.

I firmly believe that you’ve got to go ahead and start rebuilding the trust before the forgiveness. The reason for that, even though you are taking a leap of faith and starting to trust them, many times
you’re not even sure what you are going to forgive them for until after you have talked over the issues and you know what matters.

I know that sounds tough, but so many times the spouses want to go ahead and give a blanket pardon, or a blanket forgiveness to cover everything and then resentments build up. That becomes destructive to getting close to one another.

I would rather see you go ahead and start taking the steps to trusting each other, even if it’s just in small ways, and then when you are ready, to go ahead and deal with making the commitment in the form of forgiveness or whatever other type of commitment you’re looking for.

This might be a little counterintuitive to many people since forgiveness is often sited as a barrier to trust, but I think you have got to start with the trust and then get into the forgiveness.

Early on, it’s small ways, because you want to make sure you can trust the person with – for lack of a better term – objects and tangible things.

Can you trust them with the cell phones? Can you trust them with the bank account? Can you trust them to not take off in the night and go over to the lover’s house? Once those things start getting settled, then it feels safe enough to start taking the steps to trust them with your emotions. It’s at that point that you can go ahead and start dealing with the forgiveness.

I think you’re asking for a lot of heartache if you try to deal with the emotional issues before some of those other ones - the tangible ones - get settled.

I know that this may not make sense for all couples, but if you can’t trust, your husband or your wife to have a spare 20 dollars, because
you know what they are going to do with it, then you know what I am talking about.

It takes the small steps for the spouse to gain trust with their emotions. A betrayed spouse has a shield over them until they let them self go freely and trust that their spouse isn’t going to reject them. It takes a lot of time for this to happen and to be completely honest with yourself about your feelings.

At the same time, it can be hard for the person going through this to just differentiate between trusting and forgiving. Are you trusting, or are you forgiving?

I think it's just a feeling that you have, the more security you feel when you’re with the person, your heart isn't racing. It's just something that happens. You can't really label it as trust or forgiveness, but it just feels better.

Taking a look at the other side of the coin, one of our favorite authors, Dave Carder, who wrote “Torn Asunder” and “Close Calls,” takes the stance that you must begin the process of forgiveness first.

He feels that to the extent that you can forgive, you gain respect, and to the extent that you have respect, you gain trust.

It’s hard to argue with this opinion as well, so you really need to look within and try to determine what suits you best and go from there.

**How We Rebuilt the Trust**

So now we’re getting to the nuts and bolts of how we were able to restore the trust in our relationship.
To be clear, it takes a long time to completely trust a spouse after a betrayal, so I’m going to caution people not to believe that you can totally trust after a certain amount of time.

I think that in the back of your head you feel you need that safety net and that you still believe that this could happen again. The cheater (and betrayed) must have patience to endure the journey. They cannot rush the trusting process of the betrayed spouse in any way.

Also keep in mind that the trust that is rebuilt is different than what it was before the affair. It is more sober, less idealistic, less naïve, but more solid.

**Our Journey to Trusting Again**

What follows are the steps that worked for us in rebuilding trust in our relationship:

**No Contact.** The affair had to be over and there was to be no contact whatsoever with the other person. Enough said.

**Consistency.** In order to even begin trusting Doug, the affair had to be over and his behavior had to be consistent. During the affair, and probably for a sometime afterwards, his emotions and the way that he reacted toward me were not consistent.

One day he would be willing to work on the marriage; the next day he would be withdrawn. While that inconsistency was going on, I really could not begin to trust that he was involved in the marriage.
Until you get pretty consistent emotions from your cheating spouse, trust can’t begin.

When Doug started really showing effort to commit and to come back to the marriage and want to work on the marriage is when I was able to begin trusting my instincts and trusting him.

It’s consistency. What is lost from this whole mess is the person that we knew before the affair. When those behaviors started coming back again it made me feel comfortable.

**Actions.** Another primary factor that helped me trust Doug again was not his reassuring words, but his actions and his commitment.

There were so many things early after discovering the affair that Doug had told me that were inconsistent. Much of these details of the affair and his feelings were divulged to me in bits and pieces over time.

I had to see his actions and hear his words over and over again for them to start to internalize, and for me to begin trusting what he was saying.

I didn't really trust his words very much at all so I really focused on his actions.

He changed many of his habits that were prevalent during the affair. Silly things like walking away from me while he was on the phone or taking brief trips to the store to get a soda (at which time he was making phone calls to the other person). He started showing that he cared about me as much as he cared about the children.

I knew he loved the children and that he was here for them, but I needed to also witness that he wanted to be with me alone, that he
cared about my feelings, my safety, and that he wanted to take care of me as well as them.

I think a lot of times we do believe that our spouses are only here for the package; the children and the home. I needed Doug to display to me that I was just as important as the kids. It's so weird because, in the past, that never really bothered me.

I love that he was such an awesome father, so dedicated to his children, but it seemed like after the affair I was very attuned to how much he was paying attention to them versus me.

It’s terrible for a mother to say, but I felt that I needed that kind of reassurance that he was here for me as well as the kids.

Actions are important because you get to the point where you don't put as much trust into the words as you did at one time. Prior to the affair, you have a relationship based on trust, where you can say “just trust me.”

After the affair, that foundation has been damaged. You have got to find some kind of new foundation, and that foundation is usually one that’s some variation of honesty; either honesty in their day-to-day acts or the one who was cheated on, needs to have that reassurance that there have been changes and they are going to look for those changes.

Talk is cheap. You want to look for changes in their thinking as well as changes in their behavior. If all you do is get change in one area, it's not going to last very long.

One thing that Doug did just recently amplifies what I mean. This story sort of coincides with transparency, but I think it has more to do with his actions.

The other day, Doug was in the middle of cooking dinner and his cell phone rang. He went to pick it up, looked at the number that was
calling, and then set the phone down without answering it. I’m thinking, “Who the hell was that? Was that her?”

After a few minutes (with my heart racing, by the way), he went and picked up his phone and turned the speaker on and played the voice mail message that the person had left.

Then he said, “I knew that you are probably wondering who the call was, so I figured you would want to hear the message.”

He was absolutely right, and I was so happy and relieved that he thought to do that on his own. One more trust notch was added to his belt!

By the way, it was not her. Whew!

**Transparency.** Every expert on Earth talks a lot about this. It’s allowing you to see the phone records, emails, Facebook, knowing the cheater’s whereabouts, and everything else. This is a good idea, but it’s not something that I would say is a predictor that an affair is not going on or that there’s other ways to continue the affair.

Initially, it was my safety net. I checked Doug’s phone every day. It was just something that I had to do. Then I got to the point where I thought that there is always another phone; there are other ways he could get a hold of her.

How much can I control the situation? How much time am I wasting doing this and how much stress and anxiety am I creating for myself by engaging in this activity?

I finally let it go. But at the beginning, it was more of a safety net for me. But, as I said, there are always other ways. You can’t trust your spouse just because you don’t see the lover’s phone number on their call logs.
Transparency is more than just not lying; it’s more than giving up phone records, letting your spouse know where you’re at, and things like that. It’s also communicating. Expressing feelings. Being honest about what you are doing, your feelings and your needs.

Many betrayed spouses will experience discrepancies when the cheater does begin communicating about the affair. They will find that the cheater’s answers are inconsistent. One day, they tell you this and then a week later, the story changes. That makes us doubt our gut, our choices, ourselves; therefore, we can’t trust you.

The cheater needs to be honest in their answers and confessions even if they’re hurtful. As hard as it is to handle what they are telling you and the resulting emotions, the cheater must be honest, because as the inconsistencies in the answers goes on and on, it is harder to begin trusting your spouse. You can’t trust. That’s why the questioning keeps going on and on, because every time you ask it, you get a different answer. You need the consistency from your spouse; the security.

I do realize though, that the cheating spouse is in a certain state of mind while they’re in an affair and in a different state of mind when they’re out of the affair and sometimes remembering things, details and dates, is difficult and can’t be helped. They’re all jumbled. But that jumbled mess breeds mistrust for a while until all that gets hashed out.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention other ways for the cheater to be transparent. They include:

- Being attentive you your spouse’s emotions, feelings, wants and needs.
- Offering reassurance proactively. The hurt spouse is going to go through a whirlwind of emotions for a long time and any little thing might trigger some mistrust. Reassurance can be as
simple as keeping your cell phone in plain sight, calling if you’re going to be late or sharing emails.

- Be caring and supportive. Show intimacy and offer random acts of kindness. Stand by your spouse in times of emotional turmoil. Offer your unconditional support when needed.
- Show stability. Be predictable in every aspect of your life – emotionally, financially and in your day-to-day activities. This doesn’t mean you can’t let lose and be spontaneous with your spouse though.

The cheater needs to show their spouse that they are 100% committed to the marriage and that they will do whatever it takes, no holds barred, to prove that. The cheater should ask their spouse what they can do to win back the trust again, and do anything their spouse identifies.

If the cheater balks or hesitates at anything that is asked for their cooperation on, they will send an instant unspoken, but very strong message that they are setting boundaries. Doing so leaves the betrayed spouse wondering as to what is beyond that boundary.

It makes the betrayed feel that there are still secrets that are being hidden from them. The cheater must forget about privacy or control, as marriage is not about privacy or secrecy or control. It is about sharing your lives and working to satisfy each other's needs.

**Be Yourself.** One thing that we did for a while, that hindered trust in our recovery, was that we both were walking and talking on eggshells. I think that we both believed that we needed to change our behavior so much that we became different people.

It was hard for me sometimes to see Doug acting differently than he had before. Sure, some changes or adjustments were needed, but I
don’t think it was us personally that needed to act different. I think we needed to act different within our relationship.

So sometimes when he would react a certain way that was not who I remembered him being, that scared me. Again, I stopped trusting myself. I wondered, “Is that the way he acted with her? Is that a new person? Is that the person he wanted to be or is that the person he’s always been?” Really stupid things.

As Doug also saw how I was acting unlike myself, he didn’t have that security in me either. I know he said to himself, “She’s changed, but did I really need for her to change?”

You really need to focus on changing your relationship more than changing your personalities.

Besides, can you really even change your personality? Not really. But you try. You try, and it’s fake and it’s uncomfortable.

You just don’t trust them. It takes a long time to feel comfortable being yourself again around your spouse. For so long, I tried to be what I thought Doug wanted me to be.

And I know that there were things about Doug that I complained about and he tried to be that person also. Finally we started going back to the way we really were. We love each other the way we were. It was our relationship that we didn’t love.

**Knowing Why.** One of the most significant reasons why I trust Doug again is because together we took the time to discover why he had the affair. Then we both made the changes necessary in our marriage to ensure it doesn’t happen again.
I doubt very seriously I could trust again if we hadn’t together discovered why it happened in the first place and then made the necessary changes in our relationship.

This wasn’t an easy process, nor was it a short one. This took months of heart to heart talks, lots of pain and lots of tears. But it was worth it.

The real reasons for the affair are nestled within the cheater’s inner self, and require the cheater to take a deep and honest look within to see what really made them vulnerable to an affair. When the cheater can discover the real root causes and make the appropriate changes the betrayed spouse will have a solid reason to trust again.

**Deal With It.** The final thing that helped, and as difficult as it was for me, it was just as difficult for Doug, was to see my pain, deal with my questions and go through this day after day. All the while he would reassure me by saying, “I'm not leaving; I'm committed, I'm going to be with you forever.”

He didn't say it just once; he had to tell me it a lot. It was vital. Just because a cheater says something once doesn't mean that your spouse is going to believe it. The betrayed spouse needs to hear it over and over again. It has to counteract all the negative things that were said during the affair.

I know this sort of contradicts what I said earlier about not trusting his words, but as you begin to trust your spouse in little bits at a time, these words can serve to compound your spouse’s trust building efforts.
Educate Yourself. This entails not only gaining knowledge about affairs and their dynamics, but also the cheater (and betrayed) needs to learn more about themselves and why they did the things they did.

Doug resisted this process for a period of time and it certainly hindered the trust process. Not until he decided to seek knowledge from books and courses and to learn by looking within did the process really accelerate.

Trust Can Be A Fragile House of Cards

For a period of time both during and after trust has been rebuilt, it remains a fragile, fragile house of cards. It’s very difficult to rebuild the trust and it can certainly be broken and destroyed very, very easily.

Obviously, this house of cards would be blown away should the affair reignite or there are new episodes of lying or deception. However, there are also a variety of “mistrust triggers” that can pop up from now and then, that though perhaps innocent, might cause there to be mistrust again. The betrayed spouse is very much attuned to these triggers.

Some of them include:

Changing Habits. The cheater starts to do things that they normally haven't done during the trust building process. This might include going out more or maybe spending more time on the computer.

Sometimes if Doug is in the office on the computer late at night, my heart starts to race; I start feeling uneasy. If he’s on the phone for a long period of time and I don't know who he is talking to, that bothers me.
Another thing that bugs me is if he gets up out of bed in the middle of the night. I don't want him to do that!

It could be anything. Calling out women's names while he is dreaming, you know. (Kidding)

**Withdrawing.** It may be something that is totally not related to the other man or woman, but if the cheater doesn’t want to talk as much or doesn’t seem to want to spend as much time together, the hurt spouse might start feeling mistrust again.

**Being Angry or Argumentative.** Sure it’s okay to get angry, but the reason had better be darn good. Showing these emotions at the drop of a hat will make me wonder that’s something is going on.

**Making Accusations.** This one can go both ways. If either one of you make unfair or unjust accusations of the other, it can tear down the trust between the two of you.

**Selfish Demands.** Marriage means teamwork. It means doing your best to meet the needs of the other. Having selfish demands shows the other that your needs are more important than theirs and inhibit trust.

**Dishonesty.** I state this one separately because I wanted to stress that dishonesty isn’t just about lying with respect to the affair. It also entails honesty in everything you say and do. If a cheater lies about something such as why they were not home when they said they would be, it makes us wonder what else he/she has lied about.

**Reverting Back to Old Behaviors.** There is an acronym that we came across during our trust building process that might be of use to you regarding any type of behavior that you’re scared that the cheater will get back into.

**H.A.L.T** is an acronym that stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired.
Most relapses towards old behaviors will involve one of those, if not a combination of each.

**Hunger** – takes in any sort of craving, because when the body is hungry, it might be hungry for sex, hungry for food, hungry for excitement. A lot of times the body knows it is hungry and it doesn't care for what. Boredom or being in a rut would fall into this category as well. There is high risk in these cases.

**Angry** – when couples have a fight and somebody starts to pull away and they’re mad. That's not a good one.

**Lonely** – it’s late at night or their out of town away from their spouse, essentially where you find yourself by yourself. Again, you're running high risk.

**Tired** – a lot of times when you just get tired and you’re at the end of your rope and there’s too much going on, you’re vulnerable to getting back into your old ways.

**So You Feel That You Will Never Be Able To Trust Again**

I have talked to a lot of different couples through email, mentoring and blog comments and some of these couples have gone three, four, five years after an affair and they still have not come to a point where they can trust. They say that they just don't think that they can ever trust their spouse again.

What can they possibly do to get over that hurdle this late in the process?

When those situations happen, a lot of times the couple has made the decision to continue the relationship and just maintain the peace rather than get honest.
For a lot of couples out there, maintaining peace in the home is a higher priority than honesty. I can understand a lot of people don't like conflict in the home, but if you’re going to have real intimacy that you can count on, you’re going to have to have the honesty. It’s got to be a priority.

Many times when you compromise and you go ahead and you have this unspoken agreement, “Let’s not bring anything up, let’s just put it behind us,” it just sits there and smolders. It's never really settled.

Eventually you’re going to have to come back and face it, whether it’s the issues that triggered it or your fears that it could happen again or the uncertainty of just having some loose ends that were never tied up.

But it goes even further. In many of the cases of those who have said that they will never trust again I hear such things as, “My spouse is doing all the right things. We’ve reconnected. We get along better than we have ever gotten along before, she/he's trying as hard as she/he can,” and yet they still say, “I just don't think I can ever trust him again.”

Part of what is happening is that the couple is just going through the motions and part of it is that they still have a barrier up. They’re still programming themselves to hide behind it. They have not let their wall down.

Often they are too afraid to tear down the wall. It's more of a defense mechanism. “If I start trusting completely, then I won’t see the signs, I won't let him take advantage of me again.” If they tell themselves, “I will never trust him again,” they feel that they are always watching, just in case.

This is understandable, but if you fall into this category then you’re literally faced with a choice. You can either keep your spouse at
arm's length and play it safe, or you let them in and run the risk of being hurt.

**You can do one or the other; you can't do both.**

When you try to do both, all you do is put up a barrier that you never feel close with your spouse again - just because you want to play it safe. That is a dangerous thing.

It’s one thing if there is a reason to be afraid (going back to the safety issue) – guns, choking – that's a whole different ball game. But assuming it's just a matter of emotional safety, then you have got to decide, “What’s more important, for me to feel safe or for us to have love?”

Yes, when you love someone you are taking a risk and letting them come back into your heart, much like inviting somebody into your home. Yeah, they may put their feet on the furniture, but that’s one of the risks that you take. The thing is, when they are there in the house, you have somebody to share things with.

The betrayed spouse should make a choice. That’s as simple as it gets.

It's not a pleasant thing for a lot of people, but those kinds of choices do have to be made.

For me this was a difficult concept to overcome.

I felt that I was very naive before and I think that’s just my personality. I trusted most people. I wondered if that was a good trait to have.

After the affair, I thought that maybe I shouldn't be so trusting and believe that everyone has good intentions and so forth. I basically put a wall up so I wouldn't get hurt again, not just by Doug, but anyone else who tried to take advantage of my good nature and naivety.
To trust someone again is a huge step and the fear of being hurt again is a big obstacle. But sometimes you just need to go through it and decide to do it. You can’t hold back. You’re either going to jump in with both feet, or you’re going to live your life always afraid.

I think it was very hard for me because of the trauma that I endured, but I came to the point where I said, “I’m going to do this. I’m going to trust myself again and I’m going to trust Doug.”

It’s understandable to want the promise that an affair is not going to happen again. I don’t think anyone can give you a 100% for sure promise it won’t happen, but you can put everything in place to prevent it from happening again.

Affairs happen to some of the best families. Regardless of your religious beliefs, your amount of money, the position you have in society, coming from a good family - it can happen. Nothing is a sure thing.

**How Do You Know When It’s time to Trust Again?**

Many people ask when they will know it is time to trust their partner again. There is no cookie-cutter way to answer this other than to say that you will know. You will feel it in your head and your heart.

The thing to remember is that trusting again is solely up to you and should not be rushed. It may not even seem like a decision at all as it will come naturally as a result of using many of the ideas that we have set forth in this book.

Trusting again comes slowly and in small bits and can be very fragile. To be quite clear, trust cannot happen without tremendous effort from the cheater.
Remember to trust your gut and don’t be afraid to express how you feel, when you feel it. Communicate with your spouse whenever suspicions or mistrust triggers surface.

A survey we conducted on our blog showed that rebuilding trust was considered the number one struggle people are dealing with after an affair by an overwhelming margin, which to me proves that it is the highest hurdle in the whole affair recovery process.

We hope that we have given you some valuable ideas on ways to more easily get over this hurdle so that your journey becomes a bit easier. Use the ideas and when you are ready, your heart will open and you will be able to trust again.
Exercises: Rebuilding Trust in Your Spouse

Describe the pain that has resulted from your spouse’s violation of trust. At some point you must express this pain to the cheater.

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Both of you need to take a look at your needs within your marriage. What needs are not currently being met? Make a list of what you want from each other. (This can be as simple as telling your spouse how good they look or to call your spouse during the day. They can also be somewhat more difficult like, going to therapy or ending contact with the other person.)

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Spending time together is very important. What are some ways that you can increase the amount and quality or time that you are with each other?

What are some ways that your spouse shows inconsistencies in their actions and emotions after the affair?
What is your definition of transparency?

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How does transparency work for you? For example, how does transparency work for you when you share with each other? How is the way you communicate with each other meaningful to your relationship?

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List the ways that you can be transparent with each other.

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How might you recognize if transparency diminishes?
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How might you address a situation where one of you stops being transparent?
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Think of ways that you stopped being yourself as a result of the affair.
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What are some ways you can change your relationship instead of changing yourself?

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What is the story of the affair? In other words, why did it happen?

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Describe the pain that you felt as a result of the affair. Either read aloud to the cheating spouse, or let them read it.

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What are some of your “mistrust triggers” that would cause you to not trust your spouse?

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What are some specific methods for developing trust in your relationship that you have found might be effective in this book?

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Develop a statement of commitment to each other based on the ideas outlined in this book.

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About the Authors

We are Linda and Doug and we’re just a normal couple who have been able to survive infidelity and go on to create a much stronger and more intimate marriage.

It’s taken a lot of hard work and effort along the way, but we feel closer now than we ever have after almost three decades of marriage.

You may wonder why we choose to not put our last names out there, but it’s simply to protect the privacy of ourselves and our family and friends.

Linda is a teacher by trade, and Doug is in sales and marketing. When we’re not working, you’ll find us at one of our three kids’ sporting events or their other extracurricular activities. We also blog about our affair recovery experiences at Emotional Affair Journey and conduct mentoring sessions with other individuals and couples.

Writing the blog and being mentors have provided wonderful learning and growth experiences for us both and we truly enjoy trying to help others survive infidelity.

Our plan is for this book to be just one of several highly targeted books on affair recovery. We hope that you have enjoyed it and that the information we have provided will be of benefit to you.

Thank you once again for allowing us to share our experiences in rebuilding trust after an affair. We look forward to hearing from you, and wish you the very best that life can offer!
Selected Resources

On this page you will find a variety of resources that deal primarily with rebuilding trust after an affair. However, some resources will also deal with other areas of infidelity or marriage.

Though certainly not all inclusive, these resources should give you a significant amount of beneficial information.

In every instance we have personally read the book or course or have spent a significant amount of time reading the website.

Books and Courses

*Not Just Friends: Rebuilding Trust and Recovering Your Sanity after Infidelity* by Shirley Glass. One of the best books we’ve read on infidelity without a doubt.

*After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust When a Partner Has Been Unfaithful* by Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D. This book has some significant information with respect to rebuilding trust.

*Torn Asunder: Recovering from an Extramarital Affair* by Dave Carder. Dave’s book is one of our all-time favorites and has a lot of information regarding trust. We suggest you check out the companion workbook as well.

*Surviving an Affair* by Willard Harley. A practical guide to understanding and surviving every aspect of infidelity—from the beginning of an affair through the restoration of the marriage. Harley claims his methods are very successful.
Love Must Be Tough by James C. Dobson. This book discusses how one must always maintain their dignity and confidence regardless of what the relationship throws his/her way. He offers a plan to respect yourself and others and to bring those you love closer to you.

My Husband's Affair Became the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Me by Anne Bercht. Anne and her husband’s personal journey in recovering from infidelity. More of a recounting of the story of the affair, but does offer helpful and practical suggestions.

First Aid for the Betrayed by Richard Alan. Another book from someone who has survived infidelity. This time from a man’s perspective. Richard doesn’t pull any punches in this book.

Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity by Gary Shriver and Mona Shriver. Gary and Mona write how they were able to rebuild trust and survive an affair that affected their own lives. We’ve read the book and we’ve interviewed them and we really like their perspective on things.

“How to Survive an Affair” by Dr. Frank Gunzburg. One of the most comprehensive resources we have used. Very in depth system with lots of great advice for both the victim and the cheating spouse. Has a significant amount of material dedicated to rebuilding trust.

“Relationship Trust Turnaround” by Susie and Otto Collins. If you listened to the interview we did with them, you know they have a lot of valuable stuff to say. A good source for learning how to rebuild trust after an affair.

Websites

Free From the Affair” was probably the first book Linda read after D-day.

SurviveYourPartnersAffair.com – Our good friend and therapist Jeff Murrah’s blog where he has helpful articles about infidelity and coping with affairs.

Survivinginfidelity.net – Infidelity forums and articles.

HopeAndHealing.us – Gary and Mona Shriver’s site offering various books, recordings and other resources. They also conduct periodic weekend intensives for couples recovering from infidelity.

Talkaboutmarriage.com – Many forums on all aspects of marriage.

Psychologytoday.com – Lots of articles on infidelity and rebuilding trust written by professional therapists and psychologists.

Marriagebuilders.com – Dr. Willard Harley’s site is chock full of articles, audios and forums.

SmartMarriages.com – Huge resource site for almost everything related to marriage and infidelity.

American Psychological Association – Psychologist locator.

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy – Therapist locator and informational articles pertaining to various psychological disorders and subjects.