

Cottonwood Counseling Center

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The Road to Recovery: A Practical and Proven Guide When Trust is Broken

This is a guide. The amount of time it takes to heal broken trust is different for every couple. This roadmap is *not* meant to increase shame. Shame can fuel addictive patterns. A key to recovery is to understand one's shame and learn to understand that choosing to engage in compulsive sexual behavior is a harmful and unhealthy coping strategy. It does not mean that those who engage in these recurring patterns are bad people.

This guide is meant as a serious tool that is the result of helping many, many, people through this process. When clients cut corners with this guide, do it for a week or so, or think "This does not apply to me," these are the clients that are unable to build lasting trust.

Some of the factors that can increase the time it takes to build trust are:

1. The amount, duration, and severity of the lying/hiding that has taken place.
2. The severity of the breach in the injured partner's eyes (not the injurer's point of view).
3. How willing, or not, the injurer is to lead out in their own therapy? How motivated they are to enter a focused *discipline of* recovery? Does the injurer go to a recovery group on their own— without being asked? Does the injurer engage and encourage their partner to go to couples therapy?
4. Does the injurer police himself or herself? And do they learn to proactively share with their partner regularly what they are doing to build trust and how the process is going, and how they are feeling about it emotionally? Is the injurer still secretive about any part of their life?

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I receive life from all around me: To all around me I give life

Cotter: Prayer in the Morning

The following is a non-exhaustive list of behaviors, the trail, or road if you will, to the destination of a trusting, emotionally safe, and connected relationship.

- A. A commitment, formally spoken from the injurer to stop lying to their partner for the rest of their life.
- B. An ongoing reflection of feelings *from* the injuring partner to the injured partner that the hurt they have caused their partner **deeply** saddens them and causes remorse. *Your partner needs to see that their pain hurts you.*
- C. The injuring partner takes over policing his or her own behavior. This is not their partner's job. Leaving this job to your partner conveys to them that protecting your partner is not important to you. Exploring willingly with your partner and therapist how to police your own behavior.
- D. Be willing to do whatever it may take to build trust. Anything less tells your partner they are just not as important as your own comfort.

Examples of what I have personally seen injurers willing to do that have been critical factors in building back trust are:

- Leave their job if the affair or one nightstand, or triggering source is present*
- Move away from their affair*
- Cut off ties with anyone who may compromise trust*

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- Give up a computer, cell phone, cable service etc.
- Do multiple forms of therapy—individual, group, and couples— as needed to aid in recovery
- Refrain from the attitude: “ I can do this on my own, or it won't happen again, or I do not need a group, or that does not work for me.” Injurers need to realize and admit to themselves that if, “I could have stopped on my own I would have a long time ago.” Make your behavior speak rather than your words.
- Search, with the help of a qualified therapist, for answers as to why you act out sexually, especially when you knew it would devastate your partner! Without a cohesive narrative as to why this happened, how can you prevent it in the future, or assure your partner that you can prevent this from happening again?
- Learn to monitor your shame experiences. **Shame is one of the most prevalent causes of wanting to escape, numb, and retreat into old patterns of unhealthy coping.** One needs to come, eventually, to a place where you realize that you are not a bad human being (you may know this intellectually but you must be able to feel and live it) and that you are worthy of love and acceptance. you also need to realize that your coping with life by using compulsive/out of control sexual behavior will eventually destroy you and you're important relationships.

How can I possibly achieve all this?

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- a. Work (like your life depends on it) a dedicated discipline of recovery for your compulsive sexual behavior and,
- b. Work (because your relationship does depends on it) a dedicated form of therapy on your relationship.

If these two goals are not the most important goals of your life building back trust will probably not be successful.

A. Injuring partner needs to lead in their recovery by proactively engaging their partner in couples therapy (a therapy that is non-shaming) and personal group work such as SAA or other groups that stress vulnerability and high accountability.

B. Not be too concerned about how long recovery will take. It takes as long as it takes. And **not being impatient** with your partner when they ask questions or continue to worry or doubt or have a hard time when you are away, or they are not willing to have sex, or one day you feel like things are getting better and the next day you wonder what happened. Post traumatic stress is normal after deep breaches of trust and does not necessarily improve in a linear fashion.

Be willing to listen and lean into your partner emotionally whenever you sense them pull away. Or make time to listen and explore your partner's feelings during the week. You need to lead this effort. Learn to allow them to be upset with you. This sends a positive message to your partner that their feelings in the moment are more important to you than your comfort in those moments. Learn to take the hit without resentment or blame.

C. How long must I do all these things? Forever. Make it a lifestyle.

D. Lastly, along with your “Why” (knowing what is underneath, what drives you to break trust even though you know it will hurt your partner) formally present a

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disclosure of your acting out behaviors to your partner. This should not be done right away and should be discussed with your therapist and your partner. *Not all partners want to hear about every detail. Others need a comprehensive disclosure.*

E. Omitting or “forgetting” behaviors that your partner finds out about later or that your partner has to pry out of you will result in trust being broken again and can sabotage healing and even end some relationships. (refer back to item number 1.)

Notes: