

You've Just Learned About An Affair

Jim Hutt, Ph.D.

If the most difficult words to hear are “you’ve got cancer,” the next most jolting sentence might be “I’ve been having an affair.” Your head spins, emotions may erupt, your emotional earth has essentially been forever shifted on its axis. Dreams are shattered, the partner or spouse you thought you knew is now a stranger, and the wound you feel is so deep like you’ll bleed forever. The betrayal seems unfathomable, the hurt indescribable, and the marital ship now navigates without a rudder.

In this altered reality, this bad dream from which you can only hope you’ll awaken, the feelings of devastation are palpable, the doubt ever-present, and need for relief genuinely intense, it is very difficult to know just what to do. You may or may not tell your friends and family, and when and if you do, for every three people in whom you confide you are granted four opinions, some conflicting.

This is a particularly delicate moment in what now marks the beginning of the recovery process from an infidelity for both you and the offending/injuring partner. It’s delicate for several reasons, but I’m only going to discuss one of them in this article, and it is this: Make no decisions about the relationship at this stage of infidelity recovery.

Here is what that means:

1. You will be told by some to leave the relationship and get a divorce;
2. You will be told to stay and work it out;
3. You may be told to punish him/her;
4. You may be thinking, or have been told, to have your own affair;

For now, simply stay put. Calling a family law attorney and beginning the divorce process before the dust has settled from this domestic explosion often ends up heaping another regret on top of the current one. Remember: making no decision about the disposition of the marriage AT THIS STAGE does not mean you have decided to never leave.

Why am I advising no decisions about those important matters in particular? Because you are highly emotionally activated. Without going in to great detail here ([because you can see more detail in my previous article](#)), the reason is because emotional reactivity prevents or inhibits logical, thoughtful thinking. Therefore, if you are not thinking logically and thoughtfully, the odds of making a decision might later regret skyrocket.

Yes, you probably said to yourself and your partner an affair was “a deal breaker,” as if it was written in stone. However, some people find themselves re-evaluating carved-in-stone positions for a variety of reasons. If you re-evaluate and still decide it’s a deal breaker over time, then fine. There is no implied or explicit moral imperative about divorce in this message whatsoever.

But you’re in pain, lots of pain, and you want relief. The limbic brain will do almost anything to get that relief because that’s the way it’s wired. Sometimes the avenue of relief we choose ends up causing more pain, unintended pain. While there may be an immediate reduction in pain, it also may be short lived. You don’t need that. Instead, you need to create a solid, long lasting relief you can trust. Right now, trusting yourself is important, as trust in general has taken a huge hit. However, bad decisions tend to increase doubt in ourselves, and reduce trust in our ability go forward and be happy again.

There are many other ways to relieve some of the initial pain of your partner/spouse’s affair, and you can find them if you have a skilled professional help you. Otherwise, let the dust settle, and read Peggy Vaughan’s book, [The Monogamy Myth](#), which you will find very helpful, before you make a life changing decision. Regain your emotional equilibrium before you make any major decisions.

In addition, you also might consider attending [Brian and Ann Bercht’s workshops](#) for people in the earlier stages of infidelity recovery.

© 2009 Jim Hutt, Ph.D., MFT & CounselorLink.com