

# OVERCOMING SEXUAL BETRAYAL

## HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL BETRAYAL?

- People whose parents were unfaithful in their marriage are twice as likely to cheat on their own spouse (this is tied to generational sin).
- 15% of married women and 25% of married men have had physical extramarital affairs.
- 35% of married women and 45% of married men have had non-physical extramarital affairs. These may include: emotional, virtual, sexting, etc.

## PREDICTORS OF SEXUAL BETRAYAL

- Pornography or Sex Addiction in either partner is highly likely to lead to physical extramarital affairs.
- Early childhood trauma, unresolved trauma.
- Relational dissatisfaction, personal dissatisfaction and low self-esteem are causes of most extramarital affairs.
- Likelihood of infidelity increases with relational dysfunctions such as: conflict avoidance and fear of intimacy.
- Major life transitions such as: parenthood, empty nesters, major life changes, and milestone birthdays.
- Individuals who grew up in chaotic and unstable environments will create dysfunction unconsciously to mimic what is familiar by acting out in extramarital affairs.

## TYPES OF SEXUAL BETRAYAL

- Any form of lust.
- Emotional affairs.
- Physical/sexual affairs.
- Masturbation/Ejaculation (with or without a visual/audio stimulant).
- Sexting.
- Hosting or visiting a profile on any dating/hook-up or subscription site that caters to sexually explicit photos (even if not actual porn).
- Abusing social media accounts to obtain sexually suggestive images and videos.
- Abusing day to day objects or locations to stimulate pleasure (ex. the gym, seductive album covers, magazine aisles in the grocery stores, etc.).

- One-night stands, random hook ups.
- Strip clubs, massage parlors, escorts/prostitution.
- Filming your spouse without consent, voyeurism.
- Anything sexual in nature that goes against the covenant of marriage, that one spouse does in secret out of shame, guilt or fear of the other spouse finding out.

## WHAT IT TAKES TO RECOVER FROM SEXUAL BETRAYAL

### IF YOU ARE THE BETRAYING PARTNER:

1. **Confess everything at once.** The whole truth will come out eventually and if it doesn't come out all at once you will continue to re-traumatize your spouse, which causes more psychological and emotional damage and reduces the likelihood of reconciliation. During the disclosure, the betrayed partner gets to decide when they want to hear it, how much they want to hear, when the conversation is over, and they get the right to have any questions they ask answered. The betrayed partner maintains these rights for all productive follow up conversations while moving forward towards healing.

- 39.8% confessed to inform their partner they are unhappy.
- 25% of cheaters choose to confess to their partners.
- 25% of cheaters only confess because they got caught.
- Married cheaters are more likely to wait 6 months or longer to confess.
- Non-married cheaters are 52.4% more likely to confess within the first week.

2. **Repent and take action.** Take responsibility for your actions and your recovery. Initiate this process by doing the following:
  - Get right with God. Make him your priority. (Most men smother their wives in effort to prove their regret and their commitment to make it right. This is typically not effective for most Christian women. Most women would want their Christian husbands to renew their relationship with God and take their regrets and insecurities to him; seek his wisdom and discernment; not their's.
  - Do not justify your actions or make excuses (this is a death sentence).
  - Cut all ties with individuals involved in your betrayal, including friends or family members who were involved. (Ex. this could be a brother who paid for the prostitute or even the prostitute herself. If the affair partner was someone at work, it's time for a new job.
  - Continue to "clean house" in additional ways if necessary:
    - Obtain a new phone number, new email, close social media/dating/pornography accounts.
    - Give spouse all passwords for remaining accounts (all devices, banking, email, medical, etc.).
    - Trash all items of pornographic nature (even women's magazines, catalogs or album or movie cases with sexual images on them).
    - Avoid places that trigger temptation (the gym, the beach, Victoria's Secret).
    - Evaluate people, places, practices, and commitments in your life that are not edifying or conducive to restoring and developing a healthy marriage and

remove them. (This could be poker night with the guys, hanging out at bars, or your sister's flirty best friend, vulgar music or shows, etc.).

- Install accountability software on your devices.
- Join a Biblically based Sex Addiction recovery group.
- Seek professional counseling to explore the root issue (usually early childhood trauma). This step is key to overcoming Sexual Addiction. You must do it whole heartedly and for yourself, not for your spouse or your marriage. If you are not motivated by your own convictions to seek healing, you will relapse quickly the next time you have a negative incident in your relationship and the cycle will continue.
- Eventually seek marital counseling when your spouse is ready.
- Get a wise, spiritually mature Christian mentor/accountability partner. Preferably one who knows the struggle you're in and has had continued victory over it.
- Tell one or two trusted, mature, and Godly friends (though often resisted by men betrayers, it immediately gives the wife a sense of validation and comfort knowing she doesn't have to harbor her betrayal in secret and that her spouse risked his reputation with his friend to be transparent.) Ask them to be praying for your recovery and your spouse's recovery.
- Get a full STD/STI test and show your spouse the results.
- Refrain from alcohol and drugs, indefinitely. You need a complete renewing of the mind that is void of all addictive substances and habits.
- Set firm boundaries for yourself and ask your spouse for their input (ex. No texting/calling/emailing women of the opposite sex, no alone time with the opposite sex, devices remain out and available on the counter not in your pocket, etc.).
- Do not make grandiose promises or declarations to your spouse. Just put your head down, shut your mouth and do the work. Your actions will speak for themselves.
- Finally, ask your spouse what else you could do to ease their insecurities and show you are committed to restoration.

3. **Reconcile.** To do this correctly means your life will look 180% different than it did. This may take years to establish new habits, priorities, and behaviors, but it is necessary.

- Give your spouse the space to grieve but also be available if they want your company.
- A common theme is after the betrayer confesses and starts healing from their addiction, they immediately feel better not having to harbor the burdens of their secrets any longer. Meanwhile, the betrayed partner continues to feel utterly destroyed, and are just beginning to wrap their head around everything. This can cause further resentment and disconnect as the betrayed partner is left suffering and broken as collateral damage. As the betrayer in this scenario, be sensitive to your spouse's pain and do not try to fix it, minimize it or rush it. One of the best things you can do for your hurting spouse is sit with them in their grief and let them be sad, angry, numb, in your company (unless they don't want you there). Ask if you can hold them, make them tea, get them tissues, or if they want to talk. If they don't want to talk, just sit with them. Be present when they need you and show them you are committed.
- Expect a rollercoaster of anger, sadness, numbness, even requests to be held or have sex, as everyone grieves in different ways and at their own pace.
- Let the betrayed partner call the shots regarding timeline and restoration. The job of the betrayer here is to do whatever the betrayed partner requests. This includes where the

betrayal will live or stay, how much time they want to spend with them, when they want to be intimate, when they are ready to date each other again, etc.

## **IF YOU ARE THE BETRAYED PARTNER:**

### **1. Upon First Finding Out – Establish safety.**

- If you are fearful for your life, your children's lives or in any potential danger from your spouse or their affair partner, seek help immediately. Retreat to a friend or family members house, file a police report, if necessary, a protection order.
- If you are feeling like you may cause harm to yourself, or others seek help immediately. Call the police for assistance and a trusted friend or family member. Do not be alone for at least 72 hours until the last instance of suicidal ideation or causing harm to another has occurred and you've been cleared by a qualified physician.
- Make sure you have all the facts. Be careful not to make assumptions too quickly.
- Call a certified professional who is both spiritually mature and qualified to mediate a disclosure. Do not attempt to have this without the third party. If you do not have immediate access to a certified sex addiction counselor or a betrayal trauma therapist, the next best alternative would be trusted members of the church board who knows you both and will remain unbiased and compassionate to both your needs but also firm in scriptural truths.
- Know you have the right to hear your spouses' entire disclosure of betrayals, have any questions you have be answered, declare when you talk about and for how long and what happens next as far as where they stay, where you stay, etc.
- Keep all conversation as productive as possible. Try not to ask questions that will cause you more harm than good (ex. details about what the other person looked like), just what you need to know to fully understand and process the whole situation so you can move towards forgiveness.
- While with the third-party mediator, establish some guidelines and boundaries for the next few days to weeks ahead. (Ex. They will stay at their friends' house or sleep on the couch, they are not allowed to initiate any physical contact with you, etc.) You have the right to change these as you need to in effort to feel safe enough to grieve.

### **2. Be Mindful of the Enemy and Practice Intentional Self Care**

- Get a qualified and spiritually mature betrayal trauma counselor or coach to guide you through your healing journey and build you up in biblical truths and God's promises.
- Tell only friends and family that will pray for you and your spouse and remain unconditionally loving and unbiased to you both.
- Surround yourself with only what is good, noble, and pure. (Worship music, feel good movies, scriptures, prayer journaling, baths and other self-care activities, encouraging people, etc.).
- Avoid alcohol and drugs, or other addictive substances or habits. This includes emotional eating, over exercising and excessive social media usage. Keep your focus on moving forward in a healthy balanced manner, with a clear mind and strong desire for restoration. Self-medicating only leads to self-destruction.
- Visit your PCP for a full STD/STI test.

- Be aware of your mental health and mood, there is no shame in asking for medication to help manage depression or PTSD. It is moments such as these that these medications were created.
- Allow yourself time to grieve and be still with the Lord. Filling your schedule with distractions so you don't have to think about it will eventually backfire.
- Pray for God's truths to fill your soul and quiet the lies of the enemy.
- Be aware of bitterness, hatred, and resentment. It festers quickly and will eliminate your motivation to forgive. This is exactly what the enemy wants. Instead, counter with prayers for God to soften your heart to a.) want to forgive or, if you're ready b) forgive your spouse and the others involved.
- Set boundaries for yourself, your friends and family, your spouse. (Ex. If your in-laws insist on trying to tell you you're overreacting, let them know you love them, but you will be taking a break from talking to them for a while. If your best friend keeps running down your spouse and telling you to just move on, let them know you only want to hear encouragement and if you need their advice, you will ask for it.)
- Eat. Do not forget to eat.
- You are the most valuable thing you can ever invest in. So do it. Get massages, take naps, invest in professional help for your healing, buy healthy foods. Be kind to yourself. Just because your spouse failed to value you, doesn't mean you have to.

### **3. Seek God First and Have Self Respect**

- Only God can renew your mind, spirit, and soul. Only God knows your pain like you know your pain.
- Pray for God to reveal areas in you that need healing in addition to your broken heart.
- Go to church. Be around believers. Invest in edifying friendships.
- Resist the urge to obsess over what your spouse is doing. Take instances like these to God and give him full control to restore your marriage and protect you from further betrayal.
- Avoid checking up on your spouse. What they are doing in right now doesn't concern you. If they are doing the work, you will see it in their transformation. Checking up on them to verify their story is not an alternative to trust.

### **4. Give it Time but Don't Stick Your Head in the Sand**

- Think of recovering from a betrayal as a very hilly marathon. Be patient with yourself and your spouse. Seek God's grace and rely on Him for renewed strength, wisdom, and discernment.
- Accept that moving forward, your marriage as you knew it is over, but God can heal your pain and give you and your spouse a new marriage better than you ever thought possible.
- On the other hand, be weary of temptation to assume your spouse is doing the work without seeing actual results or noticing any tangible changes. (Many women believe their spouse when they say "it isn't a problem anymore" at face value. They want to believe the problem is gone, so they don't press into any further.) Accountability is lost and boundaries are forgotten.

- Educate yourself on sex addiction and learn the signs of relapse. Sex addiction doesn't just go away. In fact, it often accommodates other addictions such as drinking or gambling.
  - Sex addiction can take 2-6 years to overcome. It is far more complicated than it appears.
  - Relapsing is to be expected but not fully accepted. What does this mean? There are stumbles and then there are face plants. For example, if during their recovery, your spouse has an incident and begins searching for pornographic materials then quickly catches himself and stops, that is a stumble, this is to be expected. Here we celebrate his willpower to stop and thank him for being honest. However, if your spouse doesn't come home all night because he hooked up with a prostitute, this is a face plant, and is not acceptable. At this point, no matter how much success he had gained between acting out sexual, he now must start over from the beginning.
  - In effort to safeguard your heart, have some firm boundaries and decided at what point enough is enough. (If you are enduring 2 plus years of relapses, something is not working, and it is probably the spouse's commitment to healing. You will never be able to fix or protect the other person from their addiction, but you must protect yourself and your children from the emotional and psychological toll addiction takes on the family.
- Do not rush forgiveness. This is cheap grace and will lead towards resentment later. Until you are certain you are ready to release the negative emotions towards your spouse do not claim to forgive them.
  - When you are ready to forgive them, be prepared to do it daily. It is a choice you will have to make every morning, to forgive your spouse and there will be days you do not feel like it. That is okay too.

Source:

**Angie Livingston, Ed.D.(c), BCMHC, CPCLC**

Betrayal Trauma Recovery Coach

Kingdom Coaching & Counseling, LLC

(206) 817-5422

[www.kingdomcoachingandcounseling.com](http://www.kingdomcoachingandcounseling.com)

