



The *Post-Cheating* **Survival** **Guide**

When you or your partner strays, you can—and maybe should—fight for your love.

By Faye Brennan

Infidelity happens—often. Twenty-five percent of people admit to an extramarital affair, per the *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* (some experts put that figure even higher). But counselors no longer advise extreme coping methods, like ignoring the cheating or automatically splitting.

So whether you were caught with your pants down or he was, ask yourself whether the relationship is worth saving. If so, this advice can help you work (and we really do mean work) through the wreckage to come out a stronger, happier couple.



Sever Ties with the Other Lover

Start with the obvious: End the affair for good. The first and most crucial step is to remove the other man or woman from your lives, says Scott Haltzman, M.D., a psychiatrist in Naples, Florida, and author of *The Secrets of Surviving Infidelity*.

Don't just take his word that he's cut off his mistress, or expect him to trust that you've ended things. The two of you have to handle this breakup together. Even though it will be an emotionally charged, and possibly surreal, thing to do, sit down with your guy to write an e-mail or letter to this person that states very clearly that all contact must end, that he or she can no longer be a part of your life. Haltzman suggests phrasing like "My partner is writing this with me. I can't see you again. I need to work on my relationship. Please don't contact me."

This way the person who was cheated on regains some power, and the cheater shows that his or her priorities are back on track.



Become Transparent

Odds are, the mistress or mantress will respond or get in touch in some way (after all, this person hasn't respected the boundaries of your relationship before). That's why it's crucial that *both* you and your guy agree to being what Haltzman calls "completely transparent," and that means some intense, privacy-busting stuff.

You both must be allowed to look at each other's text messages, phone records, e-mail, social media accounts, and banking passwords—even STD test results—for as long as the partner who was cheated on deems necessary. Sound overly intrusive? Maybe so. But, Haltzman says, "all of your efforts should be toward reestablishing trust, and part of that is showing you have nothing to hide."

Keep in mind, however, that "you have to shift out of the mode of being a detective out to catch someone doing something wrong, to a partner working to make sure things continue to go right," says Haltzman.

So, if your guy receives a message from his ex-mistress and you happen to see it first, don't instantly accuse him of relapsing. Or if your ex-flame contacts you, don't withhold that info out of fear. Instead, discuss it calmly until the trust is restored.

Hide nothing.

Plan a private getaway.

Cut out the interloper.

Reignite romance and fun.





Discuss the painful details.



Do Ask, Do Tell

Get ready to ask and ask (or answer and answer) lots of probing (and heartbreaking) questions. According to Haltzman, a healthy way to discuss infidelity is for the partner who was cheated on to get all the details he or she wants—the who, what, when, where, why, how, and how often. “They may also want to know how far it intruded into their own lives: Did their partner buy gifts or invite the person back to the home they share?” he says.

If you’re doing the asking, try to stick to questions you’ll be comfortable learning the answer to. (Ask yourself, “Can I live with my partner if I know this information? Will I find out something useful or not?”) If you’re doing the answering, respond to every question directly and honestly, even if they’re as specific as what sex positions you used or if there were toys involved. Really. That’s because, much like a crime-scene investigator, the cheated party won’t be able to consider the case closed and move on until they hear all the facts that they’ve deemed important.

Being this honest also shows that the cheater is done lying (something he or she probably did a lot of during the affair). But you don’t need to offer details your partner didn’t ask for, and if a question comes up related to your own feelings, you can filter your response. There’s no reason to be hurtful by saying something like “He was hotter than you.” “It’s more important to share the facts,” says Haltzman.



Take a Break, Together

A post-affair honeymoon sounds bizarre (and like the last thing you need right now), but it will jump-start healing, says Willard F. Harley, Jr., Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and author of *His Needs, Her Needs*. So leave talk of the affair, as well as your friends, families, and jobs, behind for



Spark the Passion

The cheating itself is not the only factor in most divorce cases. Says Margaret Klaw, author of *Keeping It Civil* and family lawyer and partner at Berner Klaw & Watson, LLC, in Philadelphia, “I hear, ‘Yes, there was cheating, but the marriage has been over for years.’” So how can you make your own union one you want to be a part of again?

“Don’t go back to your [pre-vacation] schedule and routine,” says Harley. Instead, devote at least 15 hours a week (two hours a day or the majority of the weekend) to couple time, during which you can rebuild your romance and meet each other’s emotional and physical needs. Do activities you both like (check out new restaurants or try trendy workouts), and keep up the honesty and transparency.

If after all of this, you don’t feel like your relationship is becoming better, consider therapy or couples counseling to help you work through your feelings and figure out what your next best move should be.

Tell Your Friends—or Not?

Revealing your guy’s infidelity to all your pals only gives them ammo to hate him—which won’t help you two stay together. “Research shows that we feel the most empathy for our friends,” says Carlin Flora, author of *Friendfluence: The Surprising Ways Friends Make Us Who We Are*. So when you’ve been wronged, your BFFs will take it personally (cue the “Dump his ass!” chanting). Avoid that drama by disclosing the truth to only one or two trusted friends who will listen with open minds. Tell them that your goal is to stay together and you need support, not judgment, says Flora.

If it’s your bestie who’s been betrayed, restrain your gut reaction, listen attentively, then “ask questions that can lead to constructive steps forward, such as ‘What can I do to help?’” suggests Flora. You can speak up if you’re absolutely convinced her guy is a repeat offender, but don’t turn the convo into an all-out bash of him (and his “sleazy” mistress). The focus should be on having your friend’s back—whatever she decides. ■

Get Out of This Jam

There are real, practical steps—think of them as tools—that can help you move past an affair.