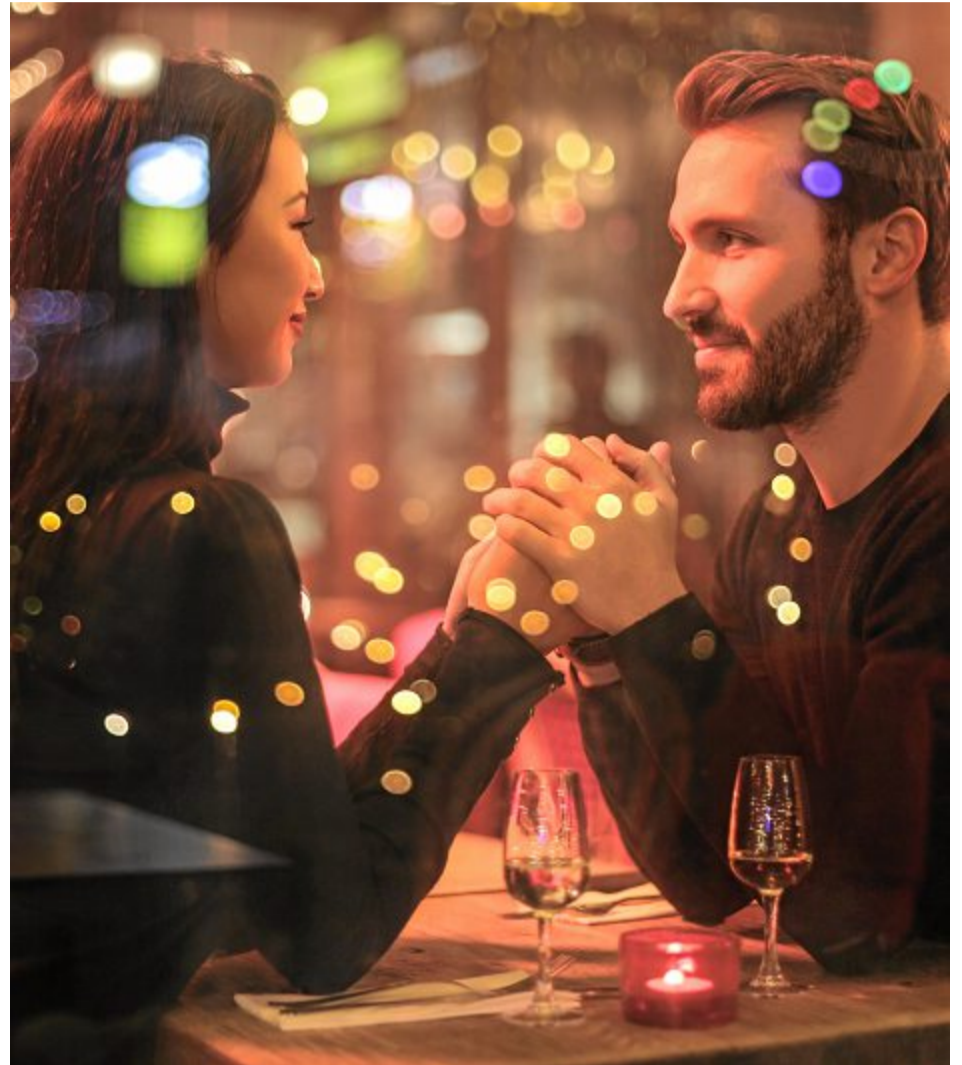


THE BETRAYAL

THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF AN AFFAIR CAN BE AS SHATTERING AS THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE. COUPLES CAN SURVIVE BUT IT REQUIRES COMMITMENT

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON



Only those who trust can find love and happiness. And only those who love can be betrayed. Welcome to the final column of my four-part series on infidelity which featured:

- What counts as infidelity.
- Myths and why do people do it.
- Pornography and affairs.

Today, what to do if you find yourself or your partner in an affair. Will you recover together or apart?

The effect of an affair can be similar to the grief associated with death. It's important to realise the common repercussions for both partners:

- Intense emotional dysregulation: For the unsuspecting "injured" partner, any sense of security and safety has been shattered.
- Both partners can experience feelings such as hurt, anger, fear, disgust, sadness, shame and guilt.
- Symptoms of depression, grief and anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Alcohol and other substance use.
- Suicide attempts/completion.
- Physical health problems.
- Skewed assumptions, beliefs and meaning of life are changed forever. For example, "I thought I could trust you. Now, I don't trust you any more and I don't trust anybody else either."

● Injured partners often have intrusive memories and flashbacks, and can alternate between feeling numb and becoming hyper aroused and accusatory.

It is not catastrophising to note that discovering an affair creates a crisis. It is a devastating threat to your partner's security and attachment needs.

Consider the extreme emotional adversity and vulnerability from isolation and separation in the events of miscarriage, death, and life-threatening illnesses. This is not dissimilar.

What now? Like many of these extreme events, couples can recover when there is demonstrated commitment toward remorse and forgiveness. It usually commences with understanding who the betrayer sought to "become" and what needs they yearned to fulfil.

A usual pitfall for couples in recovery is for the betrayer to downplay what has happened in their effort to repress any shame and guilt. This causes the injured partner to repeat questions and concerns all over again with more fervour. It creates a painful cycle that traps them in isolation and pain.

Some of the demonstrated commitment includes the acknowledgement that a primary relationship rule has been broken. A focus on transparency, patience, reassurance and validation to repair the broken trust is required. It can take up to three years for trust to be re-established. In therapy, we collaborate on skills to manage flashbacks, obsessions and triggers, and talk about the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness.

Importantly, affair recovery recognises the needs of both partners, their longings and desires versus repeated shame for the betrayer.

The greatest outcome is that couples build a stronger, new and improved city of a relationship, far better than the one that was rocked in the earthquake of the affair. If couples decide to part, it is very important to

unveil any resulting skewed beliefs about themselves or trusting others that can inhibit future relationships.

May I highlight that it's fun to get fun and flirty in the Christmas season. It is my hope that this series has provided a warning as to the consequences when you're doing it with the wrong person.

Missed the first part of the series? Head to the blog on my website. Listen in

to radio Salt 106.5 each Friday morning before 9am for my weekly chat on these articles.

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