

Restoring Trust

When trust has been broken or lost in a significant relationship or marriage, then ways to restore trust and demonstrate a desire to produce lasting change must be explored if there is to be any chance of the relationship overcoming an affair or maladaptive pattern. Words convey intent, but behavior demonstrates the capacity for change. To ask forgiveness, one needs to back up words of remorse with acts of repentance. Just as critical as “I’m sorry, I won’t do it again” are bold, concrete gestures, day after day, that drive home the point that you mean what you say.

In her book on recovering from infidelity, *After the Affair*, Janis Abrahms Spring, developed the concepts of low- and high-cost trust building behaviors. The “cost” refers to the emotional, not necessarily the monetary, expense to the offender, or person whose behavior is unacceptable or is in question.

Low-cost, trust building behavior is something you can do to demonstrate the sincerity of penitence and simultaneously the intent to restore trust. A high-cost behavior requires much more of you. It often involves great sacrifice that makes you feel uncomfortable, defensive, or resistant. In choosing appropriate acts of atonement or trust building, you have to give the injured party what matters to him/her, what he/she needs to trust you again. There’s no formula, no prescription, for healing. Just be wary of an anemic response—too little, too late. It’s better to err on the side of generosity.

If you want to be forgiven for an affair, a relationship that has crossed the line, or become inappropriate to your partner/spouse, here are **some possible low-cost ways** to restore trust and demonstrate the desire to produce lasting change:

- Allow your partner/spouse to review your cell phone usage and contacts on a regular basis;
- Change your cell phone number so that a former lover does not know how to reach you;
- Encourage your partner to call you at any time;
- Letting your partner know as soon as you run into or hear from the person in-question/
former lover;
- Giving your partner a copy of your monthly telephone, credit card bills;
- Sending and reading E-mail only in your partner’s presence and agreeing upon any
texting or social media practices where your contact becomes questionable; and
- Telling your partner when you feel angry or annoyed at her/him rather than storing your
feelings, as you may have done withheld your feelings previously.

High-cost behaviors might include:

- Changing jobs, if you and the lover or person-in-question work in the same office;
- Changing homes or communities, if you and the lover are neighbors;
- Formally ending your relationship with the lover in your partner’s presence; and
- Putting a significant portion of your savings in your partner’s name.

Here are **a few other high- and low-cost behaviors** that can be used to redress other violations:

Explore your early childhood wounds in therapy and writing the hurt/injured party a letter revealing what you learn about yourself and your present behavior;

Acknowledging the truth of her/his accusations both to her/his - her/his spouse or her/his children depending upon age level appropriateness;

Respecting her/his need to distance herself/himself from you (not touching her/him when you greet each other, if that is her/his wish);

Not pressuring her/him to forgive you.

When it comes to working-out breaches of trust or even the timing in scripting out contrition, do not assume that the two of you are going to be on the same page. The previously enumerated suggestions around low- and high-cost behaviors are just that, suggested starting points for due consideration, not an exhaustive list of what can be done, if trust is to be restored. I encourage each person and couple, therefore, to pinpoint their own needs by asking her/him exactly what you can do to win back trust or by making suggestions and asking the other person to rate their importance in the effort to restore trust.

Adapted from *After the Affair*, by Janis Abrahms Spring

Rev. Carl Ripley, L.P.C.

PCNV

