
APPENDIX FROM “AFFAIR RECOVERY: A 4-STEP
PROCESS TO HEALING FORGIVENESS AND
GROWTH” BY ANDREW MCCONAGHIE, LCSW

Truths and Tips to Hold On To

Chapter 1: Questions, Questions, Questions

- ☆ Questions are a normal part of the healing process after an affair.
- ☆ It is important to address these questions directly, even if the answers are not immediately forthcoming.
- ☆ Until these questions are addressed, you will not have the clarity you need to make decisions about moving forward in your relationship.
- ☆ Because people outside of your relationship will have varying opinions, be careful about whom you choose to speak to about the affair.
- ☆ You should never blame yourself (or take the blame for) your partner’s infidelity.
- ☆ Cognitive dissonance, the state of having inconsistent thoughts or beliefs, is a normal response to an affair.
- ☆ Assimilation, the reconciliation of seemingly opposing truths, is an important step in the healing process after an affair.

Chapter 2: Anatomy of an Affair

- ☆ An affair can take many different forms, including flirtatious behavior, a secret emotional connection, a sexual encounter, or looking at pornography.
- ☆ Each couple has implicit and explicit agreements about what constitutes betrayal.
- ☆ Some signs of problem behavior in a relationship include keeping secrets from your partner, outright lying, or omitting information.
- ☆ Our culture teaches that true passion in a relationship lasts forever, a misconception that can lead to feelings of disappointment that cause us to look outside of our relationship for happiness.
- ☆ Feelings of guilt and shame are indicators that your behavior could be perceived as a form of betrayal by your partner.
- ☆ As in the metaphor of the boiling frog, an affair can often creep up gradually, drawing a person in without their full awareness.
- ☆ Alcohol often plays a significant role in poor judgment that leads to an affair.

Chapter 3: Managing the Initial Crisis as a Couple

- ☆ Setting aside a certain limited time each day to discuss the affair will give structure to the conversation and also ensure that feelings and questions will get addressed.
- ☆ Be careful to keep your children protected from overhearing conversations about the affair.
- ☆ Take the word *divorce* and other exit statements out of your vocabulary for at least three months.
- ☆ Do not make any major decisions about your relationship, living situation, or job until you are out of this crisis phase.
- ☆ Do not talk about the affair late at night or if one or both of you have been drinking.
- ☆ Choose only one or two people in your inner circle to talk to about the affair. These people should be trustworthy and able to manage their own emotions about the situation.
- ☆ Prioritize self-care at this time to make sure that you are both at your personal best to deal with the intensity of what's happening.

Chapter 4: Managing the Initial Crisis as Individuals

- ☆ As the betrayed, consider carefully which questions you really want answers to.
- ☆ As the betrayed, pull back from investigating further details about the affair if you find your thoughts keeping you awake or if you can't concentrate on life responsibilities.
- ☆ As the betrayed, acts of revenge may feel good in the short term. However, they may create difficulties for you in the future if you decide to move forward in your relationship.
- ☆ As the betrayer, telling the truth is of utmost importance if you wish to rebuild trust in your relationship.
- ☆ As the betrayer, remaining calm and listening are key indicators to your partner that you understand the pain your actions have caused and that you are committed to working things out.
- ☆ As the betrayer, do not offer your partner any explanations for your behavior at this early stage, since they will only sound like excuses.
- ☆ As the betrayer, seeing your own individual therapist to explore the reasons for your affair may not only help you find clarity, but also help your partner to be more patient about hearing explanations.

Chapter 5: Forgiveness

- ☆ Forgiveness is not a favor you do for your partner, saying that they owe you something in return.
- ☆ Forgiveness often takes time.
- ☆ Forgiveness is not forgetting that a betrayal has taken place.
- ☆ Forgiveness is not a guarantee that you won't feel pain, anger, shame, or guilt anymore.
- ☆ Forgiveness involves promising your partner that you will not punish them for their betrayal.
- ☆ Forgiveness is deciding not to use your partner's affair as an excuse for your own poor behaviors.

Chapter 6: Steps in the Forgiveness Process

- ☆ Before you can begin the 4-Step Affair Recovery Process, reestablishing trust as a couple is key.
- ☆ Ways to reestablish trust include sharing passwords to computers and phones, sharing details about your whereabouts and the people you are with, spending more time at home, and suspending business trips.
- ☆ The trust-building agreements you establish with your partner should last at least 6–12 months before you discuss changing them.
- ☆ Step One in the forgiveness process involves sharing as much information as you can about the facts of the affair.
- ☆ Step Two is about developing empathy by communicating feelings honestly and constructively.
- ☆ Step Three establishes contextual understanding about the betrayal and answers the question “Why did this happen?”
- ☆ Step Four is called The Leap of Faith and requires the betrayer to ask for forgiveness and the betrayed to commit to forgiving.

Chapter 7: Step 1: What Actually Happened?

- ☆ The betrayer needs to be as transparent as possible about the facts involved in the affair, even if they worry about hurting their partner further.
- ☆ The betrayed has the right to ask any questions about what happened but should wait to ask questions about their partner's around the affair until dealing with the context of the affair in Step Three.
- ☆ Both partners should discuss what parts of the affair were actual betrayals of their contract—which, in general, is any behavior or information the betrayer intentionally kept from their partner.
- ☆ Once you have completed the 4-Step Affair Recovery Process, you and your partner should get clear on what the boundaries of your relationship need to be from now on.
- ☆ For the betrayer, shame about your behaviors can often make you feel unlovable, making you reluctant to tell the entire truth.
- ☆ Building shame resilience by choosing to continue to be vulnerable ultimately will help you and your partner heal.

Chapter 8: Step 2: Empathy for the Betrayed

- ☆ For the betrayer, true empathy involves listening to your partner's feelings and being able to reflect them clearly and thoughtfully.
- ☆ For the betrayed, describing your emotions to your partner in as much detail as possible will help you feel better understood so that you can eventually heal from your pain.
- ☆ Common emotions that come up for the betrayed partner include shock, anger, disappointment, anxiety, sadness, and grief. These are all normal.
- ☆ For the betrayer, developing increasing empathy is important before moving on to the next step in the forgiveness process when you will discuss the reasons why the affair happened. Otherwise, if your partner doesn't feel understood, they are likely to perceive these reasons as excuses for your behaviors.
- ☆ For the betrayer, showing empathy may include actively nodding when listening to your partner, being willing to share passwords to devices, saying phrases like "I'm so sorry," and being patient with your partner when they repeatedly ask questions.
- ☆ Conversely, certain behaviors such as getting frustrated, rolling your eyes, sighing, sharing too much about your own feelings, and pursuing your partner physically or sexually can show a lack of empathy.
- ☆ As the betrayer, the shame you feel about your affair may cause you to develop shame shields, which are strategies of disconnection and self-protection.
- ☆ Recognizing these shame shields that can move you against, away from, or toward your partner in unhealthy ways will help you to stay honest and vulnerable in your conversations.

Chapter 9: Step 3: Understanding Why the Affair Occurred

- ☆ Affairs usually happen over time and involve a series of decisions and factors leading up to them.
- ☆ Before you begin to explore the factors that contributed to an affair, make sure you and your partner have developed enough empathy during Step 2. Otherwise, the reasons for the affair will sound more like excuses.
- ☆ Unhappiness in a relationship, whether because of conflict or disconnection, can make a partner susceptible to outside influences and temptations that might lead to an affair.
- ☆ Examining what your relationship was like before the affair began may give you and your partner a better understanding of why it happened and also guide you in the future to healthier dynamics.
- ☆ Often a partner's unhappiness about aspects of their life that have nothing to do with their relationship can contribute to an affair.
- ☆ Clinical depression, poor physical health, financial troubles, problems at work, and feelings around aging are all factors that can contribute to unhappiness.
- ☆ Using alcohol or drugs to tune out can cause many behaviors that contribute to an affair such as emotional disconnection between partners, poor judgment, a tug-of-war to manage the alcohol or drug consumption, or behavior that offends or hurts your partner.
- ☆ For the betrayer, you may try to avoid shame by oversimplifying and overreacting to your affair behaviors instead of dealing with the real factors that led to the affair.
- ☆ Keeping a journal or talking to a friend or therapist will help you practice being vulnerable so that you do not resort to these avoidance behaviors.

Chapter 10: Step 4: The Leap of Faith

- ☆ The last step asking for and offering forgiveness is called The Leap of Faith because there are no guarantees that betrayal won't happen again.
- ☆ Writing letters to each other that summarize the first three steps and promising to do everything possible to make sure betrayal won't happen again will help you make this leap of faith as a couple.
- ☆ A special act or ceremony after you have read these letters out loud to each other will signify the milestone when you as a couple move to a new, healthier stage in your lives together.
- ☆ Forgiveness does not minimize your partner's betrayal behaviors, nor does it guarantee that they will never happen again.
- ☆ Forgiveness means choosing to trust your partner again, even without this guarantee.
- ☆ Moving forward, you and your partner must continue to look for signs of distress in your relationship, including boredom, dissatisfaction, disconnection, and unresolved arguments.
- ☆ Forgiveness also means accepting that triggers will occur that remind you of the betrayal behaviors.

Chapter 11: Factors that Affect Recovery

- ☆ The most important factor when a couple is trying to heal from an affair is the betrayer's level of commitment to the process. It is up to you to lead the way in restoring the trust that has been broken.
- ☆ A willingness to cut off all ties with the other person is crucial to healing from the affair.
- ☆ You can show your commitment to healing your relationship by checking in with your partner regularly, being completely transparent about your schedule, and being very patient.
- ☆ As the betrayed, you will need to be committed to the process as well. Extreme amounts of courage and vulnerability will be needed for you to listen to what happened and stay open about your feelings.
- ☆ The health of your primary relationship before the betrayal plays a significant role in your ability to heal as a couple.
- ☆ The length of the affair can affect the ability for you to heal, depending on how attached you have become to the other person and also how long you have been deceiving your partner.
- ☆ Emotional intelligence, empathy, and communications skills all play important roles in how well a couple will heal from an affair.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew McConaghie, LCSW



Andrew McConaghie, LCSW and his wife, Tracy, opened McConaghie Counseling in Alpharetta, Georgia over twenty years ago. He has over thirty years of experience, specializing in couples counseling. In addition to working with clients, Andrew provides clinical consultation to couples therapists. As part of his clinical training, Andrew studied under John and Julie Gottman and Dr. Brené Brown. Andrew and his wife are also co-founders of the Upside Down Divorce® process that guides couples through a step-by-step approach to divorce that is healthy, good for children, and solution focused.

www.mcconaghiecounseling.com
www.upsidedowndivorce.com