



LIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES, LLC

Caught Having an Affair?

7 Ways to Minimize Doing Further Damage

© 2015, [by Linda J. Engelman, Licensed MFT](#) You may print & distribute this article as long as the author's byline and copyright are included.

Infidelity? You've been caught? Or you're about to reveal? There are plenty of ways to stack the cards in your favor - to increase the chances of healing and recovery. To become a SAFE partner again, consider these 7 ways you can keep from creating more damage as you begin the process of divulging the truth and expressing remorse.

1. Don't let yourself get caught up in a "staggered" disclosure. Often times, when the betraying partner gets "caught," he or she will try to do damage control, only revealing that which is necessary to make it through those difficult first hours and days. Your story may change each day as your spouse pushes and pleads for more information. Only after a great deal of pressure from your spouse might you may find yourself adding the true details and incriminating facts. Take heed - this can be hugely damaging and can lead to a much longer-than-necessary recovery period. In fact, it often precludes recovery being possible at all.

While there are times that staggered disclosure is necessary (and often the place to do a full disclosure is in a therapists' office so that you can have the support of a professional), it's critical that you don't find yourself caught up in a downward spiral of lying. It makes sense that you're trying to save whatever self-respect and ego that remain. Or perhaps you've told yourself "It's to protect my partner from further hurt," or "it's to protect myself from complete destruction." Perhaps you've decided that you will live the rest of your life with no one knowing the depths of the lies. But then, with continued pressure and digging by your spouse, you're eventually forced into revealing more and more of the truth over weeks and months. Each time that you reveal that you've still been withholding, your partner has to re-experience the trauma all over again, knowing that the lies have continued and that you only become truthful when all else fails. Each time THAT happens, the relationship becomes a little less salvageable.

Time after time, clients have told me that had their partner been 100% truthful, fully incriminating themselves right from the start, the relationship could have been saved. **Surprisingly, a great many people can endure the pain of hearing awful truths - but many of those same people can NOT endure the agony of having to dig for those truths over and over again, just waiting for the day when their partner's conscience will not allow him/her to hide any more information.**

In order for your partner to begin to trust again, it's important to commit to telling the entire truth — to have everything out in the open. A good couples therapist will help you endure this process. It's not easy, but people do it, and survive it, and quite often thrive together as a couple afterwards.

2. Prioritize the needs of your partner, not those of your affair partner. Huh? Do people actually do this? Um, yes. Often times, after getting caught, people will create further damage by trying to take care of the hurt feelings of the affair partner. That person may be distraught, even devastated. Perhaps you had indicated that you were planning to leave your spouse. Or that the two of you would find a way to be together, no matter what. And now, suddenly, you're turning off the lights - closing the door. Any attempts on your part to

600 Dewey Blvd., Suite B, • Butte, MT 59701 & 302 Missouri Ave., • Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Phone: 406-782-4778 • Fax: 406-782-1318

Navigating Life's Obstacles.....Choose LMA



LIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES, LLC

Caught Having an Affair?

comfort that person will be seen as further betrayal by your partner. If you are wanting/planning to save your marriage, you have an important job right now - it's to be remorseful, to be transparent, and to be 100% available for the partner that you've betrayed, the person you want to grow old with. If you're going to have empathy for someone, or hold someone tight, let it be your lifetime partner, every single time.

3. Take the following stance. It will make a big difference if you can find a way to say it and genuinely mean it (over and over again during the coming year). "I know that I don't fully get the impact of what I've done to you yet. But I want to. I want to get it. I look in your eyes and I care so much that I've hurt you this badly. I want to know why I've done this, so that I can reassure you, and that we can both know that it could never happen again. I'm committed to finding out why I did this, and I'm committed to being there for you, relentlessly." And then do it. Get committed to therapy, get committed to being there relentlessly. Get committed to believing that you deserve a loving relationship and can have one with this amazing partner -- he or she is statistically likely to stick with you even in the midst of all of this trauma. (Assuming that's what you want.)
4. Have relentless empathy (keyword: relentless) for your partner. It's quite possible that you will have to endure repeated questioning, anger, blaming, and intense sadness, from your partner, over and over again for the next year or more. While you will struggle with your own shame and guilt, as well as your own fears of the unraveling relationship before you, you will need to find a way to weather the storm in order to be there for the person you've betrayed. Attending weekly personal therapy is a way to get the support you'll need to get through this difficult time, and to learn how you can best attend to your betrayed partner's pain. Another way to get stronger is do some reading and learn about attachment in relationships. Try the books *"After The Affair," "Not Just Friends,"* and *"Hold Me Tight"* to get you started on this path.
5. The following are not helpful. Try not say them. They usually cause further damage and set back the healing process. (Again: Relentless Empathy works. The following statements do NOT.)
 - "I've answered your questions, but it seems that nothing is ever going to be enough for you"
 - "Why would you ASK me THAT?"
 - "That's ridiculous. You're going off the deep end."
 - "When is this going to end?"
 - "I'm not going to answer that."
 - "He/she (affair partner) isn't such a bad person...you're being judgmental."
 - "What about me and my pain?"
 - "I feel like you just want to punish me."

600 Dewey Blvd., Suite B, • Butte, MT 59701 & 302 Missouri Ave., • Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Phone: 406-782-4778 • Fax: 406-782-1318

Navigating Life's Obstacles.....Choose LMA



LIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES, LLC

Caught Having an Affair?

As for that last one, YES....your spouse probably DOES want you to hurt like he/she is hurting. Makes sense, and isn't pathological. It's all about attachment - "I want to matter to you, I want you to have my back, I'm terrified, I need to see the pain in your eyes so that I know you really care and you really get it."

6. Take care of yourself during this difficult time. You can minimize further damage by becoming someone who has a strong support network, and by getting the help you need to treat any addictions, depression, or anxiety. The more coping tools and support people you have around you, the more your partner can reach for you and know that you'll be there. Don't be a martyr ("I did this horrible thing and therefore I don't deserve anything"). That will only serve to widen the chasm between the two of you.

7. Be transparent. No, like, REALLY transparent. But Linda, you say, let's say my affair partner contacts me. I'm going to think "this is going to put my partner over the edge...since I'm not responding to the email, it's best if I just keep this to myself". Well, there are many rationalizations you can come up with. But resist the urge to hide this information because too often, it will be a damaging choice. Regardless of how upsetting the news is to your partner, it will be worse if it is later discovered that you (once again) hid something. Telling the truth means: no lying by omission, no filtering, no editing, no withholding, no rationalizing. Unless you have a partner who says "I don't want to know," go with the assumption that "knowing" is best, even when it hurts. It conveys the message, "Even when I know something is going to hurt, I'm going to be transparent, so that you know you can trust me. Even when it incriminates me, I'm going to tell you, and I'm going to be here to hold you and comfort you in the aftermath."

600 Dewey Blvd., Suite B, • Butte, MT 59701 & 302 Missouri Ave., • Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Phone: 406-782-4778 • Fax: 406-782-1318

Navigating Life's Obstacles.....Choose LMA