

## *How to Deal with Infidelity of a Parent/Spouse*

*“Infidelity among one’s parents or a spouse can have profoundly negative impacts on a person. It can impact how a person approaches commitment and close relationships, and how they can trust others. We’ll discuss some of the ways this can impact a person and how to deal if ever in a situation where it’s discovered that a parent or spouse is being unfaithful in their partnership.”*

### **Key Points:**

- Infidelity can damage the entire family, not just a marriage.
- After infidelity between your parents or spouse occurs, it’s important to focus on processing your feelings and emotions with a trusted friend and/or therapist.
- Infidelity between parents or spouse can feel like a betrayal to the entire family, but with time, open and honest conversations, and strong boundaries, you can rebuild the bonds that are broken if you decide that is the path that you want to take.

### **Consequences of Cheating**

- There are both short-term and long-term consequences associated with infidelity for both the betrayed parent and their family. In the short term, a partner may have feelings of rage, betrayal, and other feelings of insecurities and hurt. It is also a **trust breaker** — **it takes a long time to rebuild**. A person who has been cheated on may develop negative thought patterns about themselves, and it can have a long-term negative impact on their self-esteem.
- It also can create a “Void” in their life as if something is “suddenly” missing. Something is rather “Taken Away” when this happens because suddenly you are forced to be “Less-Than” a family than what you are accustomed of having.
- It can cause a spouse to have a difficult time trusting other people, especially if they decide to end that relationship. As a result, one may isolate themselves from others or avoid certain social settings. Some will almost be “paranoid” by thinking everyone knows their story or situation.

- It may lead to other issues down the line, such as anxiety and depression, the fear of being cheated on again if one does not terminate the relationship or becoming emotionally vulnerable.
- Children’s relationships with the one who cheated may disappear, or forever distanced and not as close as it once was with that parent. ***It is abnormal for the offending parent*** to believe their children will accept them back as if nothing ever happened. Trust from this time forward is ***always earned***.
- There are times when a spouse or children may blame themselves for allowing this to happen but that minimizes or shares the blame of the offending person. While thoughts like this might surface, ***it is abnormal*** for one to accept any responsibility for the offender’s actions.

### **Talk to Someone**

It has been my experience when someone keeps their feelings inside, it causes more stress and uncertainty than when someone ***“releases”*** their thoughts and feelings openly to someone else. A therapist may be needed.

### **Don’t Rush into Any Decisions**

Take your time to sort through the shock, hurt, uncertainty, infidelity, abandonment, and other rushed feelings that come swarming into your life.

### **Remember You Are on Uncharted Territory**

Chances are, you have never been in this situation before and as a result, decisions should be thought out carefully but ***before any decisions are made***. You must take care of you as a person first! This process can be challenging at times because it is common for a parent to think of their children first and then work on their feelings and thoughts later on.

One can do this but don’t take too long. Please understand that most decisions should be postponed until you have some time for ***“healing”*** for yourself.

Secondly, please understand that getting over your ***“hurts”*** is a ***process***. Complete healing may take some time for you to be able to fully get over or get through what has just happened in your life.

### **Be Open and Honest About Your Feelings**

## **Parent:**

True healing and restoration come from honestly “letting go” of your feelings and thoughts for the purpose of something better than what you are experiencing today. If you seek therapy, one can do this as an individual or as a couple. It has been my experience to have the offended person at least seek or get some of their hurts dealt with first before deciding on family counseling for the following reasons:

- Sometimes the offended person (you) does not feel their story can be freely shared without lashing out at the offender in a family session.
- The offended person (you) may not have any energy or desire to keep the relationship going.
- If the offended person (you) is not willing to continue the relationship, they need to explore possible steps to recovery?
- What steps can the offended person (you) do to create a new future and outlook that can validate them as a person?
- If the relationship is to continue, what boundaries must be in place, so this does not happen again? How does one restore the hurts and betrayal of a person who has been wounded? What steps will ensure success, validation, and happiness?
- Cheating can destroy a marriage and family, but with some work, you can begin to repair and rebuild a new relationship in a healthy way that works best for you.

## **Child:**

There may come a time when you may have the opportunity to express your honest feelings to the parent who has been unfaithful, whether you will forgive them, or whether you will make any effort to restore your relationship. Some children may be reluctant. Some offending parents may reach out to you first. What do you do?

Regardless of what you decide, that's your decision and no one else's, but once you do, you may have questions to “*Why*” this happened or use this opportunity as ammunition to “*lash out*” in anger to your parent. While you may be tempted to do this, it may be best for you to move forward and forgive, but only you can wholeheartedly make that decision. This is not saying you “accept” what they have done but you are no longer allowing the hurt or shock to “*negatively affect or dictate*” your life.

After infidelity, if the family continues, the bonds between your parents, and between you and the parent who cheated, will have to be rebuilt if they are going to survive. It is hard to metaphorically “wipe the slate clean”. It could mean you can wipe away part of the slate while “reserving” the other part to be decided later once trust has been rebuilt.

It’s also important to **set boundaries with your parents**, stating that you do not wish to be in the middle of their conflict and refuse to take sides. Likewise, it’s unfair for them to ask this of you or to put you in the middle of their marriage issues.

### **Taking a Stance on the Issue**

Coming to a decision that is good for you and your future can relieve a lot of stress and anxiety. It may not be a decision you had thought you would ever make but you are at peace with your decision. Secondly, it should not be a bitter decision but a peaceful one, the one that is best for you.

### **All Things Work for Good. (Romans 8:28)**

I have heard this all my life. it is easy to share this with someone else who is going through a trial or some tragic situation but when it comes to us, we cannot ever think of any good from coming from this horrible situation. “I thought we were doing God’s purpose”.

First, it's never easy when you know your parent or spouse has cheated.

Secondly, we cannot control one’s actions. If they choose to alter that purpose, it was their fault, not God’s!

Thirdly, the most important thing that you can do for yourself in this situation is to focus on yourself, trust God, process your feelings, take a stand on your thoughts surrounding the issue, set boundaries, and perhaps rebuild bonds if this is an option.

Lastly, the important thing to know and trust lies in the fact that God is always with us! He will take us through any battle, hurts, disappointments, and changes in our lives. It is also important to have godly friends who do not try to “steer us” but be along side of us as we go along this new journey.

### **Another Suggestions:**

**Journal:** You may find it comforting to journal your daily thoughts and steps along your journey. I have discovered this can be therapeutic to many people to “release and communicate” their thoughts daily or often. Secondly, I have seen people who have read their journal months or years afterwards and have seen how much progress they have made through God’s help and with the help of friends.

**Breathe:** I have discovered when we become tense or upset, our breathing is often shallow. It is hard for our minds to get the oxygen needed to make decisions when we don’t effectively breathe. Take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds, and let out all the bad air, thoughts, and situations you are facing. It is good therapy. I personally do this when I am tense.

**Exercise or Take Walks:** Taking a walk gets our mind off situations. It allows us to breathe better and allows us to focus on something else. Our minds are often drawn to nature or the events around us. Most of the time we start feeling better. It systematically keeps our minds off “things and feelings”.

**Change Your Settings:** Go out to a new store you have not visited and always wanted to see or go out to a new restaurant. Changing your setting tricks your mind in seeing “new” things or experiencing “new” foods.

**Start a New Hobby or Revive an Old One:** This is another way to get out from your setting. Staying in your home, never going out or being creative, often causes us to be stagnant. We don’t usually get better when we are stagnant.

These are only a few ideas. Your therapist may have other ideas that can be beneficial along your journey. Trust the process, trust God, and trust yourself. You can get through this difficult but terrible situation!