
HOW TO DEAL WITH A CHEATING PARTNER

An interview with Carolyn Tucker



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Q and A with Carolyn Tucker

Q1. When someone suspects their partner or spouse is having an affair, what should they do? Should they confront them without having the proof or should they confront only after having the evidence?

I would suggest if someone suspects their partner or spouse is having an affair that they check in with themselves first. We all have natural intuition, the “red flag” feeling, and in this situation they really need to tune in to that feeling. It is important to remember what it felt like when they “just knew” someone was lying to them, or when they continued to probe something because “it just didn’t feel right.”

The reason I say this is because going into a situation where they feel someone may not be honest with them or might be deceiving them, they need their internal guidance system on “all systems go!”

They should step back for a while and watch for when the red flag feeling comes up and see if there is a pattern. This will lead them to all of the information they need to know. Breathing, getting centered and grounded and tuning in to intuition is definitely the wisest first move.

Q2. What do you suggest someone do when they see the red-flags and their natural intuition says something is wrong?

At this point I suggest that they get centered and notice what has changed.

- Has their partner stopped seeking them out to spend time with them?
- Has the partner begun spending more time away from home than is normal or are they away at odd hours?
- Are they more secretive than usual?

- Is the partner more attached to their phone or computer than normal or more secretive with it?
- Is the partner responding to them differently physically?
- Does the partner look them in the eye?

Many clients report that when their partner was being unfaithful that there was little eye contact. Does the partner still kiss them? The intimacy of kissing can be difficult to handle for someone who is being untrue.

These can all be soft signs that something may be going on. By noticing the things that have changed, it gives them an opportunity to really focus on the relationship as well. Looking closely at the relationship is important at this point because it may be that they themselves see something that has not been fulfilling or that is missing for them as well.

Becoming curious instead of angry or paranoid is the most helpful thing to do at this point. Choosing not to jump to conclusions right away gives them time to rationally and intuitively prepare for the eventual conversation that will occur.

Q3. So essentially, you are advising caution and giving their partner the benefit of doubt. At what point do you suggest someone have the conversation and should it be a conversation or a confrontation?

I am totally advising giving the partner the benefit of the doubt. Becoming curious instead of angry or paranoid has a benefit. It allows you to look at the situation without judgement. I have had clients who observed the relation up until this point in our process and discovered that they were not actually even happy in the relationship as it had existed for awhile.

This is important information! Becoming intentional about what you want at this point is key. After looking at the relationship with curious eyes, how does it look? Is it healthy? Is it fulfilling? Are there things that need to change? Are there

things that are particularly good? All of this information will be important to bring into the conversation.

Having a frank conversation with yourself about what you expect from the conversation is important at this point. I know you are anxious to get to the conversation, but restraint and intention will allow a much more productive conversation.

Do you want to stay with your partner if what you suspect is true? Are you ready to walk away before you have the conversation? Your attitude going into the conversation will determine the course of the exchange. Running headlong into it will not benefit you.

I suggest that before the conversation that you attempt to get into the frame of mind where you are able to observe your partner from a place of gentleness and love. This is not easy if you are expecting to hear that they are cheating on you, but it will make all the difference in how the conversation goes and in what information you receive.

Picturing your partner as a small child who is afraid and vulnerable, or at a time when they were particularly open with you can help soften your approach. Practice assuming this soft and gentle demeanor towards your partner. The conversation depends on your ability to communicate from a place of compassion.

I do not suggest approaching the conversation attempting to find out if your partner is having an affair. I suggest a loving conversation about your own relationship with them. “I feel” statements are helpful.

Sharing with them your observations about how the relationship may have changed or things that you appreciate about the relationship is a good place to start. What you want to communicate at this point is a place of safety for your partner, combined with a loving presence.

It would be easy to run in and throw a nuclear bomb into the mix because you are hurt and angry, but this is never effective. Even if you plan to leave the relationship if there is infidelity, maintaining dignity and respect for the relationship will feel better in the long run.

Q4. I think an important takeaway from your advice is “preparedness”-hoping for the best and preparing for the worst. So many people don’t really think through the process because they are anxious, confused, angry as a result of which they tend to have a confrontation than a conversation. I can understand why they would do that because it is so hurting and painful to think the person you trust and love the most is cheating on you.

Let me be a devil’s advocate here for a moment and ask you, is there a danger of this soft approach being taken advantage of by the suspected straying partner?

From what I hear from my readers, for the most part, the suspected straying partners almost always deny having an affair and very rarely are they willing to have this honest conversation. And to make matters worse, they get defensive and accuse their partner of cheating on them or being jealous or paranoid and controlling.

What do you recommend someone do when they are trying to get to the root of the problem but have an uncooperative and hostile partner not willing to answer their questions?

Preparation for the conversation is indeed the most important thing. Know what you want and have all of the information you can gather from inside yourself so that you are able to make an informed decision.

First of all, I find that when you enter the conversation from a position that is not adversarial you tend to get more honest responses. When you do have a hostile and uncooperative partner, then knowing what you want is doubly important.

Are you willing to do the work to attempt to stay in the relationship or do you want to leave? Once you know the answers to this you can make better decisions.

I do not recommend going through their phone or their computer. Once the relationship gets to this place it is usually doomed. It is so tempting to gather information or “proof,” but you have to be prepared for the cost to the relationship and to your own self esteem if you proceed down this road.

I have had clients embark on all kinds of “protective” actions, like monitoring the phone bill or putting a keylogger on the computer. The relationships do not tend to last much longer after they reach this point because it is difficult to turn back after embarking on this surveillance journey.

Once you use these measures to feel “safe” then your partner only has to go deeper underground if they want to. It is a vicious cycle of mistrust and deceit. If you are looking at a divorce with custody issues it may be a different story, and I recommend that you follow the recommendations of your attorney in this case.

If you decide to stay in the relationship then boundaries are important. You cannot force a partner to be honest with you, but you can minimize opportunities for them to lie to you. Creating that safe environment is the most important piece to this.

Know that partners who lash back and project infidelity or lying on to you usually have something to hide. This is common in people who feel attacked, which is why I recommend a soft approach.

Practical concerns like potential STD's are something that should be considered. Making decisions about whether a physical relationship is wise until issues are

sorted out is part of the decision making process. If they persist in being angry or defensive, suggesting couple's counseling is one course of action.

If you have decided that leaving is the best course of action for yourself, I would say that the hostile, uncooperative partner's attitude is enough to spur you to consider whether the relationship is worthwhile. The hostile defensiveness is indicative of deep problems, whether infidelity or not. Individual counseling is a good idea to gain support in your decision making process.

I urge my clients to maintain their power at each step of decision making. You do this by making decisions based on logical, intentional, conscious information gathering, about yourself, your partner and your relationship. Following the impulse to fly off the handle and accuse only gives away your power and robs you of the opportunity to make wise decisions for yourself.

Q5. You mention, "Are you willing to do the work to attempt to stay in the relationship or do you want to leave?" I guess staying in the relationship is somewhat easier when the straying partner confesses the affair as opposed to a partner who still lies, deceives and continues having the affair.

Assuming the betrayed partner wants to save their marriage or relationship even when the straying partner has not confessed or ended the affair, what should they do- should they just wait for the affair to end its course or should they separate temporarily or should they work on themselves?

I never advise clients what to do in this case, I merely hold the space and inquire with them of their hearts and their intuition what feels right. Frequently they decide to separate in the same home or ask their partner to relocate during this process. When this is the case, I help my client do everything they can to keep their focus on the one thing they have control over- themselves.

Frequently we find that they have neglected self care and have been running on empty for a long time. We will institute a regime of self care that feels nurturing to them. Whether it is yoga and meditation, or running and a book club, rediscovering what brings them feelings of self love and nurture gives them the energy to face the relationship with a “full bucket” instead of exhaustion and panic.

Getting in touch with things that bring them joy is important as well. Noticing cloud shapes, blowing a dandelion or paying attention to the sound of music or the warmth of the fire can go so far towards creating a life that is joyful.

It is the little moments that we do not notice when we are ruled by the tyranny of the urgent that give us joy. When my clients start scanning their days for moments of joy they can then begin to string them together to make a quality of life that they may have been missing.

Time away from the relationship can offer time to reignite a passion, or to discover a new one. This is an exciting time for my clients, I find them coming in with pink cheeks and a smile on their faces.

Tapping in to something creative and re-engaging with life helps boost that life energy that they may have been missing. The best part of this entire process is that it is very attractive. The rediscovering of self-love, joy and passion and creativity is magnetic.

I find clients that have not had a good conversation with their partner in years will breathlessly share their new found passion for life and excitement with their partner, causing them to give a second glance. None of this is done with the intention of getting the partner’s attention, but I have found that it does have that effect.

When it does not have that effect, I have found that it helps ground my clients and to give them a vision of the future that they simply did not have before, so that no matter what the outcome, they are better prepared to thrive.

Q6. Interesting, for the most part what happens is you have the betrayed spouse in a constant state of panic and worry filled with negative thoughts and fear that their partner is having an affair. So they look for clues and evidence to confirm their fears- checking their partner's cell phone, their computer, tracking their vehicles, checking their bank statements and credit cards, all of which is a natural reaction to a mind filled with conflicting thoughts. Needless to say, there is a lot of pain, hurt, grief and drama during this truth seeking phase.

And this continues till the point, they have undeniable evidence that their partner is cheating on them. At that point, they are even more hurt and angry because of the repeated lies. Unless the cheating spouse realizes the damage they have caused to their partner and family because of the affair, there is still lying, fighting, blaming and the denial to reveal the complete details of the affair.

Your philosophy seems to be more along the lines of Buddhism, where you encourage someone to look inwards and work on themselves to find inner peace and happiness than turn outwards where you may be looking for blame and suspicion and stop worrying about things that you cannot control.

Actually this does make sense, because so many readers have written to us that when they suspected their partner or spouse of having an affair or knew they were having an affair, they cried, begged, pleaded, threatened and even promised to change to become the person their spouse wants them to be, but none of this works for them and to make matters worse, they tend to backfire and push the straying partner further away.

However with your approach, the change you are seeking is for the right reason, it doesn't come from a desperate state of mind, you are not doing it superficially because you want to win your spouse back but because it makes you feel good and makes you happy.

Assuming with this approach, the straying spouse notices the difference, finds this new change desirable, comes back and is willing to work on the marriage, how does the healing process begin and what needs to happen? Because the straying partner has betrayed the trust of their partner, hurt them immensely, exposed them to risk both financially and medically and caused a lot of shame and embarrassment to their family, they have to make it up to their partner and family. Talk us through the dos and don't of the healing process for both the betrayed spouse and the straying spouse once both of them are committed to rebuilding their marriage after the affair.

Great question! The healing process is a delicate one. If the straying partner decides to return, then it is vital that the partners contract with each other to maintain the dignity of the partnership. This means the wronged party cannot throw dirty bombs or snipe. This is hard when you are tired or feeling insecure or wounded.

The transgressor is asked to show respect for the wronged party and the emotional risk they are taking in continuing the relationship. The partners must continue on equal footing, not one where one must kiss the other's feet or be forced to live in fear that their partner may decide they are not worth the effort and walk out.

At this point both partners have made a conscious decision to be in the relationship, therefore giving up any right to holding more power than the other. There is an emotional vulnerability on both parts, and finding equilibrium may take some work. The errant partner often has as difficult time as the wronged

partner because they elect to sit with their injured lover and to bear witness to their healing.

It can be very pain filled and guilt inducing. The wronged partner has a long journey of healing and it can be filled with anxiety. It is not an easy path for either partner, but for the right people it can be an amazing voyage of self discovery.

Committing to “hold the space” and allowing feelings to open naturally is the only way this will work. Good clear communication and reassurance when needed are the tools. There is the temptation to twist oneself into a pretzel trying to produce an atmosphere of trust at this point for both parties. This may be a little unrealistic.

Sitting with each other when feelings of insecurity come up (either feelings of fear, anger or wounding on the part of the injured party, or feelings of being scrutinized, judged or futility on the part of the transgressor) and allowing the feelings to exist without judgment in the presence of love can be very healing. Sometimes, just breathing together is all you can manage. Sometimes that is enough.

It is a slow process, learning to trust again, and rebuilding what was broken is a slow process, but it can be done.

Q7. Based on what you say, it really requires a magnanimous attitude from the betrayed partner because it is incredibly hard for them to accept the fact that the partners must continue on equal footing when they may feel otherwise.

They may think, ‘My partner had an affair, it was their choice, no one forced them to have an affair. While problems may have existed prior to the affair, they have to take a 100% responsibility of the affair’

A number of betrayed partners after the affair feel the need to have access to their partner's email, computer and cell phone at least for a reasonable period of time because the trust has been broken by the straying partner and it takes time before they can trust their partner again.

They also feel the need to have all their questions about their partner's affair be answered in order for them to heal since their mind is constantly obsessing over the details. They have problems with infidelity triggers and memories, mood swings and random episodes of crying and anger, all of which stems from the recollection of the affair. Sometimes it may take a year or two for the betrayed partner for healing process to be complete.

So in a way, the straying partner has to show a lot of patience and work hard to help the betrayed partner heal from the affair.

These are the typical expectations and feelings of a betrayed partner after the affair. Would it be unfair for the betrayed partner to have these feelings and expectations? What problems do you see, if any, with this attitude?

This really is a process of shifting from the place of fear to the place of love, and it can be a very difficult journey. Many choose not to walk it. For those that do, even society may prove a hindrance.

What people believe you should or shouldn't "put up with" can become a pronouncement on the one who chooses to stay. It can be a lonely place without much support. What's more is that the emotions are a tossing, turning, swirling sea of anger, pain, sadness and confusion.

Sharing details of the affair more than how it happened and the emotional course of it is not always wise. The details give mental images that may never heal. As much as a partner thinks they want to know and need to know, it may not always

be wise. The bare minimum of details that can allow the wronged partner to understand it the better, though this may feel contrary to what they want.

It can become a compulsion to have the straying partner catalog their sins over and over, and can tend to be more self injurious than productive for the wronged party. Hearing details of their partners intimacies with another can become a way for them to punish themselves for not being “enough.”

The wronged partner is entitled to have any emotion that comes up. I suggest to my clients that they “allow” their emotions to flow naturally, without resistance. Since emotions are “energy in motion” in our bodies, that want to be literally expressed or “squeezed out,” resisting these emotions causes them to become trapped, and causes discomfort.

Really taking the time to drop their awareness into the area that the uncomfortable energy exists in their bodies, and to allow the energy to flow through the body without resistance, can help them heal faster, and to be more comfortable with the difficult emotional experience.

A lot of work is required of both parties. The straying partner is required to give a heartfelt apology and the assurance that all precautions will be taken to prevent it from happening again.

I usually recommend shared passwords, and access to all information, however I urge both parties to try to avoid leaning in this as a means of preventing any future bad behavior.

It simply isn't effective to control another person. Being in a relationship is simply not “safe.” There are always risks when you open yourself up to another person. Learning to be alright in spite of taking a risk is the key to happiness in a relationship. This is why I recommend such deep personal work by both parties apart from the relationship.

The straying partner does have a lot of work and reassurance to do to help their partner heal. In my experience these partners are willing to do what they can to redeem themselves and to heal the relationship because they are so grateful for the chance to make things right.

One caution I would make is that this partner can become demotivated and get down on themselves if their efforts are not received and acknowledged in a loving manner.

I have seen relationships where this party has become the scapegoat, and has taken a lashing for years in hopes of righting the wrong. If we are looking to re-establish relationship and to rebuild after the reconciliation then obviously this continued flogging is counter to what should be occurring.

This is redemptive work, and again I will repeat, it is not for the faint of heart. Knowing themselves, both parties have to assess their goals and decide if they are willing to do what it takes to repair the relationship.

Q8. Some of our readers have written to us that even though they have tried to forgive their spouse for the affair they have a really tough time truly forgiving them. In a way, it is as if a part of them never wants to forgive their spouse or let go of the affair. As you mentioned earlier, these are typically the people who know too many details of the affair and these details come back to haunt them. What do you recommend someone do when they are stuck in the forgiveness process and are unable to move forward? Is there anything the straying spouse can do to make forgiving them easier?

Unfortunately, this piece is not up to the straying partner to fix. If it were, I think the process would be much easier. For the wronged party, it is a matter of deciding that they do not want to be unhappy anymore.

Forgiveness is a decision, albeit a decision that will have to be recommitted to with every memory and every trigger.

The grieving process must be honored, and all of the steps worked through, but ultimately, forgiveness is a decision. In therapy, there are skills, such as thought stopping, mindfulness and distraction that help the clients in coping with the pain.

Here are some techniques that are very helpful in dealing with unwanted thoughts that cause us pain.

Thought stopping is the act of noticing when your thoughts wander towards the topic that give you discomfort (in this case, the infidelity) and purposefully stopping that thought. I coach my clients that when their minds wander where we would prefer them not to go, to throw up a big red stop sign in their imagination, and immediately use that as their trigger to think of what to cook for dinner, for instance. There are many other forms of thought stopping.

One technique that is effective for some people is to wear a rubber band around their wrist and to snap it when a distressing thought comes up. The negative stimulus can encourage the mind to refrain from going there.

Mindfulness is the process of living in the moment. It is the act of focusing on this minute, right here in this room, being fully present with what is in front of you. When thoughts start to wander, immediate focus on bodily sensations is helpful.

Talking yourself through “I feel the floor under my feet, I feel the chair under my legs, I feel the cool air in the room, I smell the flowers from the vase on the table.” Being present in your body allows you to fully immerse yourself in the moment and thus avoiding the harmful thoughts of the past.

Distraction is just as it sounds. Making sure that you keep a list of activities available to take your mind off of the infidelity. When you start with the uncomfortable thoughts, watch a movie, immerse yourself in a book for awhile, go to a sporting event or pop in an exercise DVD. Anything that engages your mind and keeps it off of the pain you are feeling is helpful.

All of this boils down to realizing that you have power, that you can be intentional in your responses, and that you can make choices that honor the path you choose to take in life.

And again, the power is back in the wronged party's court. That is what I love about this process. It allows the wronged party to maintain control of what they can control, and to have the dignity of making their own decisions.

About Carolyn Tucker

Carolyn is a National Board Certified psychotherapist, certified life coach and energy healer, is a graduate of Argosy University, and a Harvard research assistant. She specializes in divorce issues, trauma and anxiety. Carolyn works with a broad spectrum of clients. Among her areas of expertise are relationship issues, pre and post divorce issues and custody communication, trauma, anxiety, and gay and lesbian relationship issues.

She uses a unique blend of mind/body interventions, coaching, energy medicine and extensive traditional therapy modalities. She is distance counseling certified and offers Skype, email and chat counseling and coaching for your ease and convenience.

Carolyn is a person-centered therapist. Her therapeutic approach is to provide support and practical feedback to help clients effectively address personal life challenges. She integrates complementary methodologies and techniques to offer a highly personalized approach tailored to each client.

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With compassion and understanding, she works with each individual to help them build on their strengths and attain the personal growth they are committed to accomplishing. Carolyn is known for her warmth and nurturing support as well as her extensive training.

To know more about Carolyn Tucker, visit her website, www.carolyntuckertherapist.com or call her at 770-789-0847.