

What is Betrayal Trauma and What Does Healing Look Like?

Information based off Facing Heartbreak by Patrick Carnes and The Betrayal Bond by Patrick Carnes

“After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment.” - Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery

“Betrayal is the sense of being harmed by the intentional actions or omissions of a trusted person.”

“Trust is restored when we learn to trust ourselves and build trust with others. There is no other way.

*“What happens to someone’s heart when the person they loved and trusted most in the world betrays them by going outside of the relationship sexually and emotionally? What happens to the psyche of a person who has been consistently deceived and manipulated by sexual addiction, internet pornography, and affairs? What level of pain does someone experience when the person whom they have built a life with—the person who knows their mind, body, and soul—betrays them on the most intimate level? **Trauma**”*

Healing from Betrayal Trauma:

1. The Trauma of Discovery

The Nine Stages of Deception:

- **Stage 1: Suspicion** - You get a sinking feeling inside. Something doesn’t “feel” right
- **Stage 2: Confrontation** - You confront your partner with an accusation
- **Stage 3: Denial of Reality** - The addict lies about his or her sexual behavior either overtly or covertly (not telling you about it or hiding it
- **Stage 4: Investigation** - As suspicion persists, you may begin snooping, following the addict, going through pockets, checking email, searching through paperwork, interviewing friends, reviewing text messages, and other probing behaviors
- **Stage 5: Accusation** - A hostile confrontation happens involving yelling, tears, and threats of terminating the relationship if the whole truth is not revealed immediately.
- **Stage 6: Staggered Disclosure** - The addict admits to a small bit of the truth, often padded in elaborate details, but denies any other sexual secrets while withholding information.
- **Stage 7: Deception/Bullying** - The addict lies, bullies, and gets angry as a way of controlling you

- **Stage 8: Ultimatum/Bargaining** - The addict or the partner strikes a bargain through ultimatums for the addict to change once and for all
- **Stage 9: Promises** - The addict makes false promises to stop the dance and the addictive behavior

Staggered Disclosure: Staggered disclosure, although with good intent (the addict thinks it will be better received, and less hurtful, in small bits over time), is incredibly damaging to the partner. It destroys the trust that they have in themselves, their gut and intuition, and makes them feel crazy. It is also extremely damaging to the spouses trust of their addicted partner since every time the partner discloses they usually say “but that is all that happened,” “It only happened once,” “that was the only time,” “I promise that that is everything.” Or something similar.

2. Manage the Crisis

Set Goals for Yourself:

- Locate a therapist who specializes in treating partners of sex addicts, as well as EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing).
- Observe the addict’s behavior to see if they are taking their recovery seriously. Are they concerned and taking action? Or are they denying and minimizing their behavior? Discuss this with your therapist
- Get sound legal advice from a trusted source
- Cope with the trauma you’ve experienced by building a network of social support
- Educate yourself about the disease of sex addiction from reliable sources
- Find Support Groups, SANON and COSA meetings, of other women dealing with similar issues, and learn about their strategies of coping
- If you are planning on staying in a relationship with the addict, locate a Recovering Couples Anonymous meeting
- Create a list of Non-negotiable Boundaries

Boundaries:

Non-negotiable boundaries

Examples of non-negotiable boundaries:

- *Sever ties with the affair partner*
- *Enter a recovery process and follow all of a therapist’s treatment recommendations*
- *Permanently remove pornography from your home*

What happens if the Boundaries are crossed?

Examples:

- *The addict inform you about the relapse within seventy-two hours after it occurs*
- *You will refrain from having sex with the addict for a specified period of time after relapse*
- *Move out for a period of time with a safe friend or family member after relapse to take time and evaluate your options.*

Emotional boundaries

Examples of emotional boundaries:

- *When you feel triggered to act out sexually, I want you to discuss this with your accountability partner and your group rather than with me*
- *If you remember a sexual behavior that you participated in and have not yet disclosed it to me, I would like this to be done in the presence of a therapist*
- *If you are making a change in your treatment plan, I will need to be informed of the change so I understand why the recommendation was made.*
- *I am requesting that you watch the kids on tuesday and thursday nights so that I can attend my support groups*

Physical and sexual boundaries

Examples of physical and sexual boundaries:

- *I will not change clothes or shower in front of the addict*
- *I will sleep in a separate bed*
- *I will have no sex or no unprotected sex*
- *I will be the one to solicit physical affection*
- *I will require that my partner have a test for STDS now and again in six months-and show me the results*

Boundaries with other people, places and things

Examples for boundaries with other people, places and things:

- *I want to be involved in deciding what information about your addiction is shared with our children, and I want to be present when that information is shared.*
- *I want to replace our bedding since you were unfaithful in our bed*
- *I want new pornography filtration software installed on all computers in our home with me holding the password*
- *I will no longer attend the church we went to as a family since one of your acting-out partners still goes there*

- *I want you to make arrangements to fire your administrative assistant because you acted out sexually with her*
- *I expect that you will begin looking for a new job immediately since you've had sex with people at your company*

Decide Who You Will Tell:

- Identify the people in your life that you trust
- Find a Support Group and/or Twelve Step Program where you can share and be vulnerable (COSA, CODA, S-ANON)
- Agree together on who you will tell and how you will tell them

3. How to Deal with the Emotional Aftershock

Common Emotions:

Shock - Disbelief

Pain - Sadness, loss, grief, heartbreak, betrayal

Anger - Rage, hatred, desire for revenge, mistrust

Shame - Worthlessness, Embarrassment, Insecurity

Confusion - Deception, Used, Self-doubt

Numbness - Avoidance, Denial, Checked out, dissociation

Hope - Relief once the truth is known, possibility of positive change through recovery

Steps to Take in Order to Overcome Shock

- Identify the Crazy Making Deceptions and Lies
- Document Your Discovery Story
- Process Your Pain
- Write a Letter to Sex Addiction

What is Anger and is it Bad?

Anger is a natural response to having our boundaries crossed, being manipulated, and being betrayed and is a protection mechanism. It allows us to take action, to realize that what has happened is unacceptable and that change **MUST** follow.

Distinguish Anger from Other Emotions:

Anger - an emotional state that can range in intensity

Aggression - a behavior that is intended to cause harm

Hostility - an attitude or judgement that motivates aggressive behaviors

Rage - the strongest form of anger that is physical, threatening and includes possible lack of control. *Fear and shame are often the roots of rage.*

Resentment - a process in which anger is stored. The belief that we have been injured by others

Hatred - the end product of unresolved resentment. Frozen anger.

Release Shame:

Shame is the fear of disconnection. The fear that if someone knew who we really were, they would reject us or would not want to be around us. (Shame is at the core of addiction, along with feeling unworthy, unlovable, and defective)

Shame is the

Separate Shame from Guilt

- Guilt - the belief that you **did** something bad
- Shame - the belief that you **are** bad because you made a mistake

Four Elements of Shame:

- How we react physically - Our bodies become hypervigilant, anxious, constantly scanning the environment for threats, ever alert to further shaming events
- Our thought process - Reciting every event, chapter, and verse of our failings. Preoccupation with wishing we could go back and do it differently. **Fundamental belief that we are defective**
- How we react emotionally - We want to withdraw, hide, isolate, become invisible and are afraid of connection
- How we behave - Avoiding eye contact, walk with our head down, speak softly, feel frozen, or try to do too much.

4. The Nature of Sex Addiction

Definition: "Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors."

If mental health is a commitment to reality, addiction is the complete opposite. Addiction is when someone will do anything and everything it takes to numb, ignore, and block out reality.

“Addiction is an *intimacy disorder*. Because we have been taught that we cannot trust people we learn to trust in alcohol, sex, substances, and fantasies because they always do what they promise. Addicts engage in these processes and acts due to the mood-altering chemicals that are released in the brain that make us feel better. Addiction becomes the solution to loneliness, pain, and shame.”

Key Features of any addiction:

Impaired control - Efforts to reduce addictive behavior repeatedly fail.

Compulsive use despite harmful consequences - The addictive behavior persists even though it damages the addict’s relationships, employment status, or health, or even when it leads to legal problems

Craving - Addicts feel a powerful desire to engage in the addictive behavior.

Denial - The addict refuses to admit the devastating consequences of the compulsive behavior.

Addiction Cycle:

Preoccupation - obsessing about the solution (addictive behavior)

Ritualization - behaviors that separate us further from reality so that we can’t say no to the solution (addictive behavior)

Acting Out - engaging in the solution (addictive behavior) and experiencing relief

Despair - reality sets in and shame comes to the forefront. The addict promises themselves to never do it again.

The reasons for sobriety are as follows:

- Cooling off period (damage control)
- Allows for the addict to learn how to handle emotions without the sexual crutch
- Repressed childhood memories start to emerge
- Stimulates healthy sexual interest
- Provides an important context for defining what sobriety is, what relapse is and what healthy sex is
- Allows the partner to feel safe, work through their trauma, and evaluate their boundaries

5. How to Communicate Your Feelings

Often as children we are not taught how to put words to our feelings, what feelings are, or even that our feelings are okay. Quite often we are taught to buck up, suck it up, and deal with it. We are told to stop being dramatic, stop crying, etc.

A crucial part of healing is developing self-awareness so that we can recognize what our feelings and boundaries are. This is critical for creating boundaries, maintaining boundaries and developing self-trust and self-love.

How can you trust yourself if you do not know yourself?

How can you love yourself if you do not know yourself?

How can you create a list of what your boundaries and values are if you do not know yourself?

Developing self-awareness

- Use mindfulness techniques daily
- Journal daily
- Use the Intimate Conversation Guide and Emotions Table to talk with you friends, spouse, children and support group
- Start finding hobbies that you enjoy. Explore your interests and start getting to know yourself again. Think of it as Dating yourself.

Recognize negative scripts from childhood

- What were our family's unspoken rules?

What is Your Communication style?

- **Passive** - hiding or disguising true thoughts and feelings (I am not worth loving. My feelings will get me in trouble)
- **Aggressive** - intimidating or overwhelming others by interrupting, accusing, yelling, and being verbally abusive (low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness)
- **Passive aggressive** - appear to be serene but underneath is resentment, indirect, undermining.
- **Assertive** - allows open and truthful communication of feelings, thoughts and desires

Using "I" Statements and Avoiding using the word "You"

Three Communication Roles:

Victim - Continually feels victimized, has unrealistic expectations, despair and vulnerability and chronic disappointment as a result. This person feels "less than" the Victimizer and everyone else.

Victimizer – Acts out in order to get revenge and offends others so there's not an opportunity to feel his or her own discomfort. People who communicate in an aggressive way are often victimizers. This person feels “better than” the victim.

Rescuer – Natural care taker, keeps secrets, is very non-confrontational, and is an enabler of addictive behaviors. People who communicate in a passive-aggressive way are often rescuers. This person feels superior to both the persecutor and the victim.

Prepare for a **Full Therapeutic Disclosure** with your therapist and your spouse's therapist

- **Disclosure** (addict shares their history of acting out starting from childhood till present)
- **Impact Letter** (partner shares the impact the spouses addiction, behaviors, lies, manipulation, gaslighting, have had on them mentally, emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually, etc. Shares the boundaries that are going to be required of the addict in order to continue in the relationship and gaining back trust)
- **Restitution Letter** (Addict responds to the Impact Letter validating the spouse's feelings, experience, pain, and agrees to the boundaries and to pursuing the relationship and doing anything and everything the spouse needs to gain back trust)
- **Polygraph test**

6. Make Empowered Choices

Common dynamics in Addicted Relationships:

Parenting the Addict

- Being the responsible one
- Advising the addict to change his or her behavior
- Exhibiting disrespect for the addict
- Taking care of the addict
- Overfunctioning in the relationship
- Partner is “one up” and the addict is “one down”
- May include controlling behaviors
- May include raging and/or blaming behaviors

Codependency

- Snooping
- Controlling behaviors

- Blaming him or herself for the addiction
- Covering up for the addict
- Accommodating/tolerating the addict's behaviors
- Ruminating about the addict
- Anger, blame and/or rage

Trauma Bonding

- Addict's behavior is abusive and traumatic for partner
- Partner believes or tolerates addict's lies and manipulation
- Partner stays in a relationship that s/he knows is abusive
- Partner tolerates exploitation
- Partner may be repeating patterns from past relationships

Overcompensating

- Partners find themselves overcompensating for addicts who are out of control with their behaviors
- Partner is the responsible one
- Partner handles more than their share of responsibility
- Partner has difficulty challenging the addict to take initiative or responsibility
- Partner is stretched too thin
- Partner begins to withdraw from the relationship
- May include lack of self-care
- May include anger, rage, and/or blame

Examine Your Family of Origin

For a lot of us, we come from dysfunctional families that distorted our view of what love or healthy relationships are.

- Not having a healthy model of attaching to others in our early family of origin,
- Having blurred or nonexistent boundaries,
- Having a past that involved abuse, neglect or fear,
- Being required to take on an adult role when we were children

How have you contributed to the unhealthy dynamic in your relationship?

What are the scripts or beliefs from your childhood that contributed to the dysfunction?

Forgive Yourself and the Addict

Forgiveness is NOT forgetting what happened, excusing behaviors, tolerating further betrayals, allowing escape from consequences, or guaranteeing that you will be reconciled. Forgiveness IS releasing the addict from having to make you feel better. Forgiveness IS taking responsibility for your part and committing to healing yourself.

7. Reclaim Your Sexuality

How Your Partner's Sex Addiction Can Affect Your Sexuality:

Making Comparisons - Am I as sexy as she is? Am I too fat? Are my boobs too small?

Feelings of Aversion - Not wanting to be sexual with him, the behaviors he's been involved in are perverse, I don't even want him close to me anymore.

Sexual Retaliation - I know that my "ex" still thinks I'm sexy, If he can have affairs so can I

Fear of Being Sexual - Finding it hard to feel relaxed or sexy around him, feeling uncomfortable with sexual acts that you used to be comfortable with

Intimacy Impairment - Struggling to feel close after all the lies, Scared of being hurt so you shut down, not feeling like you know him anymore

Feelings of Victimization - I feel betrayed and violated, upset that you have to keep it secret, upset that your partner may not be more affect by sex addiction, wanting him to suffer

Shame - Feeling isolated and shamed, believing it is your fault, feeling unlovable or unworthy

Sexual Dysfunction - When the addict is unable to "get off" or climax due to desensitization from porn.

Body Image Issues - Feeling unattractive, unwanted, undesirable, insecure and that you will never measure up

Obligatory Sex - Not wanting to have sex with him but doing it anyways, getting drunk so you can have sex with him

Compulsive Sex - Start using porn and having lots of casual sex

Anger - Feeling inadequate, angry, upset, resenting spending your time with him, etc.

8. Choose Your Next Steps

At this stage you no longer define yourself as a victim but you see the change and growth that has come from it.

You have healed, can trust others, have a great support system around you and are ready to move forward.

You may also be continuing with Couples Counseling, meeting with you individual therapists, or continuing with check ups. The journey looks different for everyone!