HOW TO SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE WHEN YOUR SPOUSE WANTS TO RECONCILE... AND EVEN WHEN THEY DON’T!

Re-Engage After the Affair

BY Kim Bowen

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You Can Survive...and Rebuild a Better Marriage

Clients often ask our experts if it is possible for their marriage to fully recover from an affair. After all, an affair causes a tremendous amount of trauma and chaos in a relationship.

But, it really is possible to survive an affair. In fact, most marriages do recover. We want to help you do more than just survive it. We want to help you rebuild an even better marriage.

I’ve seen many couples that work with us, come out on the other side stronger and more committed than ever before. Why? Because as devastating as an affair is, it is a wake-up call for both of you. Something was going on that made one of you vulnerable to an affair to begin with. The affair is not the "problem" in your relationship. It is a symptom of the problem. Once you start to do the work of healing and recovery, you will discover where the cracks are in your marital foundation. You cannot rebuild your marriage on a weak and broken foundation. We will help to strengthen the framework so your marriage is on sturdy ground...maybe for the first time!

Can you rebuild trust once there is this level of betrayal? Absolutely! Can you develop intimacy again? Yes! Can you truly forgive the affair? Yes! But this is where the real work begins. Recovery is not quick nor is it painless. It takes time, patience and each of you willing to look at how you contributed to the weaknesses in the marriage.

Enduring Some Difficult Times

If your spouse is having or has had an affair, no one would blame you if you wanted to call it quits. Instead, I’m assuming that because you are reading this, you want to save your marriage.

However, you need to recognize that this will be a very long and difficult journey for you. Especially if your spouse wants to continue the affair and/or leave the marriage. But, it is possible to still save your marriage.

I promise you, though, that the next few months will be some of the most difficult times of your life.

• You will be fighting insecurity, anxiety, depression, anger and uncertainty.
• One day things will look promising, and the next day you will feel hopeless that things can ever turn around.
• You will experience a roller coaster of emotions that will no doubt leave you exhausted.
• And it is possible to go through all of this and still lose the fight for your marriage.
You may also feel isolated. Your friends and family may not understand your determination and may very well discourage your efforts. I’ve even seen family and friends get very angry and frustrated when someone doesn’t quit the marriage after an affair. But YOU are the one who has to live with the consequences of divorce and YOU are the only one who can decide when it is time to quit fighting.

Divorce Is Rarely the Answer

As exhausting as fighting for your marriage will be, divorce will not set you free. It is expensive and destructive. Choosing divorce will require you to split assets, figure out a new way to live and support yourself, and separate from some family and friends.

The effect on your kids
If you have kids, your spouse will always be in your life on some level. Co-parenting, co-grandparenting, and negotiating holidays, celebrations and big family events will take an emotional toll on you.

Even if both of you move on with new partners. Divorce is especially difficult on kids. They often deal with the consequences for the rest of their lives.

The attorney costs
An amicable divorce with one attorney typically costs $600-$1,000 in the U.S. But most divorces don’t go that route. The average divorce in the US costs around $15,000 to $18,000. I’ve seen them cost several hundred thousand dollars!

Simply put...divorce is a pain that keeps on giving

Many, many people have told me that they wish they had stayed to work on their marriage, because divorce was so much harder than they realized. They chose divorce because they were simply exhausted and tired of fighting.

The point here is that there is no easy path. If your spouse is having or has had an affair, you are going to have a difficult journey. It will take some time for you to heal, no matter which path you choose.

But let’s say you choose to fight for your marriage. The first step is getting a handle on the battle you will be fighting.

Is There Really an Affair?

Approach with caution
You may be suspicious your spouse is having an affair but how do you know for sure?
I always tell clients to approach this with caution. I've worked with clients who were convinced that their spouse was cheating but that was more about the client’s insecurity and fears than the truth. However, they did significant damage to their relationships because they kept accusing their spouse.

**Your own fears and anxieties**
I recommend that you do some serious introspection here, and make sure your fears and anxiety aren’t more about you than your spouse.

- Have you been told you are controlling?
- Have you always had some anxiety your spouse would cheat?
- If you are even a little bit doubtful whether this is more about you than your spouse, talk to a counselor or coach and make sure you aren’t suffering from a jealous nature or insecurity before approaching your spouse.

### The 11 Telltale Signs of an Affair

When a spouse is having an affair, there are typically signs:

1. **Your spouse has pulled away from you emotionally.** You aren’t talking or sharing the day’s events. You don’t communicate about more than the kids or running a household.
2. **Your spouse has pulled away sexually.**
3. **Your spouse has become more sexual** than usual.
4. **Your spouse may be overcome with guilt** and giving you more attention than normal. Even buying you gifts.
5. **Your spouse spends more time away from home.** Working late, taking overnight trips for work or cannot account for his/her time.
6. You notice **charges or missing money that cannot be accounted for**.
7. **Your spouse is guarding their phone.** They always have it with them or near them.
8. **Your spouse has changed or set up new passwords on phone and email** and has not given you access.
9. **Your spouse is texting more than usual.**
10. **Your spouse is up late on the computer** or tablet several nights a week.
11. **Your spouse gets angry when you confront him/her about any of these signs.** He/ She may become defensive, tell you that you are crazy or make you doubt yourself. Your spouse may attack you for asking questions.

One or two of these signs doesn’t mean there is an affair. But if your spouse is exhibiting several of these together, you should ask some questions.
Why You Should NOT Spy on Your Spouse

Some of you may be tempted to become a super sleuth and start spying on your spouse. I highly discourage this for a several reasons.

1. I’ve rarely seen it work out well.

Clients are always surprised by this, but it is true. It makes perfect sense that if you investigate and catch your spouse with inappropriate emails or texts, they will feel guilty when you bring them evidence. They will start telling you the truth and agree to stop the affair. They will be so sorry for the hurt they’ve caused you that they will agree to counseling. At the very least, the deception ends. Unfortunately, this isn’t what usually happens though.

Instead, it most often looks like this: You confront your spouse and show them the evidence. Instead of feeling remorse, they are furious. As ridiculous as it seems, they will accuse YOU of betraying them! Catching them doesn’t stop the lying either. It just makes them get better at hiding their activities.

2. This kind of spying and checking up on your spouse is addictive behavior.

You will never feel that you have looked hard enough or long enough. You will spend a huge amount of time and energy checking phone records, Internet histories, Facebook activities, and going through email. One client I worked with almost lost her job. She was checking phone records every few minutes to see how often her husband was texting the other woman. Another client put a GPS tracker on his wife’s car and spent hours each day watching to see where she went and how long she stayed. This is not healthy behavior!

None of this activity stops an affair or makes your spouse want to be with you. I would much rather see you spend that time, energy, and effort on something that may actually help your marriage for the long-term.

How to Confront Your Spouse If You See Signs of an Affair

Talk when you’re not aggravated
Find a time when you and your spouse aren’t particularly irritated with each other. I always teach my clients that difficult conversations must come from a place of vulnerability if you want those discussions to go well.
Discuss your own feelings
This means you talk more about your feelings than your spouse's behavior. Very calmly, tell your spouse that you feel insecure about the relationship and tell them why without attacking or sounding critical. Give him/her the opportunity to explain.

Recognize their concerns
Your spouse may be under a lot of pressure at work or may be going through something he/she hasn’t shared that would explain some of the behaviors you’ve noticed. Just let your spouse know you feel anxious he/she may be having a relationship with someone else. At this point, your spouse will almost certainly deny any involvement.

Asking for Transparency to Feel Secure
I would recommend that you say “thank you for the reassurance," and then tell your spouse you need more transparency to feel more security and confidence. Let him/her know this is only temporary. That means access to passwords and permission to look at phones and email.

Most spouses comply with this to help you feel more secure. If this makes your spouse angry, it is a good sign there is some type of affair going on. If your spouse refuses to give you more transparency, it may be time to set some boundaries. (Note: I have covered boundaries in the Re-Engage Toolkit, and I advise you to purchase and review that resource if you haven’t done so already. You will get some great information that isn’t covered here.)

If your spouse does admit to an affair, keep reading! We will cover what to do in this situation.
1. Has your spouse changed? Are any of the changes listed above, as one of the signs of an affair? List them here: 

2. Have you been spying on your spouse? List ways you have been engaging in this unhelpful behavior.

3. If you have been spying, write down how this behavior is hurting you or your marriage.

4. Can you commit to stop this behavior?

5. Do you want to save your marriage? List reasons for fighting for your marriage: (Keeping this list may be helpful to look back on when you feel discouraged.)

6. Ready to confront your spouse? Write here what you want to say. Remember to stay calm, talk about your feelings and do not attack your spouse.
The 3 Types of Affairs

It is helpful to understand what type of affair your spouse is involved in. They basically fall into 3 categories:

**Type 1—Physical Affair with No Emotional Attachment**
These can be very short-term, as in one-night stands (even with multiple people), or long term. Whether short- or long-term, this type of affair is mostly focused on the physical pleasure of sex.

You may have seen texts or emails where there are declarations of love, but that doesn’t necessarily mean there is a serious attachment. Sometimes it just adds to the excitement and the passion.

If your partner has had multiple affairs, you need to consider whether there is sex addiction involved. Sex addiction usually begins with pornography and can progress to bar hook-ups and prostitution. If this is your situation, we have a porn and sex addiction coach who works with these clients to help them break free. It is done from the privacy of your home, on the phone or video chat with our coach, who is outstanding in handling these types of issues.

**Type 2—Emotional Affair with No Physical Interaction**
Even though there has been no sexual/physical exchange, these types of affairs are often difficult to get over for many people. Those who are in emotional affairs have become very attached to another person and leaving this person creates a painful gap. If these go unchecked for too long, they often progress into a relationship affair.

These emotional affairs usually begin as friends and progress over time OR they begin over the Internet in some fashion. Women seem particularly vulnerable to emotional affairs on the Internet, although I have seen many men fall into this trap as well. I’ve seen women leave good husbands for someone they have never even met face-to-face, because they built a fantasy world around this partner that their husbands could not compete with. These relationships almost always end as soon as this newly formed couple starts to experience real-life together. Sadly though, there is often a lot of damage done to the marriage before this happens.

**Type 3—Relationship Affair with Both Emotional and Physical Attachment**
These affairs can last months or years. Partners have developed strong feelings of attachment for each other, and there is often great passion and excitement. There is usually a deep level of intimacy, which means these affairs are often extremely difficult for someone to end and recovery can take a long time.

But there is an extra ingredient that can occur in both emotional and relationship affairs which makes them particularly difficult to understand and deal with. It’s called “limerance.”
Is It Limerence?

You should know about “limerence.” When your partner has limerence for someone else, he/she is not thinking clearly. You will notice behavior that surprises you and leaves you wondering if your spouse has lost his/her mind. For all practical purposes, that is exactly what is happening, and you need to learn how to deal with this if you want to save your marriage.

Limerence is...

• A term that was coined by psychologist Dorothy Tennov in the 1970’s to describe the ultimate, obsessive form of romantic love that consumes a person, whether those feelings are reciprocated or not.
• More intense than infatuation.
• An involuntary cognitive and emotional state of intense romantic desire for another person.

When someone is in a limerence affair, they are consumed with thoughts of the other person. They experience chemical highs (dopamine) in the brain similar to what happens when someone takes drugs to elevate their mood. A limerent brain has almost exactly the same MRI images as someone on drugs to elevate mood.

A person in limerence is preoccupied with the person past the point of reason and logic. It has been described as “madly in love.” It can sweep a person away from their marriages and families and cause them to do things they would never do in their right mind.

Limerence doesn’t last

But here’s the thing about limerence. It always ends. No one can maintain that kind of unbalanced high. Limerence can last on average 3 months to 3 years. However, most limerents come down from the high at around 18 months.

Limerence is addictive

If your spouse is in limerence, you need to treat them like an addict, because that is what is happening to them. They are addicted to another person. They cannot be trusted to act responsibly, honestly, and rationally. Addicts are masterful liars and know how to cover their tracks.

It’s completely emotional

You cannot reason with a person in limerence, because this is a completely emotional experience. There is no logic here. People in limerence are able to live double lives because they can compartmentalize their thinking.

If you choose to stay with a spouse in limerence, you have to be prepared to wait it out. I know that isn’t what you want to hear. But the longer you stick it out, the closer you get to the limerence ending. How you respond to your spouse can help end the affair...but there are no guarantees.
Understanding How Your Spouse Sees You

If your spouse is having an affair, it is likely this activity goes against his/her moral convictions. When this happens, a person needs to justify their actions to help them deal with the guilt and shame of what they are doing. To accomplish this justification, they will often:

- **Focus entirely on your flaws** and may not hesitate to point them out to you at every opportunity. If you don’t understand what is happening and why, this can be a huge hit to your self-esteem.

  I’ve had clients come in very upset, because they have taken full responsibility for their partner’s affair. They just beat themselves up because they feel they must have truly been a horrible person for their spouse to go outside of the marriage. This simply isn’t true. You certainly have your flaws. We all do!! But your spouse made the decision to have an affair. You will likely have some responsibility in the relationship being vulnerable to an affair, but you aren’t at fault because your spouse chose infidelity as a way to cope with things not going well. You did not deserve this.

- **Rewrite history.** They will tell you they never loved you or have felt this way for years. They will say they never should have married you. This is all a normal part of their experience because they cannot align their actions to their beliefs. Therefore, you must be the one at fault. 

Try not to put too much energy into the negative feedback your partner is giving you.

Your First 5 Steps

**Step 1—Have a support system**

Once you learn of an affair, it is important for you to get a support system in place. Choose just a small handful of people to talk with and make sure they are:

- **Trustworthy and able to keep confidences.** You don’t need to add to your stress by having to deal with gossip and rumors.
- **Level-headed.** Make sure you choose people who have a history of making good decisions in their own lives.
- **Unbiased.** Well…as unbiased as possible. If you pick someone who feels too protective of you, they may make recommendations that are in your best interests but not in the best interests of the marriage. People who are close to us do not want to see us suffer. They are the ones who almost insist you divorce and move on, because they want you to feel better sooner rather than later. They cannot be objective.
• **Expert at helping you.** Choose at least one expert—preferably a marriage counselor or coach. Avoid individual counselors or anyone who isn’t pro-marriage. I’ve written extensively about this on my website. Choose wisely.

• **Clergy.** Clergy members are often a good choice and can help you from a spiritual perspective if that is something you are interested in.

**Step 2—What not to do**
Read the free ebook on my site about what NOT to do. Start putting these in place immediately.

**Step 3—Refer to our Re-Engage Toolkit**
Get and read the Re-Engage Toolkit. It will help you realize when you need to be hard and when to be soft with your spouse. If your spouse is in limerence, boundaries are especially important. It is unlikely you will save your relationship without them. The Toolkit will also show you how to start talking to your spouse again, which is another really important part of the process.

**Step 4—Talk to a PRO-marriage counselor or coach**
Find a good PRO-marriage counselor or coach and start processing your feelings. Go alone at least for a little while, even if your spouse is willing to come with you. You need a safe place to become aware of all the feelings you are experiencing.

No doubt you will be angry. Your spouse doesn’t need to be in the room while you vent all your feelings of hurt and betrayal. That only traumatizes the relationship further. Hopefully, the time will come when you can discuss your hurt feelings with your spouse, but not until your spouse wants to work on the marriage with you. As long as your spouse is leaning out, process alone.

**Step 5—Self-care**
Start the self-care steps I mention in the Re-engage Toolkit. You need to start taking care of yourself...especially now! Don’t allow yourself to only be about the affair and reconciliation. You will benefit so much from this. I promise you will thank me later, whether the marriage is saved or not.
1. List the 3 types of affairs here:

2. If your spouse is having an affair, can you identify which of the 3 types it is?

3. Have you seen signs of limerence in your partner? If so, list them here:

4. Refer to Step 1—Support System, then list the names of those you will ask to support you in this time:

5. Hiring a professional is a good investment right now. Which type of professional will you hire?

6. Have you read the free ebook?

7. Have you read the Re-Engage Toolkit?

8. List ways you are committed to self-care over the next several months:
Watch Out for These Concerns

• Taking all the blame for your spouse’s affair. Your spouse is probably vilifying you to help justify his/her behavior. You aren’t perfect, but you didn’t cause the affair. Your spouse chose this path, and you didn’t do anything to deserve this. Be willing to look at your part in the marriage problems, but don’t take full responsibility.

• Trying to compete with your spouse’s affair partner. Do NOT do it! I worked with one woman who was very petite with a slender frame. Her husband had an affair with a voluptuous woman. My client had breast implants (against my advice) to make her body more like the one her husband desired. She has regretted this surgery every single day since. Try to accept that your spouse’s affair isn’t about you. It is about him/her. DO work on yourself and increase your attractiveness (the 4 levels mentioned in the Re-Engage Toolkit) based on you and your own desires.

• Setting boundaries with your spouse. Expect that any boundary you set will cause your spouse to get upset. Set them anyway. Your spouse is angry, because you are getting in the way of something he/she wants. Remember that boundaries protect relationships. Not setting them when it is appropriate will actually make you look weak and much less attractive. Not setting boundaries can actually push your spouse away from you.

How Do You Forgive?

You’ve probably heard that forgiveness is for YOU not the other person. If you want to save your marriage, forgiveness is for both of you. But sometimes forgiveness feels next to impossible, especially when your spouse isn’t showing remorse.

Move toward acceptance
If forgiveness seems impossible to you at this moment, move toward acceptance.

• Acceptance that the marriage isn’t what you thought it was.
• Acceptance that your spouse is capable of this level of betrayal.
• Acceptance that you are hurting and there is nothing you can do but get through this one day at a time.

Avoid getting even
Steer clear of any thoughts of getting even. You won’t feel better for hurting your spouse. Use that energy to take care of yourself and make positive changes to your life.

Forgive, but not forget
Keep in mind that forgiving does not mean forgetting, justifying, or excusing what was done. It means you are:
• Working to minimize the thoughts and feelings caused by the affair so you can focus on pursuing a healthy relationship with your spouse now and in the future.
• Voluntarily giving up the right to continue punishing your partner for the affair.

If your spouse doesn’t want to end the affair or doesn’t want to work on the marriage, use the steps in the Re-Engage Toolkit. If your spouse does want to work on the marriage, keep reading!

Healing Together

Ending the affair
Ending the affair is an important step and it is just as important that it is done correctly.

• Your spouse may want to end the affair in person or on the phone. He/she may feel a responsibility to let the affair partner down easy or to explain things. Too many things can go wrong by meeting or talking.
• The best way to end an affair is by written letter or email from your spouse that you have read first before it goes out.
• It is critical for your spouse to clearly state in that written communication that the affair is over and that the two of you are working to heal and restore your marriage.
• The email or letter should not leave any room for doubt or ask questions that need to be answered.
• The message to the affair partner should tell that person not to contact either of you again in the future.
• Your spouse will likely feel guilty for ending things this way but it really is best for everyone.
• The affair partner needs to be told in a kind but firm way the relationship is over. Leaving them even a hint of doubt just keeps them hanging on.

Getting past guilt and remorse
Your spouse may be feeling a lot of guilt and remorse for his/her actions. It is important for that person to believe you will be able to forgive them. If your anger and hurt is all they see, they may feel hopeless that the two of you can get past this.

Treat your partner as if they are a good person who did a bad thing. Separate the event from the person as much as you are able to do so. This does not mean you should minimize the hurt that was caused you. It means you learn how to deal with your anger in constructive ways and learn how to express that anger, so that it doesn’t cause more damage and distance between you and your spouse.
Don’t constantly talk about the affair
An important part of healing together is limiting how much time you spend talking about the affair. Your spouse will probably not want to talk about it all after the initial discovery. On the other hand, it may be consuming your every thought. You may want to talk about it constantly.

The best way to deal with this is to set aside a certain amount of time for talking. It can be 1 hour twice a week or a couple of hours once a week. It’s important for you to know there will be an approved time and place to talk, and it’s important for your spouse to know there is a limit. Don’t make all of your time together be focused on the affair.

Watch your questions
Be careful what questions you ask your spouse about the affair. It is normal to want details about the affair and the affair partner but some answers can cause you more harm than good. For example, information that gives you mental pictures can create PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) symptoms for you that make healing much harder.

Avoid pictures or reading emails/texts that can also haunt you for years to come. You may feel you need to know certain things but knowing details doesn’t make this any easier.

Allow your partner to grieve the loss
Be aware that your partner may also be grieving the end of the relationship with the affair partner. This is an unpleasant reality for you, but a necessary process for your spouse.

It is best if you allow your partner the space and time to grieve this loss. Try not to feel threatened. Your spouse chose to stay with you. Give your spouse compassion and understanding.

Tell concerned friends what’s going on
Make sure to contact any friends or family who know about the affair and let them know you are reconciling. Ask them not to speak about your spouse in an unkind way or to bring up the affair to you.

Rebuilding Trust
This is a combination of time and transparency. Ask for what you need so you can begin to trust your spouse again. Make sure you and your spouse know this is temporary. Some ideas might include:

- Sharing passwords to phones, emails, and Facebook.
- A phone call or two throughout the day letting you know what’s going on.
- Coming straight home from work on time or a phone call explaining why not.
If the affair partner makes contact...

If the affair partner makes any contact in the future, your spouse needs to agree not to respond and to tell you as soon as it happens. It is tempting to hide this information, because your spouse doesn't want to alarm you or cause you more pain, but finding out without being told will destroy whatever trust you are building again.

Beware of toxic shame

Watch for whether or not your partner is stuck in toxic shame. Toxic shame is when the offender beats himself up over and over for what he/she has done, but in the process, makes the entire event all about them.

Healthy shame says, “I feel horrible for what I’ve done. What can I do to make this up to you?” Instead, toxic shame keeps the focus on the offender so that everyone around them tries to make the offender feel better. The victim is consoling the offender! If your partner seems stuck in this cycle, it's time to bring in the professionals.

Seeing the Big Picture...Dealing With Serious Concerns

An affair certainly complicates things but it is still possible to save your marriage. You just need to decide if this is something you want to pursue.

Is your spouse staying faithful?

I also think it is important to evaluate whether your spouse has trouble staying faithful.

• Have they had multiple affairs over the years?
• Is this just one more lie you’ve caught them in?

More serious problems...

If the answer is yes to either of these questions, this would indicate more serious problems. You might need to consider separating until your spouse deals with the reasons he/she cannot remain faithful in a committed relationship. Saving your marriage at this point may not be in your best interest. Not until your spouse owns his/her part in this and gets some professional help.

There are lots of reasons why someone has multiple affairs. Sex addiction is a serious problem that requires treatment and an intense desire to recover. Both men and women can develop a sex addiction and infidelity will be a struggle for them until they get help.

Some people have a difficult time attaching and bonding with their spouse especially if they had an abusive childhood or was neglected and/or abandoned. If this is the case, your spouse may need therapy to heal traumatic wounds of the past.
Moving Forward...What Next?

What the offending spouse must do

1. It is important for the spouse who had the affair to express a clear understanding of how their actions have caused you pain. They need to take full responsibility for their choices and decisions related to the affair and its consequences.

2. The offending spouse needs to express genuine feelings of remorse for the pain they’ve caused.

3. The offending spouse needs to promise not to hurt you in this same way again. To do this, it is important to understand the conditions that contributed to the affair. I advise counseling or coaching to help with this.

Formal reconciliation
I advise a formal act of reconciliation such as renewing your vows. It is a great way to pledge a new commitment to each other and to the marriage.

We’re here to help...
I hope you have found this Re-Engage After the Affair—A Survivor’s Guide helpful to you. Please remember we are here to help as well. Our coaches are trained to walk through this process with you and support you the entire way.

Give us a call at 972-441-4432, and we will get you started with one of our experts right away!
ENGAGE WITH LOVE
YOURSELF, YOUR PARTNER, THE WORLD
WITH Kim Bowen

www.EngageWithLove.com