

Why Disclosure Does Not Heal the Pain of Betrayal – And What Does

Written by Michelle Mays; posted at www.partnerhope.com



At the Center for Relational Recovery, we will occasionally have couples call asking to do disclosure with us. We walk them through the disclosure process and then they drop out of therapy. I am always sad to see this happen because I know that they are leaving themselves stuck mid-process.

I believe this happens as a result of a misguided belief that disclosure is the answer—the cure—to the pain and devastation caused by betrayal. This is deeply untrue. Disclosure can be a profoundly healing event when done with integrity and is an incredibly necessary step in the process of healing. However, disclosure, by itself, does not heal the pain of betrayal. While it is an important step on the path to healing, it does not actually create healing.

Hearing about the betrayal is not the same as ***healing*** the wounds created by the betrayal.

Once disclosure has taken place, then there is a second very important phase that couples enter into – the emotional repair and restoration phase. The key goal of this phase of treatment is for the couple to be able to work together to heal the wounds created by the cheating and lying behaviors.

During this phase, couples need skilled therapeutic support to work through the relational injuries that result from the sexual betrayal. This is a tender, raw and very delicate process and both partners need help navigating their way through these conversations so that they create healing and not more pain. The cheater needs help lowering their defenses, moving shame to the side and accessing their own deep well of emotions about the damage their behaviors have caused. The betrayed partner needs help moving into the vulnerability of sharing the deepest emotional meaning of the pain they have experienced. This work is not for the faint of heart and you need good support to do it well.

As you work with your couple's therapist, a good portion of the therapy must focus on helping the two of you to talk about and process the events that occurred during the period of betrayal.

What I see happen frequently is that couples complete the disclosure process, the cheating partner passes a polygraph and there is a sense that things should now be OK. Often, the cheating partner starts to say things like, *"I did the disclosure and I passed the polygraph, so it's time to move on. I don't want to keep rehashing the betrayal over and over. It's not who I am anymore, and I need you to accept that and forgive me."*

As a betrayed partner, of course, that is not what you want to hear because, like it or not, just knowing what happened is not enough. Knowing what happened but then running into a wall of **'just let it go'** blocks the path of healing and keeps you and your relationship stuck. Usually the cheating partner wants you to just get over it because he or she does not want to feel any more shame about the betrayal. And every time you bring up what happened, your partner's shame kicks in again. Basically, your partner tries to avoid feelings of shame by avoiding discussions that trigger it.

If you allow that avoidance to happen, it will bog down the process of healing, so you may need to speak up and voice your needs. As you do so, it's important to remember that the shame your partner is feeling belongs to your partner, not you. It is not your job to help your partner process

betrayal-related shame. Your job is to find your way forward into healing, and that means talking about the past as well as the present and the future.

Instead, the two of you will need to commit to healing the wounds and relational injuries that the sexual betrayal and lying created. To do this, the significant pain points and raw spots created by the betrayal will have to be brought out into the light of day, examined and understood together and addressed in a way that moves the two of you toward emotional safety and reconnection.

As you and your partner do this work you will need to be able to say things like, “When I found out that you had left the hospital after I had surgery to go and be with your affair partner, it crushed me. I felt so much sadness and deeply alone. I began to feel that I did not matter to you and am not important to you in any way and that created such enormous pain inside of me. I didn’t understand how you could leave me when I was so vulnerable and needed you so much and it has made me feel that it is dangerous to need you or to depend on you.”

Your partner will need to be able to hear this from you and to hear it with a heart open to feeling his or her own feelings about the pain that you are expressing. The heart-level healing of betrayal happens when the cheating partner hears and experiences the pain caused by the betrayal with you. When you see the cheater move into sadness and pain with you, when you see the cheater feel pain about the pain they’ve caused you, the healing starts. Until that happens, there is not a true empathic emotional connection about the betrayal between the two of you and healing will be truncated or even blocked. You will struggle to move forward as an individual and as a couple.

Sadly, many couples dealing with betrayal have been in counseling together for years, but they have never gathered their courage and walked together into the heart of the pain. Therapists too can avoid this work or feel unclear about how to facilitate this type of deep healing. However, without it, couples are left with partial healing of the betrayal. Some things are better, and the relationship is improving but the deep heartbreak is still there.

My hope is that if you and your partner are in recovery together and are working on repairing your relationship that this blog post will give you a new way to think about and talk about what truly creates reparation and

restoration within broken relationships and that you will brave forward together into the work of meeting one another in the in order to heal.

About the Author:

Michelle Mays, LPC, CSAT-S is the Founder of PartnerHope.com and the Center for Relational Recovery, an outpatient treatment center located in Northern Virginia. She has helped hundreds of betrayed partners and sexually addicted clients transform their lives and relationships. Michelle is the author of *The Aftermath of Betrayal* and *When It All Breaks Bad* and leads the field in identifying and crafting effective treatment strategies for betrayed partners.

