



“BETRAYAL. IT COMES IN ALL FORMS
AND IN ALL TYPES OF
RELATIONSHIPS.”

-DEB SMITH

RELATIONSHIP SERIES: BETRAYAL

BETRAYAL

Betrayal. It comes in all forms and in all types of relationships.

Although our thoughts may take us to the betrayal of an affair there are many other forms of betrayal equally as painful requiring a similar healing process.



Sit for a moment and try to recall the very first time you experienced this emotion.

Were you a child, a teen, an adult?

Was the person who caused this hurt and pain a relative, a trusted family friend or someone you barely knew?

Were you supported by people who loved you and who validated your experience?

Was the betrayal resolved or does it remain a painful memory?

From my years of experience, I can tell you betrayal can be healed! It can be a long and, at times, traumatic process yet it is possible.

I've chosen the word traumatic with intention. When a person is so deeply wounded especially by a trusted family member or friend, they can actually experience a traumatic response. The manifestations I see most often include:

- Nightmares and/or night terrors
- Sleep disturbances, including difficulty falling asleep and/or difficulty staying asleep
- Intrusive and recurring thoughts of the betrayal and/or the situation surrounding the betrayal
- Mood disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Anxiousness and/or depression/sadness
- Outbursts of tears and/or anger
- Feeling numb and/or empty
- Hyper-vigilance
- Desperate attempts to prevent recurrence of the betrayal
- Over-reacting to incidents that trigger memories of the betrayal
- self-destructive behavior; the most common such behavior is the use of drugs and/or alcohol typically in a desperate attempt to forget the betrayal and/or to numb the pain of the betrayal

These manifestations may last for a period of months or even years often requiring individual support to resolve.

The support typically includes:

- Learning how to calm the nervous system with relaxation techniques, such as belly breathing, yoga, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, engaging in creativity etc.
- Learning how to engage in self-care such as eating well, getting restful sleep, exercising, leaning on family and friends for support etc.
- Learning how to identify and regulate emotions making sense of how you are feeling and of the experience
- Learning how to forgive

As I have stated in other blogs and series forgiveness does not mean we condone the behavior, it does not imply we should maintain or rekindle a painful relationship or dismiss the pain we have experienced.

Forgiveness releases us- not the person who caused the hurt and pain.

Forgiveness releases us from those feelings such as bitterness and anger that can consume us causing emotional and physical pain as well blocking us from moving forward.

It is the path to healing and peace.

I have witnessed this process unfold over a period of years, so have patience with yourself. It is not easy and you may need professional support along the way. I often describe the process in comparison to the unpredictability of the ocean. There are days the water is calm and serene and others with waves capable of wiping out entire towns! Knowing this will help you prepare for and better manage the unpredictability of your emotions.

A very common behavior I have observed in situations of betrayal, is what I call ***detective syndrome***. More common in situations of an affair, individuals can become obsessed with investigative work in a desperate attempt to either prove their fears right or wrong. They spend countless hours on their spouse's/lover's phones, phone records, and/or computers searching through files, emails, contact lists etc.

The outcome of this investigative work has many possibilities. You will want to prepare yourself for the worst yet hold onto hope for the best. Too often we assume one lie means more to follow; that is not always the case.

When there is genuine devotion to the relationship healing is possible. There are two major components to this process, both of which require tremendous effort on the part of the individual who caused the hurt and pain. If the highest level of devotion and effort is not present healing will be an individual endeavor. In other words, the person who has been betrayed will need to do individual work in order to free themselves from this pain and hurt as well as from the relationship.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP



The first step is remorse – being truly sorry for the hurt and pain this behavior has caused.

There can be no finger pointing, no excuses and no blame – only full responsibility for the behavior. It is my belief that betrayal, particularly in intimate relationships, acts like a light being shone on a conflict/issue in the relationship. Having said that, betrayal is a choice!

The conflict/issue can never be used as an excuse for the behavior – never! It was a choice

to engage in the act of betrayal. This is not a judgment but rather an observation that must be acknowledged to promote healing. As soon as excuses, blame or finger pointing occur the remorse is negated. There will be an appropriate time to address these relationship issues but this is not the time.

The person who caused the pain and hurt may need to write their issues in a journal to be addressed once the healing is well underway in order to process their own hurt and pain. It should be put aside to be brought out when the time is right.

True remorse cannot simply be expressed once with the expectation of resolution. It is a continuous action present in every thought and behavior. It has to be in order for the second step to be fully achieved.

MOVING INTO THE SECOND STEP

I refer to the second step as the ability to shoulder the pain the betrayer has caused. The individual who has been betrayed is typically in crisis, as I have described in the opening paragraphs. They experience a full range of emotion often volatile and out of control.

I have seen Facebook disclosures, full wardrobes ripped to shreds, bank accounts emptied and squandered, public rants and physical rages; this pain is deep and cutting to one's core. I am in no way condoning these responses, yet I understand them. The person who caused this hurt and pain needs to understand them as well. They need to shoulder this pain even if that means hearing about it daily for months on end.

Of course being subjected to physical assault or any type of destruction is never acceptable. I'm not suggesting it be perpetrated or allowed. Very often the assistance of a professional is necessary to help the partner in pain direct that pain in a healthy manner, yet healthy does not

imply quiet and polite. This pain will be expressed with the depth of hurt they are experiencing. If the individual who caused this hurt and pain cannot shoulder what they caused there is no chance for healing.

Looking at the pain of an affair, there is no way to determine nor measure the depth of pain caused, therefore, there is no way to determine or measure the length of time necessary for healing. I typically tell couples to prepare for a full year of intensity.

When I say intensity I am referring to pain, hurt, remorse, effort, awareness and forgiveness. For ease of discussion let's take a look at a common scenario.



Mary and John – a fictitious couple with a fictitious set of circumstances are in crisis. They have been happily married for

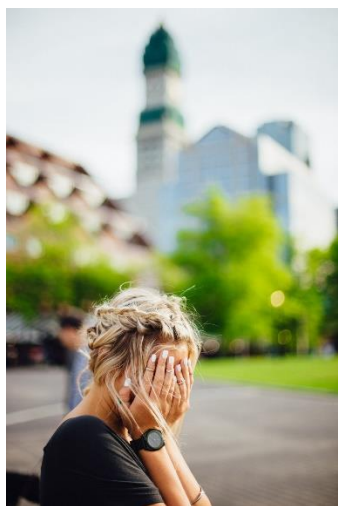
years, have children together and have weathered the typical storms that threaten most marriages – financial crisis, illness, parenting conflicts etc. John has a minor car accident yet required medical attention. Mary meets him at the hospital with their eldest child who will then drive his mother to John's car. The plan is simple – Mary will then drive the car to the body shop and their son will take her home.

While Mary is dropping off the car at the body shop she decides to clear out any valuables from the console and glove box. She finds a cell phone she had no idea existed. John does not have a separate work phone so she is initially perplexed. Once she looks at the text messages the purpose of the phone becomes clear. Mary sits in the car with the mechanic at her door frozen. The shock, the horror and the depth of the betrayal prevent her ability to move.

It takes her a few minutes until she is eventually able to orient herself to her surroundings and, just as if she is a robot, Mary takes the phone out of the car, hands the keys to the mechanic and silently gets into her son's car. Not a word is spoken. She can't speak. She can't even form thoughts in her own head.

She feels as though she has just been stabbed in the heart as the blood drains from her body. She can literally feel this happening to her. Mary knows she is in her son's car, she knows he has the radio on, she knows she is on the road to her home yet she is completely unaware of everything at the same time. It is as if time stopped and she is floating outside of herself.

When they arrive home she curls up in a ball on her bed where she remains for hours. Her children leave her thinking she is upset about the accident and needs alone time. This is the face of trauma. This unexpected event that threatens her entire existence – her marriage, her family, her identity, her sense of safety and security. It is all gone in a moment.



The following day Mary feels numb. Again she can't feel anything – it is as if she is a robot. She picks John up from the hospital getting him settled in at home. She goes about her routine in this numbed state until the mechanic calls days later to let her know the car is ready. This

call and the reminder of the secrets held in that car trigger a full blown meltdown. Mary can feel the heat of her pain, hurt and anger rise from her pelvis like wild-fire. She feels out of control, flooded with emotion and starts screaming at John with a rage that frightens her. But she can't stop. To her shock she is smashing dishes,

shoving John up against the wall, spitting as she screams, hitting him with all her might as she spews out her discovery.

Initially John is remorseful and willing to subject himself to her anger and rage. Yet as time goes on he is getting tired of the routine tongue lashings and badgering line of questioning. He wants her to get over it so they can resume their lives. They go for therapy but the therapist does not hold John accountable for the pain he has caused, instead offers Mary suggestions and strategies for emotional regulation.

Mary's nightmares intensify, she is unable to concentrate at work, has had a number of fender benders due to her dis-tractability, she isn't eating well, isn't sleeping well and has pulled away from family and friends. Her only reprieve from this pain is drinking. And John, he is doing just fine. He feels he has apologized, has repented for a sufficient amount of time and has now become the victim of Mary's insane rages which he now uses to take the focus off of himself.

All too often this is the path couples take after an affair. The problem here is John's inability to maintain his remorse instead placing blame on Mary for their inability to heal as a couple. His inability to maintain an emphatic response to Mary's pain only further infuriates her leaving her feeling dismissed and invalidated. He needed to connect to her experience literally feeling the pain and shock she endured when she first found that cell phone. He needed to maintain awareness of her subsequent pain responding to it in the moment for as long it she needed working through her pain together. He needed to engage in random acts of kindness and affection as a reminder to her of his love and devotion to her. But he didn't.

These roles could have been reversed. I have sat with wives in John's shoes and husbands in Mary's. It doesn't matter who stepped out of the

bounds of the marriage; the response is the same and the path to healing is the same. So let's look at this again.

When betrayal happens in a relationship, a light has been cast upon either a flaw in the character of the betrayer or a flaw in the relationship. Neither of these possibilities can be addressed until the pain of the individual who has been betrayed has been validated and healing has begun.

Let's look at another scenario of betrayal. John is part of a family business. His sister Mary is as well and is experiencing a personal financial crisis. She has come to John asking for an advance to help dig her out of her financial problems. John discusses this with the rest of the family who unanimously agree Mary has been irresponsible with her personal finances and it is too great a risk to extend her credit.



Mary is very close with her father and she talks him into mortgaging the business to be able to meet her financial needs.

The family is furious with Mary for what they identify as manipulating their father and putting the entire family at financial risk. John is feeling betrayed by his sister who has apologized yet has not taken any action to rectify the situation. John has insisted she return the money yet she refuses.

They are forced to see each other at work on a daily basis yet they barely speak. John believes Mary is incapable of feeling his anger and fear for the financial future of the business and its employees. Mary goes about her day as if this conflict does not exist. She appears to be in a pleasant mood, jokes with the employees and is heard on the phone with her travel agent

making plans for a Mediterranean cruise; John is furious.

Mary can't understand why John is so upset, as the arrangement was made between her and her father having nothing to do with John at all. John is unable to contain his anger which spews into the workplace. It becomes very uncomfortable for everyone. John becomes the villain here being seen as the aggressor in need of anger management. Mary becomes the victim, the target of John's aggression.

This swapping of roles only fuels John's anger, his resentment and feelings of betrayal. Mary is off the hook – never having to feel the pain she caused, never having to empathize nor shoulder John's pain and hurt. And the relationship? Just as in the scenario above, without true remorse and empathy the relationship cannot heal.

When there is no opportunity present for healing, I advise shifting attention away from the relationship instead focusing on yourself. You cannot force someone recognize the error of their actions nor can you force them to feel the pain they have caused you. I have chosen the word present intentionally. There have been times when healing was unable to occur so soon after the betrayal yet months or even years later there is a self-reflection process that leads the individual to a deeper understanding of the impact of their behavior. All too often it is too late.

Yet there have been times when this process has occurred prior to a full and permanent termination of the relationship. The balance between giving a person the opportunity to reflect on their behavior and deciding to walk away can be found on this journey of self-discovery.

Shifting your focus from the relationship to yourself can be very difficult.

It is especially difficult if you see the person who betrayed you regularly as in our two scenarios; yet just as in mediation, we don't fight with our intrusive thoughts instead we make a shift. *I just love that word – shift.* There is such opportunity embedded in the word.

You know what it feels like when you go to sit at your dining room table and someone is in “your” seat. If you allow the shift in position, you are exposed to a different view of the room. You may notice things you have never noticed before or things you had forgotten about. New conversations may be sparked, new perspectives may be shared.

This is the same process and perspective that occurs when you shift your focus from the betrayal and all that goes along with it to yourself. You may discover things about yourself you never knew – your strength, your resilience, your courage, new interests, a new direction. You may rediscover old friends, hobbies and interests you had set aside due to the time constraints of the relationship. You may make new connections offering you a new chair at the dining room table with a completely different view and a shift in perspective. I highly encourage this shift.



Allow yourself to take a break from the pain; you will return from this journey renewed and authentic. This

will then allow you to look at the betrayal, the subsequent behavior and efforts of the individual who caused this pain with a new perspective. Standing tall and strong you will be able to more clearly see their intention. You will be able to clearly see if the light is shining on a flaw in the relationship or a flaw in the character of the individual. This information

will help guide your decision regarding pursuing or terminating the relationship.

Take your time with this process. As I said earlier, I suggest allowing for a time frame of at least one year. Of course if you are at risk on any level this time frame does not apply. I strongly urge professional support in these situations to assist with safety plans, support, legal advocacy etc.

In all other situations, *patience is key*. If after a year the person who betrayed you has yet to make a serious effort to demonstrate remorse and/or a true empathic response to your pain it is time to re-evaluate the future of the relationship. This does not mean you never speak again, you divorce, etc. It means you determine how to redefine the relationship that best suits you and your needs. It could lead to termination of the relationship, divorce, etc. if that is what you determine is best for you. Ultimately what I am saying here is, don't rush into a decision and don't beat a dead horse; find the balance.

Just a few words of “wisdom”...

When the betrayal is an affair the individual who has been hurt could be in a trauma state. Often in this state intrusive and recurring thoughts plague the person. Although honesty is vitally important when questions are put forth, there are questions that should not be answered – not lied about – simply not answered.

An example of these types of questions would include sexual activity. If this information is disclosed the visual images can never be erased from one's mind serving only to thwart the healing process. Suffice it to say there was sexual activity hopefully with precaution. Yet the details are to be avoided. Any information that will haunt as opposed to heal ... avoid! Don't lie ... simply let that person know you are

trying to protect them from further pain and hurt.

Rebuilding trust can occur once the first two steps are fully in process. Honesty and transparency are key. The person who was betrayed must be allowed to prove themselves wrong for as long as necessary. Their thoughts will repeatedly return to the betrayal triggering a return of detective syndrome. Allow this; it is part of the process.

They may return to checking your phone, checking phone records, checking our computer, emails etc. They may go as far as to have you followed or have a tracker put on your car. Allow them the opportunity to repeatedly prove themselves wrong. If you remain open, honest and transparent trust will eventually return. You may ask why you should be subjected to this type of monitoring. Quite honestly you brought it on yourself therefore if you are devoted and invested in the relationship you will submit giving your partner the opportunity to build trust on their own terms. It isn't punishment, it is simply part of the process of rebuilding trust.

If you found this series helpful and would like to dive deeper into healing yourself and your relationships, be sure to continually return to my website, www.debsmithlifecoach.com to download additional segments of this and other series.

I wish you the best of luck on your healing journey.

You are worth the time and effort needed to give yourself the tools to live a happy and fulfilling life!

Love and Laughter,

Deb