

Emotional Affairs

The topic of infidelity is a frequent topic with couples experiencing problems. When most people hear the terms 'infidelity' or 'affair', they almost always think of a passionate, romantic, physical relationship. Certainly many people engage in physical affairs borne out of immaturity, acting out of hostility and even sexual addiction.

What is less understood however, and at times can be even more threatening to a long-term relationship than a physical affair, is an emotional affair. An emotional affair occurs when one member of a relationship consistently turns to someone else for their core, primary emotional support in life. It often develops slowly, even innocently, as a friendship with a co-worker or friend. There may or may not be a romantic/sexual attraction initially accompanying this budding friendship. But when the primary relationship is experiencing ongoing hostility, conflict and/or distance, and one member of the relationship pulls away from their partner and consistently turns to their 'friend' for companionship, support and sharing of deep personal material, an emotional affair has begun.

For many people, the emotional affair is a great source of relief and comfort during relationship difficulties. But the danger is that there is a finite amount of intimate emotional energy to go around, and when one begins to regularly invest significant amounts of their emotional energy in someone outside the primary committed relationship, the primary relationship can be seriously compromised.

Frequently, an emotional affair will deepen through consistent contact through in-person discussion and/or numerous email and voice mail messages. There becomes an excitement and ease in hearing from the person. And when this type of relationship does lead to physical intimacy, it's often a little sex and a lot of talking. The sex may be intense and passionate, but it is the feeling of emotional safety and companionship that really fuels the bond at the deepest level.

This companionship can doom the primary relationship. Once the door of emotional intimacy has been opened and the bond deepens, the person having the emotional affair cannot help but compare. "It's so easy to talk to her, and so hard to talk to my spouse" is the common refrain. "My husband always complains and criticizes, but my friend is always there, always in a good mood, and always understands and listens to me." It is much easier to open up and feel safe in a superficial new friendship compared to a long-term committed relationship.

How do you know if you are developing an emotional affair? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I feel like it's easier to talk to my friend than my partner?
- Does my friend seem to understand me in a deeper way than my partner?

- Have I stopped confiding my deepest feelings and concerns with my partner and now turn to my friend for these needs?

If you find yourself or your partner developing an emotional affair, you need to put your attention on your primary relationship as soon as possible. Get help to understand why you drifted to this other person in the first place. Begin the work of re-investing emotional energy in your primary relationship. Turning to someone else during a time of conflict or distance often is merely escaping and avoiding other issues which won't go away. And don't kid yourself: these same issues will resurface again should you develop a real relationship with your emotional affair partner. You may as well learn to deal with them now, before putting yourself and your partner through a terrible crisis.

ONLINE AFFAIRS - Emotional and Physical

Some emotional affairs occur online, with someone you've never actually met in person. Here are seven signs that your significant other may be having a cyberaffair:

- Change in sleep patterns
- Demand for privacy
- Household chores ignored
- Evidence of lying
- Personality changes
- Loss of interest in sex
- Declining relationship investment

Chat rooms and meeting places for cybersex don't heat up until late at night, so the cheating partner tends to stay up later and later to be part of the action. Often, the partner suddenly begins coming to bed in the early-morning hours, may leap out of bed an hour or two earlier and bolt to the computer for a pre-work e-mail exchange with a new romantic partner may explain things.

The computer may be moved from the visible den to a secluded corner of a locked study, the spouse may change the password, or cloak his or her online activities in secrecy. If disturbed or interrupted when online, the cheating spouse may react with anger or defensiveness.

In an intimate relationship, sharing chores often is regarded as an integral part of a basic commitment. So when a spouse begins to invest more time and energy online and fails to keep up his or her end of the household bargain, it could signal a lesser commitment to the relationship itself -- because another relationship has come between your marriage.

The cheating spouse may hide credit-card bills for online services, telephone bills to calls made to a cyberlover, and lie about the reason for such extensive net use. They also may tell you they will quit.

A once warm and sensitive wife becomes cold and withdrawn. A formerly jovial husband turns quiet and serious. If questioned about these changes in connection with their Internet habit, the spouse engaging in a cyberaffair responds with heated denials, blaming and rationalization. Often times, the blame is shifted to the spouse.

Some cyberaffairs evolve into phone sex or an actual rendezvous, but cybersex can include mutual masturbation from the confines of each person's computer room. When a spouse suddenly shows a lesser interest in sex, it may be an indicator that he or she has found another sexual outlet.

Those engaged in a cyberaffair no longer want to participate in the marital relationship - even when their busy Internet schedule allows. They shun those familiar rituals like a shared bath, talking over the dishes after dinner or renting a video on Saturday night. They don't get as excited about taking vacations together and they avoid talk about long-range plans in the family or relationship.

For more information or help dealing with an emotional affair, please call our office at (337) 315-3816 or send an email to: <mailto:millsjerome@bellsouth.net>

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Article shared graciously by Relationship Institute, Joe Bavonese.