



The Top 8 Emotions

- Betrayal
- Guilt
- Disappointment
- Anger
- Vengefulness
- Fear
- Frustration
- Paranoid Feelings

Almost everyone faces these eight emotions when they find out about an affair. If you think you aren't feeling one of them, I encourage you to look very closely at yourself and make sure it isn't there. This isn't meant to be a sadistic way to make you feel more pain than you do. Rather, it is meant to help you connect with your own internal experience rather than stuffing it down inside of you.

Once you have fully examined the emotion, if you find you aren't feeling it at all, that's fine. Simply move on to the next emotion and look at that one. However, if you get to the bottom of the list and you think you are only feeling one or two of the eight emotions discussed, you could be in a bit of denial. I know this hurts, but you'll move on more successfully after you face your own turmoil and pain.

Betrayal

This is the big one. Betrayal is the sense that someone has intentionally taken advantage of your trust. Betrayal is at the very root of infidelity. It is what causes many of the other emotional problems that come up when you find out your partner has cheated on you.

We invest so much in the people we love. We bare our souls to them. We trust them with the most intimate details of who we are. We are naked in front of them, both physically and psychologically. When they take advantage of this trust, the sense of betrayal can run very deep.

In your personal journal, write about how you feel betrayed.

- What specifically has your partner taken advantage of in cheating on you?

- Why is this breach of trust so difficult for you to bear?
- Are there memories of other experiences you have had that make betrayal worse for you? These memories don't have to be related to intimate relationships to have an impact.
- How do you experience or feel the betrayal in your body?
- How do you express it? This is going to be difficult, but be open with it and look for what comes up. Write it out like you were wringing poison from a wound.

Guilt

Many people feel guilty when they find out about an affair. On some level they think that the affair is their fault. They might think, "If only I had been a better partner, this would never have happened."

No matter what kind of partner you were, or are, you did not choose to have an affair and take advantage of the trust that was established between the two of you.

You did not choose for the other person to hurt you.

You will learn later in the course that there are many other ways the other person could have met his needs without going outside the relationship. If you feel guilty, rest assured, this isn't your fault.

Nonetheless, you should look at that guilt. Guilt is a natural response when our unconscious thinks we might have done something wrong or that we might be about to do something wrong. Its job is to make us look at what we have done, are doing, or are about to do and compare the behavior to our rules for what is right and wrong.

Why do you feel guilty? To figure this out, you should look at what you have done in your relationship that might be driving this guilt. Then you can compare those behaviors to your rules about what is right and wrong. In doing this, you might be able to tease out exactly why you feel guilty.

Chances are very good that you will find that some of what you did in your relationship was wrong. Yet none of your behaviors can be responsible for your partner's infidelity. After all, how can you be guilty for your partner's actions?

How does that guilt manifest itself?

Where do you feel it?

How do you express it?

Open your personal journal, and spend some time looking at answers to these questions.

Disappointment

When you have spent years building a life with another person and they come home and tell you that they have cheated on you, you are bound to feel disappointed. You will likely feel disappointed in them. But you might also feel disappointed in yourself, in men or women (depending on the cheater's gender), in humankind as a whole, or even in life itself.

These reactions are normal. But be careful not to let your feelings slide into the despair of hopelessness. If you do that, you're going to hit the roadblock we talked about above.

In your personal journal, explore answers to these questions:

What are you disappointed in?

Does your disappointment relate to any other experiences in your life? Be specific. Think about and write about specific aspects of your relationship or your world that you are disappointed in.

How do you feel your disappointment? How do you express it?

Anger

Anger is the fraternal twin of betrayal. They go hand- in-hand, arm-in-arm. When you feel betrayed, you almost immediately feel angry. If you are feeling a sense of betrayal and you aren't feeling any anger, look to see if you aren't hiding something from yourself.

Remember Kathy's quote earlier? She expressed feelings of extreme rage, anger taken to an almost unbelievable level. If you feel this kind of anger it is nothing to be worried about or scared of. Needless to say, you don't want to act on your rage. But it is natural to feel angry about the affair. It is human.

Anger can sometimes lead to violent feelings (we will talk about vengefulness below). These, too, are natural. If you have gruesome images playing themselves out in your head, it is nothing to worry about; they are feelings, not a call to action. If you are considering acting out your angry scenarios, though, I urge you to seek personal, professional help immediately. You don't want to do something you'll later regret.

Think about and answer these questions:

- What makes you so angry about the affair?
- What are some of the angry scenarios you dream about?
- What are the particular concepts about the affair that anger you?
- Are your angry feelings related to other experiences in your personal history?
- How do you feel your anger in your body?
- How do you express your anger?

Vengefulness

This emotion is usually associated with anger. Many people want to take revenge on the cheater, on the person the cheater was involved with, or both. They envision hurting the cheater as much as they have been hurt.

The desire for revenge is natural. However, playing out any vengeful fantasies inevitably has terrible results and often ends up hurting the vengeful person more than the object of their vengeance. Obviously, you will regret physically harming another person. But even subtler attempts at revenge (for example, having an affair yourself or doing cruel things to make the cheater pay) will just end up being ugly in the end. Ultimately, you will feel disappointed in yourself for acting the way you did. I have never treated anyone who engaged in revenge and was pleased with the results.

Instead of actually enacting your vengeful fantasies, try writing about them.

- What kinds of vengeful fantasies do you have?
- What would you hope for out of the vengeance?
- What does this reveal to you about the way you feel in this situation?
- How do you experience the vengeful feeling in your body? Were there other times or places when you had these feelings?
- How do these earlier experiences (if there were any) impact your current feelings?

Fear

When you find out your partner has had an affair, there are so many things to fear. You might be afraid that the life you once knew is over. You might be afraid that you will never be able to repair your relationship. You might be afraid that they will do it again.

You might even have more extreme fears. Some people become afraid that "the world is out to get them." I even had one client tell me, "I'm afraid God has abandoned me."

None of these fears is unusual. When you are faced with an experience as extreme as having your partner cheat on you, you are bound to be afraid that the very earth under your feet is no longer stable.

- What are you afraid of?
- What is the single thing that terrifies you the most in all this?
- Why do you think you are so afraid of that in particular?
- Are there other experiences in your life that might affect your current fear?
- How do you experience the fear in your body?
- How do you express it to others or to your partner?

Frustration

There is no question that having someone cheat on you can cause frustration. You likely will be frustrated with the cheater, frustrated with the person they cheated with, frustrated with yourself, and frustrated with the whole world. After all, something has been done to you and to your relationship that was and is out of your purview.

This feeling of frustration is often compounded by the fact that you now have to cope with so many painful thoughts and feelings. Sometimes it might feel like you are heaping frustration upon frustration.

- What is frustrating to you about your current situation?
- Is the current situation related to any situations from your past?
- Write about them in detail.
- What frustrated you so deeply about each of these?
- When you feel frustrated, where in your body do you feel it most?
- How do you express it?

Paranoid Feelings

I use the term "paranoid feelings" here to mean feelings that include suspiciousness. I am not using "paranoid" in the technical or diagnostic sense. Paranoid here is meant to indicate a deep fear that someone or something is out to get you or is engaging in some activity that will cause you pain behind your back. It is quite easy to see why the injured person in an affair situation might feel paranoid.

Paranoid feelings can be destructive to your peace of mind if taken too far. But a bit of suspicion or, perhaps, skepticism isn't necessarily a bad thing. You deserve to have the cheater prove to you that they are not carrying on with the affair and will not get involved in another one. Be suspicious enough to get that need met. If you don't, developing trust will be that much more difficult.

Think of some times when you had some paranoid feelings.

- Describe what they were like.
- Why do you think they are so powerful?
- Do they relate to any other experiences in your life?
- How and where do you feel these feelings in your body?
- How do they affect your behavior?
- How do you express these feelings to others or to your partner?