



The Top 7 Emotions

Cheating Spouse

Once the affair is out in the open, there are seven emotions that you will undoubtedly grapple with. What follows is a brief discussion of each of them.

Emotional Trial #1: Guilt

If you have been cheating on your partner, it is likely you have been struggling with guilt for some time. For most people who engage in affairs, the sense of guilt begins well before the injured partner learns about the affair. It may be that you have been coping with guilt since you initially had thoughts of taking that first step over the line of propriety.

Guilt comes up for the cheater for a number of reasons. 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.

If you have established a set of rules for yourself about being faithful to your partner and your relationship, then having an affair is bound to make you feel guilty. The most obvious is that you are betraying the trust of another person whom you care about very deeply. This in itself generates a great deal of guilt.

But it usually goes deeper than that. If you have children, you might feel guilty about implicitly betraying their trust as well. You might feel guilty because your friends and family are kept in the dark about the affair, and you know they wouldn't approve if they found out.

What's more, you might feel a little guilty that you are going against your own better moral and ethical judgments. It is unlikely that the affair is something you have been dreaming about your whole life. You might feel guilty because you have, in a sense, harmed one of your own dreams.

You could be wondering how you ever went against your better judgment (as well as your internal guilt barometer), but the process isn't that much of a mystery. It's what is often referred to as the slippery slope.

The affair may have begun with a small infraction that raised feelings of guilt, but were justified somehow, making the next, similar infraction easier to justify. Once you became comfortable with the earlier steps, taking another small step was easier. In this way, the process continued to repeat itself until you went way beyond what you ever thought possible.

If you have enough compunction to feel guilty about your actions, then it is possible that you will be able to do the work you need to do to fix your relationship. In this scenario, your guilt is good.

If you don't think you have any feelings of guilt, then you don't "feel" that you've done anything wrong. Stop, and give that some thought. You may be blocking out your emotions because you are afraid to feel them. After all, nobody wants to feel that he is the "bad guy." This isn't unusual, but until you come to terms with your guilt and what you have done wrong, you aren't going to get very far in repairing your relationship.

Emotional Trial #2: Shame

Shame goes hand-in-hand with guilt; however, they are distinct in a number of ways. While guilt is a way that your unconscious helps you judge your own actions against your personal beliefs about right and wrong, shame is predicated on expectations that we have about our social environment. Shame is the disgrace you feel in front of others – people in your real life, people from your past (in your imagination), or imagined "others" – when you have engaged in an act that is seen as unacceptable. There are many things to feel ashamed about when you have cheated on your partner.

You are probably ashamed that you hurt your partner so deeply, that you betrayed their trust, and that you damaged your relationship so badly. What's more, you might feel ashamed not only for breaking your partner's trust but for getting involved with another person at all. Depending on the context of the affair, you could be ashamed of how and with whom the infidelity happened.

Shame, like guilt, isn't necessarily a bad thing. It is a road sign that tells you that you did the wrong thing and that you want your relationship back. This is powerful information. Accept it and let it change your future actions.

Emotional Trial #3: Fear

If you feel afraid of losing the person you love and the life you've worked so hard to build, there is no wonder as to why. This, also, is a natural feeling for someone who has committed infidelity. This is a well- founded, rational fear. However, I hope that with the help of this course and your commitment and follow- through to do the hard work required that your fear will prove to be one that is unwarranted.

You might be plagued by other fears also. Perhaps you are thinking that you can't control yourself and you are afraid you will cheat again. Perhaps you are bothered by the idea that you were driven by forces that were beyond your control in the first place. If these kinds of things plague you, you should be aware of a couple things.

The first is that your actions are controlled by only one person – you. Though we humans are influenced by many factors in our environment and in our history, we have the choice to do what we wish. We get to choose what we do. That's the beauty and the responsibility of being a conscious person. You are in charge of you.

The second follows from the first. You don't have to cheat again. No matter how many affairs you've had, you can choose to stop this, starting right now. You can be faithful to your partner and live the life you want to live.

No one ever died from sexual arousal. Even if you get turned on, you don't have to do anything about it, and the arousal will just go away. You don't have to pursue someone just because they pursue you or offer themselves to you. In fact, this is a situation in which you can even be rude if the person doesn't take a kinder hint. After all, what if they were seducing you to try heroin – something else I hope you wouldn't want. How would you treat that seductive person then? These two situations are much more similar than you might initially imagine.

We are different than animals. Most animals immediately take care of their needs if there is a possible outlet. For example, if a male dog finds a female in heat, they will have sex right there in front of anyone watching. If a horse needs to pee, he will do it wherever he is, regardless of who is watching. If you are walking down the sidewalk in the middle of the city during the day, and you need to pee, you just drop your drawers and do it there, right? Well of course not. That's absurd. It's absurd because you consciously manage your physical urges. Even if the pressure is great, you wait for an appropriate place.

If you feel that your sexual urges are truly beyond your control, I recommend that you seek professional help. It could be that you are having problems with sex addiction, and there are many professionals out there who can help with this issue.

Emotional Trial #4: Anger

Anger is as natural a feeling for the cheater as it is for the injured.

You are likely angry with yourself for having gotten involved in an affair to begin with. What's more, you may be angry at yourself for having the emotional responses to the affair that you do. You may feel like you don't deserve to have these feelings, and this gets turned into anger.

If you were attached to the person in the affair or if you found the affair particularly exciting, you could be angry that you have to sacrifice the affair. We will discuss this in much greater detail in the next section. Many people who have affairs justify their thinking and behavior when they start looking outside their relationship to get particular needs met by focusing on the idea that they did not get these needs met inside their relationship.

If this was the case for you, and you feel you did get certain "needs" met in your affair, you might feel angry about missing out on having those "needs" met in your relationship. Or, you could still be angry at your partner because he or she was not, and perhaps still is

not, meeting those “needs.” For some people, it might seem that you will never get those “needs” met by your partner.

Most of this kind of thinking is built on a number of misconceptions about what “needs” are and how these “needs” get met. For now, you should be aware that this kind of anger is natural, even if it isn’t completely justified.

In fact, most of the anger you feel about your current situation is completely natural, and you needn’t be concerned about it. Anger is a feeling; it is not the behavior you display based on that feeling.

If you feel that your anger is turning into a rage or is in any other way uncontrollable, you might need professional assistance – anger management, therapy, medication, or some combination of these can help you calm yourself down. You do not want to do something you will later regret.

Emotional Trial #5: Hopelessness

You are probably worried that your relationship is damaged beyond repair. If you are trying to rebuild your relationship and you feel like it is damaged beyond repair, you are likely to feel hopeless.

It is a monstrous and dangerous emotion; and if you start to drown in it, you will slow down and perhaps halt your progress completely. This is not the spot you want to be in.

Rebuilding your relationship will take time, of that you can be sure. However, it is possible. In fact, it is possible that you can make your relationship better than it was before. I have said this a great deal throughout the course of this course, and it is completely true. You can have a loving relationship with your partner again and be more verbally intimate than ever.

When you experience hopelessness, take heart. Look for the small improvements that you see day-by-day in the relationship. Use the program in this course, and move forward to a better-than-ever relationship. If you don’t, you won’t ever get there. Small steps add up to large improvements.

Emotional Trial #6: Condemned

You could reach a place where you feel as though you can never be forgiven. This worry often extends beyond the need for forgiveness from your partner. Some people feel as though they can’t be forgiven long after their partner has already forgiven them.

The feeling that you have been condemned is the sense that on a universal level (perhaps by God, perhaps by your own sense of moral rectitude) you will never be forgiven.

Perhaps you even believe that you shouldn’t be forgiven.

I am not here to tell you what is right or wrong, and I certainly don't want to step on whatever belief system you might abide by. However, I know this: feeling as thought you are condemned ultimately is an ineffectual belief in terms of your relationship.

I have watched some clients come to a point in couples therapy where the injured partner forgives the cheating partner, but the cheater just can't seem to create self-forgiveness.

This puts incredible strain on the relationship.

For one thing, if the cheater insists on hanging on to the guilt, it is a repetitive reminder to the injured about the affair, and it stirs up new pain and resentment every time the cheater refers to how badly they feel. This does not prove or demonstrate your remorse, but serves as a constant reminder blocking forward progress in your relationship. In addition, if you can't forgive yourself, then you will never be able to give yourself completely to your partner. If this is the case, the relationship will almost certainly face further problems.

There will be a time and a place where if you don't learn to forgive yourself, you will do further harm to the relationship. If you are feeling that right now, it's probably just temporary. If that unforgiving feeling is all that stares back at you in the mirror after six months, you need to do some active work on forgiveness. Some people find a clergyman helpful, others turn to a therapist, and still others do this non-verbally through body work, such as acupuncture, Reiki, Rolfing, massage, and others.

Be compassionate with yourself. You are human after all. If you don't, your relationship will feel the brunt of it.

Emotional Trial #7: Loneliness

Being the cheater in a relationship that you are trying to repair can be a very lonely place to be. At this point your partner might not be engaged in your relationship in an emotionally supportive way. As such, it is likely that you are feeling pretty emotionally disconnected from your partner right now. That kind of emotional isolation can be hard to cope with, particularly when you are maintaining the secret of your affair.

In addition, you have just given up whatever comfort you took from being with the person you cheated with. This can make you feel even more disconnected and alone.

We are social creatures. We require intimate, emotional contact with other people to feel nourished and alive. If you aren't getting those needs fulfilled right now, you are likely feeling very alone. Remember that this situation is temporary. If you and your partner are dedicated to restoring the relationship, you will be emotionally connected again soon.

In the meantime, it might be worthwhile to spend some time with other friends and family. Though the feelings you are having are natural, there is no reason to torture yourself with loneliness. You can use the other resources around you to fill this space until you are able to communicate with your partner more effectually again.

A few cautions are in order. First, you should spend as much time as possible with your partner, even if that time is spent in very uncomfortable conversation and questions.

There are two factors at play here. Number one: spending more time together leads in the direction of normalizing your relationship. Number two: communicating, even about difficult and painful topics, is better than not communicating at all.

When I suggest spending time with family and friends, I don't mean to use them as emotional dumping grounds, but rather to spend recreational time with them, doing fun things. There are some problems with using your relatives and friends to complain about your partner.

First, it dampens your relationship with your family and friends. In addition, long after you and your partner have resolved your issues, your friends or relatives may still be holding on to the awful way your partner treated you during this time. This can make it difficult to re-establish a normal relationship with them, and it might even reawaken your partner's hurt feelings if they realize your friends or relatives resent them.

Be mindful of whom you choose to talk to. Make sure that they will be able to listen to you compassionately without holding long-term grudges against your partner.