

Helping Couples Recover from Infidelity: An Integrative Approach

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Goals of Workshop:

This workshop will present an integrative approach for helping couples to recover from infidelity. The workshop is designed for counselors already skilled in the basic techniques of couple counseling, but wishing conceptual as well as specific counseling skills in working with this difficult population. The intervention integrates empirically-based couple counseling approaches with interpersonal trauma and forgiveness-based techniques within an ecosystemic perspective. Video examples will be used to demonstrate specific constructs and techniques.

Background:

- Lifetime occurrence of sexual infidelity is about 20% men, 10% women; these rates double when emotional infidelity is included, and the gender gap is narrowing
- 40% of divorced men/44% of divorced women report extramarital sex during marriage
- Affairs are 2nd leading cause of divorce for women and 3rd leading cause for men
- Therapists report as 3rd most difficult issue to treat, and report lack of effectiveness

Three-Stage Model for Intervention:

Snyder and colleagues have developed a 3-stage model for intervening with affair couples that emphasizes the following:

Stage 1: Absorbing the blow and minimizing further damage:

- Re-establish some form of “equilibrium” for the couple and individuals
 - Reduce emotional upset
 - Establish behavioral routines
- Minimize additional damage to either individual or the couple
 - Minimize hurtful behaviors between the partners
 - Minimize either partner creating problems with the outside world

Stage 2: Exploring contributing factors and constructing meaning:

- Identify factors that potentially contributed to “vulnerability” or “risk” of affair
 - Relationship factors
 - Stressors from outside the marriage
 - Individual susceptibilities or contributions
 - Participating partner
 - Injured partner
- Develop shared, comprehensive formulation
- Prepare groundwork for additional change

Stage 3: Moving forward:

- Discussing forgiveness and blocks to forgiving or “moving on”
- Deciding whether or not to continue the relationship
- Either making changes to rebuild the relationship or working on a healthy termination

Outcomes:

Preliminary empirical findings regarding effectiveness of this intervention show that the majority (about 66%) of couples demonstrate the following gains:

- Gaining a fuller and balanced understanding of event(s)
- Not remaining preoccupied with the traumatic events
- Giving up the right to continuously punish the person who has “wronged” them
- Deciding whether to maintain or terminate the relationship

Resources:

Snyder, D. K., Baucom, D. H., & Gordon, K. C. (2007). *Getting past the affair: A program to help you cope, heal, and move on – together or apart*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Baucom, D. H., Snyder, D. K., & Gordon, K. C. (in press). *Helping couples get past the affair: A clinician’s guide*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

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