

“Can our marriage survive an affair?”

The answer is “yes it can.” In fact research shows that, in some cases, it can even strengthen a marriage.

Now please don't assume that I am suggesting that an affair could be good for your relationship. On the contrary, the affect of an extramarital affair (EMS) can be devastating and traumatic. It can take years to re-establish the level of trust and the feeling of security that existed before the infidelity was revealed.

A review of the statistics shows that the incidence of (EMS) ranges from 30% to 60% of the men, and from 20% to 50% of the women. Yet, a review of the stated reasons for divorce reveals that, in only 2% of the cases adultery is given as the cause for the end of the marriage. Even though EMS may not always be stated as a factor in many divorces these statistics do show that most marriages do survive an affair.

In my own practice I have found a similar result. Couples generally do not expect that their relationship can survive an affair. Yet most often, after some very hard and painful work by both partners, the affair provided the catalyst for dealing with unresolved issues in their relationship. I have worked with a number of clients who stated that their ability to deal with the crisis of EMS improved their relationship. Both partners, however, must be willing to do whatever it takes to heal the wounds.

The reason for having an affair is not always about sex. Most often it can be about a lack of deep and meaningful communication. One of our strongest desires is to be understood. To have another person, especially one we love, understand what we think, feel, value, love, hate, fear, believe in and are committed to, can be one of life's greatest pleasures. It can satisfy our need to be accepted, appreciated and loved. It is the failure to recapture those moments of understanding and

acceptance that can lead to serious problems in a relationship.

Partners will often reminisce about the early days and state that they sought out, or got involved with, another person so that they might again experience that special closeness. I will admit that I believe them when they say, "It wasn't about sex. I just wanted to feel close to someone, to be accepted, to be understood. It's been a long time since I felt that at home. I'd give anything to have that again."

These kinds of experiences are not unique. The need to be understood is extremely powerful. I do not deny that a healthy sexual relationship is also important for most couples. However, sex without closeness and understanding, is just sex. I believe that if an intimate partner has a good sexual relationship, combined with understanding and acceptance, he or she will never stray.