

Reintegrating Sex into Your Relationship

By Robert Weiss, LCSW, CSAT-S, “*Out of the Doghouse: A Step-By Step Relationship-Saving Guide for Men Caught Cheating,*” pp. 171-180

Better Than Before Is Right Around the Corner

You may not believe this, given the current state of your relationship, but in time, if you sincerely follow the steps in this book, your relationship with your spouse can and will be better than ever. No, it will not look or feel the way it did before you cheated or while you were cheating, but that is a good thing, not a bad thing. When you become an open book with your mate, behaving in trustworthy, rigorously honest ways in all facets of your life, you become much more intimate and emotionally connected. That may not seem like your primary goal right now—you probably just want to avoid divorce—but in a year or two you’ll be amazed at how much you value this benefit of sticking with your mate and healing the relationship.

To rocket yourself and your relationship into the stratosphere, two primary tasks remain: developing and strengthening nonsexual intimacy, and slowly reintroducing sex into the relationship. This is the fun part of the healing process. You will enjoy this, and your significant other will, too. This is the payoff for all your hard work.

Developing Nonsexual Intimacy with Your Spouse

It is sad that our sex-obsessed culture has degraded the word intimacy by turning it into a heavily sexualized term. If you don’t believe me, think about this question: Were you intimate with your spouse last night? In all likelihood, your immediate interpretation of that query is that I’m asking if the two of you had sex last night. So let’s do a bit of damage control with the word intimacy by defining it more accurately.

Intimacy is a state of honesty, vulnerability, and trust between two people.

From this definition you can see that intimacy is not all about sex. In fact, it is possible to have a wonderfully intimate relationship with absolutely no sex at all. Plenty of people do. Nevertheless, in most romantic relationships sex is an expression of shared honesty, vulnerability, and trust. This is especially true for your spouse, who will literally and figuratively “open herself” to you.

Can you imagine how difficult that must be for her after you've cheated on her, betraying her vulnerability and ruining relationship trust? To be honest, for a good long while after you’ve cheated, your mate is not likely to want sex with you. And if she does offer sex, it is likely out of fear that you might abandon her. Basically, she might think that you will leave her if she does not provide the satisfaction you were getting elsewhere. But believe me, she will not feel good about this sex.

So if you take her up on such an offer, realize that you do this selfishly, and that your self-centeredness in the moment could feel like a further betrayal. That said, if your mate offers sex and you say no without explaining why, she could easily lapse into a shame spiral. So you're damned if you do and damned if you don't, right?

Not exactly. The best way to approach this is to explain that you know you've ruined relationship trust with her, at least for now, and that you've betrayed her vulnerability. Then you can tell her that you do find her attractive and you do want to have sex with her, but you want her to be fully comfortable with that idea before it happens, and you suspect that you're going to have to do a lot more to rebuild trust before she gets there. Then you can suggest being intimate in a nonsexual way, such as the following:

- Holding hands and talking
- Planning a family activity together
- Taking her on a nonsexual date (e.g., dinner, a movie, a trip to the park)
- Going for a walk with her and sharing at least one (non-infidelity) secret about your life
- Inviting her to look you in the eyes and tell you what she is feeling, then reciprocating after she has finished talking
- Asking her to tell you about a work project or something she is working on at home
- Doing chores together (e.g., grocery shopping, yardwork, housecleaning)
- Starting a social media page together
- Volunteering together at a local charity
- Offering to do something that you know she really enjoys, like antiquing or going to a museum

It actually doesn't matter much what you do here. The goal is to spend quality time with your spouse without turning the action to sex. Whatever you are doing, you are silently telling her that you love her, care about her, and want to be with her.

Note: Don't wait until your significant other tries to be sexual before initiating nonsexual intimacy. Be proactive with this as a way to let her know that you value your entire relationship, not just the sex. And make sure you don't try to use these nonsexual forms of intimacy as foreplay. If you do that, she will feel manipulated. When the time is right for sex, you will both know. But that may be several months down the road.

In general, the more time that partners who are trying to overcome the pain of infidelity spend together, the better. But this time should not be entirely focused on hurt and healing. You need to enjoy the “good stuff” in your personal fidelity plan, and your relationship needs to experience this, too. This means having fun together—building nonsexual intimacy—in addition to the drudge-work of recovery.

Slowly Reintegrating Sex

If you’re like most guys, as you work toward rebuilding relationship trust, you might at least occasionally wonder if you’re ever going to have hot sex again. Or any sex at all, for that matter. Well, you will.

In fact, if you rebuild trust and create nonsexual intimacy with your spouse, you will eventually be very happy sexually, because intimate sex is, without doubt, the best sex you will ever have.

When you think that it might be time to reintroduce sex into your relationship, you should do so. But do it mutually. Rebuilding sexual trust is a process, just as rebuilding relationship trust is a process.

There are several things you can do to get the ball rolling, but you should not try these too early—that is, before your spouse begins to trust you again. If you do, rather than appreciating your gesture, she will wonder if you are trying to manipulate her emotions yet again.

And you should never do any of these things if your actions are not sincerely motivated by love, respect, and affection for your mate.

Things you can do that will help you reintegrate sex into your relationship include the following:

- Write her a love note, telling her how much she means to you and how important your relationship is.
- Buy her a gift. (You’re now at the point where gifts given “just because” will not be questioned.) The gift shouldn’t be anything big; it just has to show that you were thinking about her and the things she likes. If she is constantly amused by your children’s silly windup toys, buy her a toy of her own. If she thinks pigs are cute animals, buy her a ceramic pig. Things like chocolates, flowers, and jewelry will certainly be appreciated, of course, but not as much as something that took some thought about who she is and that you would give only to her (i.e., the sort of thing you would never have given to another woman).
- Wake up early and do your household chores, then do hers. Do not ask for a compliment. Do not expect a compliment. Don’t even bring it up. If she mentions that you have been a good boy, tell her you just wanted to get all that work stuff out of the way so the two of you could do something fun together. Then ask if there is anything she wants to do. Just in case she

can't think of anything, make sure you have a few options ready (and be sure they're activities she enjoys).

- Give her genuine compliments. Keep in mind that telling her she looks pretty is nice, but telling her something about her that you value—the firm but gentle hand she has with the kids, that she volunteers and tries to make the world a better place, that she's incredibly honest without ever being cruel—will mean a lot more.
- Tell her that you love her, and that you are grateful she didn't leave you when you betrayed her trust. Be clear that you know the relationship was in her hands at that point, that if she had wanted to leave you nobody would have blamed her, but she chose to give you another chance and your life is richer and much more fulfilling because she did.

The point of all this is that you demonstrate to your spouse that you are paying attention to her—the real her, not the idealized or sexualized version of her—and you care about her happiness and well-being. A small gift or gesture that demonstrates that you “get her” is much more intimate than something extravagant. Extravagant efforts are likely to be appreciated, but she will ultimately be happier with something smaller that is directed at her inner self.

Eventually, of course, the time will come when both you and your spouse are ready for sex. This is a delicate moment, since the emotional wounds you inflicted are probably still raw and easily reopened.

Because of this, is it wise to start slowly, perhaps with romantic activities that fall slightly short of actual sex. Here are a few suggestions:

- Take a leisurely bath or shower together.
- Give each other massages, especially foot and hand massages.
- Cuddle.
- Kiss.
- Hold hands.
- Spoon before you fall asleep.
- Dress each other in the morning or before you go out together in the evening.

Soon enough, as long as you don't do anything that causes your spouse to believe she can't fully trust you, sex will naturally occur.

At this point, you might remember a statement I made in the opening paragraph of this section: Intimate sex is without doubt the best sex you will ever have. Will it be as exciting and intense as some of the sex you had when cheating? Perhaps

not, but it will still be better. If I tried to fully explain why, I would have to write another book, so for now I'll just give you the shortest possible explanation:

The trust and nonsexual intimacy you have built with your spouse throughout your process of healing is unbelievably powerful. It will transform sex with your spouse into something you've never before experienced. Even if the sex itself is mediocre, the experience of sharing and becoming vulnerable with your spouse will not be. And you will probably find that this connection with your spouse is far more important than any orgasm, no matter how mind blowing.

I am not lying. Sex will become real in a way that seems unreal.

Do you want that? If so, consider the following tips toward loving her better:

- Talk to each other during sex. Let her know more about what you like and don't like. Ask her to tell you what she likes and doesn't like.
- Be willing to experiment. If she has a sexual fantasy, indulge it. If it turns out that playing "the milkmaid and the stable boy" is a bit too weird for you, then you'll have something to laugh about later on.
- Try it with the lights on, looking into each other's eyes. There are plenty of positions in which this can be done, so feel free to try something other than the standard missionary position.
- Stay emotionally present. If something happens that distracts one or both of you, it is okay to pause and put the sex on hold.
- Later, when you are both able to focus fully on each other, you can try it again. You don't have to finish sex just for the sake of finishing sex.
- Instead of initiating sex, initiate a conversation about sex. In fact, you might even want to interview her about sex. Ask her what she enjoys about it. Ask if there are times she doesn't enjoy it, and if so, why she doesn't enjoy it. Ask her what she experiences emotionally during sex. If your spouse turns the tables and asks you similar questions, answer them as openly and honestly as you can.