

It's happened. The last thing either you or your spouse could ever have imagined. One of you had an affair.

Perhaps you just discovered that your spouse has been unfaithful. Maybe you've been suspecting it for a while, but now you know for sure. You may have been innocently looking through some of your mate's belongings and found information that sent you reeling in shock and broke your heart. Or you might have been snooping for evidence because you've noticed some personality changes in your spouse. You've heard more excuses for being gone. And you've realized that he or she frequently leaves the room to check phone messages.

It's possible that your spouse finally decided to tell you about his or her actions because living a double life, the lying to someone they love, the loss of integrity... has become too painful to bear. Maybe someone else- a friend, an anonymous person, a family member, or even the affair partner, spilled the beans. In any case, the truth is out; your spouse has broken your marital vows and you can hardly breathe. The pain is unspeakable. You don't know which end is up.

No matter how suspicious you've been about the possibility that your partner may be straying, when suspicions of unfaithfulness are confirmed – it can send you reeling. Something deep inside you wants to believe that your spouse could never really, actually, break the sacred vow between you. Intimacy with anyone else? Unreal. Unthinkable.

Or perhaps you've discovered the truth, but your mind simply can't process what's happened. You feel like a person caught in a flood, your brain clinging to the driftwood of denial to avoid drowning in the rushing river of pain that comes with facing new and excruciating realities. "This can't possibly be happening to me. It can't be real. There must be some mistake. Maybe I'm reading too much into what I've discovered, allowing my imagination to run wild." But deep down inside, you know the truth. And now you have to deal with it. You feel caught in a nightmare from which you want to wake up. But it's not a nightmare. It's real. And it's really devastating. You're not sure what you want to do next. You're not even sure you can go on. For that matter, you're not sure about anything at all at the moment.

Or perhaps you're someone who found out about the infidelity a while ago and though the initial shock of discovery has passed, you feel like you're not functioning well. You're obsessed with thinking about the affair. "How could he do this to me,?" "Doesn't she know that this is the one thing I could never accept, a deal breaker?" "Was the other woman a better lover than I was?" "How could my wife love me and still sleep with another man?" The

questions persist, in spite of all your best efforts to move on, and you feel no sense of peace or calm. You wish you could just turn back time and go back to the old you, the one who actually had a life. You can't believe you're still feeling so bad and so confused after all this time. You want help but you don't know where to turn.

At times, you want your spouse to comfort you. But often, when she or he does, you feel resentful, angry and distraught. You don't want to be close. You can't act as though everything's okay when it's not. Your insides feel as though they've been whirled in a blender, and sometimes the emotional pain is so bad it physically hurts. By now, you thought you would be feeling better, but you're not. Shock may have turned to despair and what feels like chronic, low grade depression.

If this happens, it feels like you're stuck in a rut, or worse - a dark hole that often feels more like a grave. You just want to feel better! But you're losing hope that feeling normal and happy will ever be possible again. In short, my friend, you are grieving. Only there is no physical body to bury, no time-honored period of mourning, and no funeral. Something very precious and real has died; and yet you and your mate are still alive, breathing, moving through the days.

Whether you found out about the affair five minutes or a year ago, you may have a roller coaster of ambivalent feelings about whether or not to stay in your marriage. There are days when you are ready to call it quits and get an attorney, believing this might put an end to your misery. But when you think about what divorce really entails: ending your marriage, breaking up the family, splitting your finances, living alone, starting over from scratch—it gives you pause. You are living “in between trapezes,” when life feels on hold, or suspended in mid-air between the Life You Knew and the Life to Come. This emotional space, between a rock and a hard place, is not only disorienting and sometimes crazy-making, it can hurt like hell.

Or perhaps you're the person who had the affair. The temptation was so great, the pull of secrecy so sensual – almost like a drug – that it may have felt impossible to resist. You didn't think beyond the thrill at hand. Your affair may have been an exciting break from a life you'd allowed to spiral into a boring routine. You wanted to feel the old spark, and to have an adventure, to feel alive. Or perhaps you were having marital problems, feeling discouraged, disillusioned and even feeling unheard or unseen, so you sought solace from someone other than your mate. It felt comforting and confirming. Or, your marriage may have been on firm ground, but the impulsive draw of doing something new, something fun or illicit in the moment, overwhelmed common sense and commitment. But now your spouse knows about the affair, and all hell has

broken loose. The last thing you wanted was to hurt him or her. And you certainly don't want a divorce. You had no idea that the fallout of your decision to be unfaithful would be so devastating. You have tried to help your spouse feel better, to assure them that what happened is over and in the past, but nothing you say seems to comfort them for long. They feel the anger and hurt all the time. Your whole relationship is focused on the infidelity. You understand why your spouse is in pain, but you could never have predicted that life as you knew it would be suspended; you never talk about anything else, you don't do anything fun together, there's always an undercurrent of anger or hurt. Your spouse's mood swings are palpable. You don't know what to do. It's not that you're unwilling to be supportive; it's just that anything you've tried doesn't seem to be effective.

You love your spouse and you want your marriage to work, but you are also beginning to wonder if she or he will ever be able to forgive you for straying. And although you understand why this is so, you worry that you'll spend the rest of your life repenting for your sins. When will it truly be "over," so you can live together in love and trust, the way it used to be, again? You don't want spend the rest of your life and marriage in some emotional waiting room. You don't want to end your marriage but you're really at a loss. You wish there were a road map to help the two of you out of this adultery abyss.

Well, the good news is that there *is* a road map to help you both recover from infidelity and heal your marriage. And you happen to be reading it right now.