

## **Cheating spouses, marital infidelity and unfaithfulness: 5 danger zones that can lead to an affair**

**By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.**

*Are you ready to affair-proof your relationship?*

"Almost everyone I know has been unfaithful and now my best friend is thinking about having an affair with her boss. It's terrible. What ever happened to commitment and loyalty?" ~Sandy

An affair takes an enormous emotional, physical and spiritual toll on any committed relationship. The very foundation that a relationship is built upon—trust, commitment and loyalty—are shattered, and the post-affair relationship is sometimes unsalvageable because the sense of betrayal runs so deep.

*Surviving infidelity as a couple is a major undertaking.*

In many instances there are warning signs of an impending affair. The person who cheats doesn't typically wake up one morning and on the spot decide to betray his/her spouse/partner. The seeds of infidelity often grow slowly and couples are often unaware of what's happening until they are in crisis.

It is impossible to accurately predict if a person will decide to cheat on his/her partner. There are, however, certain conditions that, if set in motion, can lead to you or your partner becoming *affair-prone*.

Despite our best intentions at the start of the relationship, under certain circumstances (sometimes painful, extenuating ones), almost anyone can be vulnerable to having an affair. Therefore, becoming aware of the conditions that lead to this vulnerability should be a priority for all marriages and relationships.

### **Relationship Help: 5 conditions that can lead to an affair**

#### **1. A misunderstanding of normal relationship phases.**

"It feels like everything's changed. Where's the guy I fell in love with?"

~Christina, married three years

All relationships and marriages go through a series of changes, some painful. For instance, relationships often begin in the honeymoon phase, where excitement, passion and an intense emotional connection with your partner is the norm.

Around the two-year mark (this varies from couple to couple), your relationship leaves this blissful phase and enters a stage where conflict and disagreements are more likely. It might feel like the person you fell in love with, your soulmate, is suddenly nowhere to be found—leaving you feeling confused, angry and alone.

It is easy to feel disillusioned and affair-prone at this point, especially if you misinterpret these inevitable changes as evidence that you're with the wrong person. Don't confuse normal, albeit painful, relationship transitions as evidence to give up on your spouse/partner.

## **2. Becoming passive about passion.**

"We just don't have time for sex. By the end of the day we're too exhausted after working ten hours, commuting for two, taking care of the kids, the house..."

~Steve, about to celebrate his tenth wedding anniversary

The level of passion you and your partner feel for one another will vary throughout the life of your relationship. Very often relationships start in sexual overdrive—intense, frequent and fulfilling love-making. Over the years, this degree of passion levels off and you may find that the practicalities and mundane aspects of life have replaced the intense fire that once existed.

If the physical and sensual aspects of your relationship are ignored for extended periods of time, your relationship will suffer. Too many couples erroneously assume that passion should be natural and effortless—and they end up not trying.

Resigning yourself to a sexless marriage (or relationship) is a mistake that can lead you to believe that the only path back to passion is outside of your relationship.

(My new workbook, *Passion, Sex and Intimacy: Keep the Fires of Passion Alive*, which can be found at [http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/passion\\_ebook.html](http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/passion_ebook.html), gives a detailed, easy-to-use blueprint for how to deepen intimacy and keep the passion strong in your relationship.)

## **3. Ignoring important issues when they arise**

"Every time I try to talk to my boyfriend he says, 'Everything's fine...you always make a big deal out of things.' But things aren't fine. We hardly talk and I'm getting really tired of him pushing me away."

~Candice, in a committed relationship for almost nine years

Too many couples assume their relationship will simply take care of itself—the assumption being that love will carry the relationship. This simply isn't the case. Of course love is important, but it's only one piece of a healthy marriage or relationship. When couples ignore the relationship, problems mount and fester.

Failure to address issues that are important to you or your partner can erode intimacy and cause you to feel lonely. It is a painful irony to feel alone while in a relationship that is supposed to bring a deep sense of connection with the person you love.

Ignoring each other's needs has a cumulative effect—feelings of neglect, hopelessness and resentment slowly build and drive a wedge between you and your partner. When your needs continually go unmet and a sense of futility sets in, you will be vulnerable to having your emotional and physical needs met outside the relationship.

## **4. Negative relationship role models.**

"My wife tells me I treat her like my father treats my mother. I hate it when she says that...I'm afraid it might be true. I don't even realize it when I'm doing it."

~John, married thirty-three years

Have you ever noticed that there aren't any classes that teach people how to be in a committed relationship?

For better or for worse, we've all learned how to be in relationships from observing the relationships that surrounded us throughout our lives—most of this learning occurs in childhood. Like a sponge, children absorb what they see and what surrounds them.

If you grew up in a family where loyalty and commitment were top priorities, and conflicts were dealt with rather than swept away, you're apt to bring these pro-relationship qualities to your marriage or relationship.

If, on the other hand, you observed infidelity, deceit and a lack of commitment, you may struggle with similar patterns, especially when you're under significant stress or your relationship is going through tough times.

Work to become aware and mindful of the unhealthy patterns that you're repeating from your childhood—patterns that can leave you affair-prone.

(I recently completed a workbook called *Take Control of Your Relationship: Don't Let Your Past Dictate Your Future* which can be found at [http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/takecontrol\\_ebook.html](http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/store/takecontrol_ebook.html), that can help you break free from the influence of past, negative relationship patterns.)

## **5. The opposite-sex "friend" phenomenon.**

"Me? Having an affair? A year ago I'd laugh if someone asked me that...I honestly thought Jen and I were just friends. We ended up spending more and more time together and one thing just led to another...I never thought I'd cheat on my wife."

~Bill, describing how a friendship with a coworker turned into an affair

A physical affair often begins on the heels of an emotional affair.

When you prefer to get your emotional needs met from a "friend" of the opposite sex, rather than your spouse/partner, you have moved into an affair-prone danger zone.

There are several reasons why you may take this path: the friend gives you the attention you no longer receive from your husband; this friend supports and affirms you in ways your wife used to but no longer does; you feel recharged by any feelings of physical attraction you may have toward this "friend."

*Remember, if you say things to this friend that you wouldn't say if your husband or wife or partner were in the room standing next to you, then you're headed down the road of becoming affair-prone.*

Don't panic if any of the above describes your relationship. These are warning signs of a *potential* problem. The goal is to become conscious of these conditions and discuss them with your partner. This type of focused, active awareness will help you and your spouse/partner weed out any affair-prone tendencies and replace them with the seeds of commitment and loyalty.

Would you like to receive FREE relationship help tips?

If you haven't yet done so, don't forget to sign up for my monthly Relationship Toolbox Newsletter by going to [http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/relationship\\_newsletter.html](http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com/relationship_newsletter.html).

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### **Author Bio**

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

You can reach Dr. Nicastro via his website <http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com>