

Emotional Cheating

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Introduction

Cheating is an issue that comes up in the news frequently. When political figures, athletes and other celebrities “cheat” the public tends to be very interested in why. Popular music, television and film all often rely heavily on temptation and adultery. It is difficult to tell if these portrayals lead to an increase in cheating or if the existence of this in our society fuels the media. One thing that is for certain is that no one truly benefits from cheating in the long run.

Cheating in a relationship does not have a single definition. Most people would agree that it occurs when a person in a committed relationship or marriage has physical relations with someone other than their partner/spouse. This idea of cheating can range from kissing and heavy petting all the way to sexual intercourse.

Emotional cheating is an intimacy between two people who are in a committed relationship to other persons and does not immediately include a physical relationship.

Beyond this common definition detailed above, there is another less often recognized type of cheating. This sort of cheating may happen just as often if not more so than the physical sort and it is called emotional cheating. This tip sheet will explore some common features of emotional cheating and offer strategies to avoid falling into it.

What is Emotional Cheating?

Emotional cheating is an intimacy between two people who are in a committed relationship to other persons and does not immediately include a physical relationship. It typically starts innocently, as a friendship that



involves shared likes and dislikes and pleasant conversation and evolves into an emotional closeness with communication about deeper issues that would usually be reserved for a partner or spouse with whom there has been an expressed commitment. Instead of reserving this communication for the committed partner it is offered to this other person who is considered more understanding and a better person with whom to entrust this information.

If a partner is getting what they need emotionally outside of their relationship then they are less likely to try to work on their original relationship. This is treacherous territory. In order to have a committed relationship, one must be willing to put energy into maintaining communication and intimacy with that partner.

How can a relationship be considered cheating when there is no sexual activity taking place?

All human beings have a need for emotional support and communication. This leads us to seek out relationships that will satisfy these needs. What makes emotional cheating a problem is that a person gets their need to be emotionally close to someone satisfied by a person other than their partner. These emotionally unfaithful relationships often begin as strictly nonphysical; with time though, they can easily develop into romantic relationships.

In relationships, emotional cheating often happens when communication has broken down between a couple and the partners feel starved for attention.

When can Emotional Cheating Occur?

In relationships, emotional cheating often happens when communication has broken down between a couple and the partners feel starved for attention. This sort of cheating can be especially dangerous because, like physical cheating, it can break down trust when it is discovered.

How Can I Avoid Emotional Cheating?

- *Save emotionally intimate conversation for your partner*

If you find yourself turning to your friend for emotional support instead of your partner or spouse then you are probably going down an inappropriate path.

- *Set rules and expectations for your platonic friendship*

Some people believe that men and women cannot have friendships. It is possible for a man and woman to be friends. However, those in committed relationships should be careful to have limits set with which your partner or spouse is comfortable.

- *Be careful of online relationships and office relationships*

Online relationships are not innocent simply because you are not face to face. Office relationships are not automatically protected since you are in a work situation. Your interactions should have strict boundaries and intimate conversations should be avoided.

- *Do not discuss intimate details about your committed relationship or complain about your partner to your friend*

This only opens the door for discussions that could be harmful.

Create new limits and boundaries or stop communicating with this person altogether.

What if my Extramarital Relationship is Becoming too Close?

Immediately change your patterns. Do not wait. Create new limits and boundaries or stop communicating with this person altogether. Be honest and tactful by

giving the other person your reasoning (if you have let it get this far you should be able to communicate this). Then, take some time for self reflection: what did you get from this person that you did not get from your partner? Be specific. Was it empathy? Attention? Fun? Once this is identified, it's time to start working on your committed relationship; this will involve discussing your unmet needs with your partner. Together, you may want to attend a relationship education class.

Conclusion

Emotional cheating is intimacy between two people that doesn't involve a physical relationship at first. This type of infidelity can be just as damaging to a committed relationship as a physical affair. If you are going to have friendships with members of the opposite sex, make sure you establish clear boundaries that both you and your partner or spouse are comfortable with. Having intimate conversations with someone other than your partner or spouse should be avoided at all costs. Although it may be difficult in the moment, always turn to your partner, instead of your friend, for emotional closeness.

Resources

10 Things you can do to Have a Healthy Marriage

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/tenthingsshm.pdf>

Couples Communication 3 Part Series:

1) Honey, Did You Hear Me?: Game Plan for Active Listening

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/didyouhear1.pdf>

2) Listening is not a Spectator Sport: Rules for Active Listening

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/listening.pdf>

3) Avoiding Communication Fouls

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/avoidingcommunicationfouls.pdf>

How Stress Affects a Relationship

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/howstressaffectsarelationship.pdf>

How to Know If You Have a Healthy Marriage

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/howtoknowhm.pdf>