

A FEW WORDS

(FROM JOE) ABOUT

AFFAIRS

This is a small book about affairs.

It is about:

- Telling your loved one about the affair
- Finding out or being told about an affair
- Asking for forgiveness and forgiving after the affair.

It is written for the person who has had the affair, the person who learns of the affair and there is a brief section about forgiveness for the couple to read and to assist them in their collective and respective thoughts.

There are four main sections which include:

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SECTION I: THE ACT AND ART OF TELLING

AHoney, I=m Having An Affair@

You=ve had an affair. You are having an affair. Stop. Pull over. Try and think.....

This is a time for thinking. Not reacting. Not running away. Not avoiding. It is well worth your while to do some thinking, to engage in thought, at least for a few moments. Generally once the issue of Affairs@ has arisen, there=s lots at stake and lots to try and think through, including telling your partner (loved one, boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife....).

Telling your partner about an affair, or a series of affairs, is a *personal* choice. Make sure you have made this decision on your own. No one can make you tell your partner about an affair you are having or an affair you have had. *You* must decide.

Try and be clear in your own mind as to what you are hoping the outcome will be.

Are you telling to say good bye to your husband or wife?

Are you telling to really let them know how much work needs to take place for this relationship to work?

Are you telling to relieve your conscience at some expense to them, without thinking through what this will mean?

Are you telling because you love them and have learned things you now need to either put in place or seek elsewhere?

Are you telling them because you were drunk and irresponsible and you think they should know?

These are just a few. Try and find your own.

Keep in mind that we assume that affairs are **sexual** connections outside of our relationships but in reality they can also be emotional and psychological connections we make with others at very deep and intimate levels that cause the same reaction in our committed and monogamous relations **as if we had sex.** However, it is common to only think of an affair as sexual or a relationship that involves varying degrees of sexual intimacy.

It may be important to establish that people do survive this experience. On one of our shows about affairs (02/02/00) a woman calls to let us know it's a year later and, she has heard the news, been angry, sad, angry again, and made sure she kept a daily journal and shared it's content with her partner who had the affair. **People, and marriages *do* survive!** This is just some of the work that needs to be done to make it work.

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL... THAT IS (ONE OF) THE QUESTIONS..

Let's start here with a few words to help you get started in the decision making.....

You may want to practice the "telling" out loud. The first time you hear yourself say this, shouldn't be the first time your partner receives the news. **Make sure what you say is clear.** This is hard enough to say *and to hear*, you don't want to be misunderstood and have to say it again. Try to say the words **"I've had an affair"** and not ambiguous things like **"remember how you used to say I never sowed my wild oats, well, guess what!"**

ONE THING TO REALLY THINK ABOUT.....

Keep in mind there's a big difference in the way things will go in the marriage based on the telling or how your partner finds out. There's a big difference between:

Playing Detective & Going Crazy

You're caught, you deny it, then, at some future point, (after lots of questioning, probing and other crazy stuff) you have to tell all and then you do. By this point you have lost the right to say "I will you forget it, I've already told you everything," "Let it go," because your partner now has to deal with the affair, the continuous lies and denial, their own behaviour as snoop and private eye and crazy person. This is a busy way to tell and to find out.

AND / OR

Hiding Out

You just never tell and live with the stress and worry of being found out or the knowledge that you have played your partner for the fool.

AND / OR

Telling

The telling is action rather than reaction to questions, investigation and ongoing accusations. This "action" gives you a small sense of control over your own destiny.

THINGS YOU MAY NEED TO KNOW & EXPECT

After the telling (or finding out!) trust is generally quite low. At this point intimacy and sexual activity initiated by your partner may be a sign that they are now competing for your affections and attention rather than enjoying them or letting you know they forgive you.

Don't be fooled into thinking everything is "okay." This is a spot where sex and doing nice things for you, the person who had the affair, means that the partner who has not had the affair has personalized the events and is now seeing themselves as responsible . . . maybe thinking, **If I had done this [had sex all the time, made his favourite dinner, stopped complaining, looked like I did the day we married, not complained about my illness or the kids or my job or my mother in law] then they wouldn't have had the affair.**

This kind of thinking generally creates a feeling of power for the person who didn't have the affair but is often short-lived. When they come out of shock and realize that if these were the problems and you were using an affair to tell them, then something is wrong. **Communication and trust generally surface as issues once this phase of discovery, shock and reaction passes in the telling of the affair.**

In telling of your affair there's a series of things one can expect including:

Expect tears, rage, anger, and feelings of betrayal.

Expect to talk about @love.A

Expect lots of things to change. Some will be temporary, some will be permanent.

Expect to feel better (“Now I’m being honest again.”) and to feel worse (“I have created pain.”) at the same time.

Expect to apologize, and make it known you are apologizing, but don’t expect this to make things better or to make things go away.

Expect to end your affair completely if you want this relationship to get better. Shut that door. Tight.

Expect your partner to question, obsess, talk about, be upset a lot longer than you’d like. If they already worry excessively, they may need professional support to deal with the worry.

Expect some feelings of revenge on your partner’s behalf and possibly some acts of revenge or revengeful acting out.

Expect to be accountable for your time and your activities and anticipate inquiries regarding this. Just answer the questions.

Expect to be in a different place than your partner at the initial telling. They may want details, you may want it forgotten. They may be in shock, you may feel relieved. They may need to tell someone else, you may be too ashamed to seek help or support.

Expect to be asked to get an AIDS test or tests for sexually transmittable diseases. (You may want to offer, considering it is a good idea for you too.)

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO TRY

There’s also things one can do to try harder in the telling and to do this in a

thoughtful and workable manner including:

- Try hard not to belittle or minimize your partner's reaction by referring to it as over-reacting or by saying things like "It was only...." Or "Get over it." At the point of telling and as you begin to try and make the relationship work again (better!) remember you will both be working at different paces.
- Try to prepare yourself for the obvious. For example it would be important to know how and where to get help for relationships in trouble in your community **before** telling. You have known about this longer than the person hearing it and you can start figuring it out and fixing it more quickly.
- Try to read something, think about and be empathetic as to how your partner will feel and think. Make efforts to be insightful about their own life history (Did their parents have affairs? Did their first marriage end in an affair? Did your relationship start as an affair? etc.).
Understanding your partner as the listener is important for both of you and especially for you as the speaker. Kind of like "know your audience".
- **Try and be sure to take responsibility for the affair.** Saying things (and meaning them!) like "It's not you..... It's not your fault..... I have done this rather than making better choices like reading the signs or coming to talk to you or addressing a problem with you..... Please don't blame yourself...." really does make sense and helps keep things on topic.

THIS IS ABOUT CREATING CHANGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP: TRUST AND LOVE

Change takes place at an intimate level and can be hard to get a handle on.

The telling creates a transition I often describe as:

You will go from being dishonest within a trusting relationship to being honest within a relationship with no trust. The latter has more hope of lasting and healing. Neither is acceptable as a place to land in any relationship. Both would need work. The trust you now build is all or none.

Trust as *all or none* means:

No lies (not even those little white lies!).

No room for margin of error. (No drinks with people of the opposite sex for business, no mystery calls, etc.)

No more saying things you don't mean.

No surprises. (No surprise parties, nothing mysterious). Nothing.

This affair is now a big bell in your relationship that wasn't there before. In the old days it was "Oh, I guess they forgot to call." Now, the same event, can ring this bell and cause all kinds of reactions and actions. Be cautious. Don't do anything that continues to ring this bell.

The bell ringing is about feeling safe. Keep ringing it and things rarely feel safe again.

A SUMMARY OF THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TELLING ABOUT YOUR AFFAIR(S)

Here are a number of things you can keep in mind when telling about your affair. I hope that it is helpful. No list can take into account everything about you, your partner, your life together. These are general things to think about,

designed to be helpful.

1. If you've decided to tell, tell before you are found out. This is a good start to recovery.

2. Remember that being found out is not the same as telling. If you are found out, don't make your partner crazy with plausible explanations for strange events. Be careful: if you continue the lies, it will just turn out to be more stuff to fix. There is a point where this can turn into 2 problems: 1- the affair and 2- all the continued lies after being found out. Make sure contact with the person with whom you have had the affair has ended.

3. Be clear. Make sure this is something you have to tell once. After that there's generally lots of talk but the act of telling is over.

4. Reassure your partner you are telling in hopes that the relationship can be saved (unless this is not true).

5. Realize your relationship is at risk because of the affair, not because you decided to tell.

6. Find out about how people get help (names, numbers, costs, etc.) before you tell.

7. Expect revenge. When people are hurt, they do consider revengeful acts based on the feelings of being hurt.

8. Remember you have had lots of time to think this through and figure it out. Whatever your time frame, that's how far behind they are in their thinking and figuring out.

9. Things will be different from the time you tell (or your partner finds out) and, hopes that you can go back to the way it was before the affair are unrealistic and not necessarily a good idea (considering this is where you landed).

10. Work with your partner to eventually establish a time frame where this can stop being the focus of discussion and activity. Don't confuse this with forgive and forget. People who stay together do forgive. If they forget, it's usually not a good sign in the long-run, for either of you. All's forgotten may seem like a relief but how do you form a new and strong relationship with someone who forgets important events like this? Better to take ownership of these events and painful moments, acknowledge their existence and, validate the pain the relationship may move through.

SECTION II:
THE ACT AND ART OF
HEARING & KNOWING

AYOU WHAT.....
HOW COULD YOU.....
MY HEAD IS SPINNING @

Hearing about your partner's affair and integrating this information into one's future day-to-day existence with them is a painful process that many adults hope to survive. Here's just a bit of thinking on a topic that could fill volumes alone just on the kind of injury one can feel and the multitude of emotions that flow through the self and the marriage as the process of personal and relationship recovery take place.

MY PARTNER HAS TOLD ME THEY ARE HAVING AN AFFAIR AND I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT!

Maybe these ideas can help.

Expect to think a lot about this. Keep in mind that people find themselves repeating and going over things a number of times. But, if you obsess or worry excessively on a regular day in the midst of day-to-day events, stopping yourself from thinking and re-thinking these painful events and thoughts may not be possible without professional help. Try to assess the

need for personal (individual) counselling as early on in the **A**hearing@ or **A**finding out@ process as possible. You may need support and assistance to get to a place of coping to start the healing.

1. Tell your partner to end the affair and all contact with the other person. Now. Completely. This is not a pragmatic or practical decision. This is a surviving the affair decision. They may have to switch jobs, fire someone, find some way to solve this problem. Nothing will work well (really) until they do. Be careful with what you are prepared to go along with for the long run. Ask them to finish this business and shut the door tight so that you can feel at least moderately safe in proceeding with the relationship.

2. Try and keep @perspective**A** on what this feels like and what it really is.

3. Remind yourself this is about the person who had the affair, not all about you. There may be things that need to be worked on, improved, addressed, etc. but this is not the way to bring them to light.

4. Make this one event. Tell yourself you need to respond to it and figure it out. Fix it. Find a place for it. Before you knew or found out, other things were all in order. They still are. This is one thing that affects everything but it is not everything. Try not to make it everything.

5. If this is not the first affair (i.e. second, third, fourth,) then you will need to stop and realize you may have a deeper series of problems and that a pattern may exist in your relationship within which you are an active player. If you can't see the pattern, check it out with someone else you trust and feel safe talking to. Lots of couples see this as a forgive and forget pattern and need to look at the pattern as well as the events of the affair. Generally the same pattern is also found in other aspects of the relationship. One man called this *the fornicate and forgive and forget* pattern. The pattern aspect is important. Consider couple therapy to figure this out and individual therapy for the person who has had

the series of affairs.

6. If you are thinking about the affair all day then it is important. However, it can become all-consuming. If it takes over your life try to assign it one hour per day= thinking time so that when you think about it all the other times of the day and night remind yourself (train yourself) to think about it during the assigned time(s) and to forward your thoughts to that hour.

Sometimes assigning a series of thinking activities for the hour is helpful. For example, you could write in a journal, writing the answer to a question you keep asking yourself. Once done, the next time the question comes to haunt you, you can reassure yourself you=ve covered that question and can return to it if it is still relevant when the thinking hour comes up later on that day. In theory, once you get this working, you slowly move toward using the remaining 23 hours to address and work at other issues and tasks. **This is only 24 hours a day if you let it be.**

7. How big is this? How big do you let it become? You have to talk to someone. Be selective about this. This knowledge will alter the way they see you and your partner in the future. You need someone who respects your ability to make your own decisions and will support the two of you if you decide to work this out or while you work this out. Be careful that you haven't agreed to **Not tell anyone.** This is hard enough to get through. Pretending you can do it in isolation without telling anyone is setting yourself up for a fall.

Sometimes a neutral professional is easier to talk to at first than a mother or sister. **Don't** tell the children. This will be a burden to them, no matter the outcome. **Don't** tell the children. **Don't** tell the children. Should I tell the children? **NO.** **Don't** tell the children.

8. Make sure you have a list of all of the other people and things that require your attention and check in with it. You will need to try to stay

“grounded.”

9. Look for things that feel safe for you and that you can count on. Create some sense of safety for yourself in the interim until you are able to assess what is next for you, and your relationship. This is generally a period of lots of relationship change. Some of the changes should be to make you feel safer or Okay.

10. Be cautious not to elect to change a lot of other things at this time.

11. Be careful to catch yourself in self-blame thinking (if I do this maybe he/she won't do that, maybe I could be more . . . less....). The real issue here is that there could very likely be a problem in the relationship and this could be a wake-up call for both of you. The first task is to establish an agreement that this is not, and will never be, an acceptable way to send messages to one another in your relationship.

12. Fight your own feelings of revenge. The feelings from acting them out are generally short-lived and the consequences can be fairly long-term.

SECTION III:

TO FORGIVE (?) AND FORGET(?): **A COUPLE'S DILEMMA**

Almost immediately after a couple acknowledges an affair exists, the topic of forgive and forget surfaces. What follows began as an article in my

web site entitled **BEING FORGIVEN & FORGIVING OTHERS: A RELATIONSHIP DILEMMA** that was inspired by a call during an open show on relationships in May of 2000. Eventually this one call helped us stumble on to the topic and to feature it in a future show. The article still appears in my web site in its original form. What follows is its application in relationships where there has been an affair and the **to forgive and/or forget dilemma** faced in the aftermath of learning about the affair.

Generally, I would encourage thinking about the following for those faced with the dilemma posed by an affair:

- Think about forgiving as something that **takes place in stages or percentages, not all at once.**
- Think about how **frequently the expectations of the person hoping to be forgiven are unrealistic.** (Can't you just forget it...).
- There is a possibility that **genuine attempts that might be made to rescue the relationship from this harm done may still result in the person who has been hurt being unwilling or unable to forgive.**

CAN INTELLIGENT AND THINKING PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIPS JUST FORGIVE & FORGET?

How often when we do a wrong to others would we like to be completely forgiven? How often would we like the event to be completely forgotten? Is this possible? Do people really forget things that have hurt them overnight? Can people just forgive? Is there such a thing as forgiving too easily or quickly? We know that forgiving and forgetting are separate things. What is realistic to hope for in a relationship where hurts (that are hard for one person to forgive and forget) take place?

Questions for the person who wants to be forgiven to ask themselves:

- Is my request to be forgiven sincere?
 - Is my request meaningful?
 - Is my request delivered in a personable manner? (Spoken? Written? E-mailed? Gift & card?)
 - Does my request to be forgiven include an apology?
 - Does my request to be forgiven include an admission of guilt or responsibility ?
 - Does my request to be forgiven include a promise for future events?
 - Is my request to be forgiven a repeat of a past pattern or a new request?
 - Does my request to be forgiven include acknowledgment of the other person's feelings (i.e. disappointment, violated, betrayed, etc.)?
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- Is my request to be forgiven an attempt to get the person to stop talking? Or, to encourage the necessary further dialogue?
 - Is my request to be forgiven tied up with some other thought or outcome not limited to being forgiven? (In this case, the other person would say.. **A**You don't care if I forgive you.. You just want me to shut up and stop asking you about it ..@)

BEING FORGIVEN: PERCENTAGES

Being forgiven is rarely all or none. We have to stop thinking of those who

forgive 100% immediately as saintly or A good and forgiving people. This kind of automatic forgiving is actually quite atypical. The person who has been wronged has a right to forgive in percentages, at their own pace, and should not be expected to forgive completely in some new age fashion. Forgiving is a process and not an outcome.

10 percent: I forgive you 10%, right now.

If a person forgives the indiscretion of another at a level of let's say 10%, it is not great, but it is a place to begin.

At first glance we may be trained to see those who forgive at a 10% level as unforgiving. However, if we stop and see that calling someone unforgiving often means that they haven't forgiven at the 100% level, we may be able to see the trap set when forgiving only means 100%. In fact, in some cases an initial forgiving of 10% is probably pretty generous and a good (safe) place for the couple to begin. Instant 100% forgiving rarely works well in the long-run of the couple's relationship.

When one asks to be forgiven and the other person's forgiving is at 10%, it may not be satisfying because we haven't got what we wanted. At this point the hope of 100% forgiven may mean that we are thinking unrealistically with regard to what we can expect from those we have hurt. We'd like to be forgiven 100%, call it a day, get on with it, get over it, etc. These are not realistic expectations.

Do we respect people who have things happen to them (or done to them!) and who then completely forgive the person who has hurt them? Do we respect ourselves when we do this? Forgiving in an all or none kind of way that makes it easy for the person who has wronged you can sometimes also be misinterpreted by the other person as a permission or a license to hurt you again.

I forgive easily, you can do whatever you want to me. I'll overlook it,

forget it, ignore it, so we wont have to do the work of being forgiven .

Doesn't work.

FORGIVING IS A PROCESS

(Hopefully not too long & painful a process...)

Being forgiven is a process. There are periods where it seems like the relationship is better (safe, a bit more like old times, easier..) and there are lapses of less easy times experienced by all parties. Building on early percentages is a good way to look at it.

AI think you are still really hurt by my affair and can only forgive me 25% of the way. I=am happy to have that and work on this to build our way up. It may never be where it was. 25% isn't great. Let=s aim for a higher percentage and enjoy ourselves more in this relationship. I appreciate whatever you are able to do in this area. Whatever amount you are able to forgive me now, I=am hopeful that this will grow.@

WHEN YOU WANT & NEED TO BE FORGIVEN, YOU LEARN NEW THINGS ABOUT THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN HURT

A general rule of forgiving is that:

Once a person who has had an affair has genuinely asked to be forgiven 3 times, they should be on the road to forgiven. On the road (that=s 1% forgiven or more!) not fully forgiven.

If this does not begin to take place, it may be time for the person seeking

forgiveness to stop and assess the situation. At this point there are a couple of things worth looking at (or figuring out) including:

HAVE I LET GO OF THE FANTASY/WISH/SHORT-TERM SOLUTION OF ~~A~~ALL BEING FORGIVEN & FORGOTTEN @ AT ONE QUICK MOMENT?

AM I BEING FORGIVEN AT ALL?

AM I MISSING SIGNS THAT THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN HURT HAS BEGUN THE PROCESS OF FORGIVING? IS THE HURT THAT CAUSED THE ORIGINAL NEED FOR THE APOLOGY BEING FORGIVEN AT ANY PERCENTAGE LEVEL UPON WHICH WE CAN REBUILD THIS RELATIONSHIP? AM I AT LEAST BEGINNING TO FEEL FORGIVEN?

IS THIS PERSON THAT I HURT STRUGGLING WITH BEING HURT & FORGIVING?

AM I KEEPING IN MIND THAT THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN HURT, MAY ALSO BE UNSURE OF HOW TO FORGIVE OR WHEN TO FORGIVE OR HOW MUCH IT IS SAFE TO FORGIVE ME?

Think this all through. It may be time to talk about not being forgiven and what you can expect at this point.

In our culture, people who do not easily forgive are seen in a negative light, rather than a sympathetic light. Truth is, if it is difficult for one to forgive (for whatever painful reason) it may be difficult for them to be in relationships where hurt occurs (intentionally or inadvertently).

You may have hurt them with the affair *and* found something out that can be quite surprising! Sometimes we have people close to us who we hurt and then when it is time for them to forgive us, we find out more about them. We may find out why it is hard for them to have trusted or felt safe

and now it is exceptionally hard for them to forgive. We really have to be patient in our process of hoping to be forgiven and try to see them in a more empathetic light as we ask them to forgive. In this case, being forgiven at 1% may be a great start! Don't think of this as "not forgiven."
Remember, only 0% is not forgiven.

WHAT IF IT IS HARD TO FORGIVE AT ALL?

Are You a Person Who Has Been Hurt and is Having Trouble Forgiving?

You've been hurt. The person who has hurt you has repeatedly apologized and asked to be forgiven. You are having difficulty doing this. Time to assess. Time to think this one out. Ask yourself these as a start:

1. Have I let go of the expectation that if I forgive I have to forgive 100% and that all has to be forgiven and forgotten? Could it be I need to forgive at a 10% level and see where things go from there? Maybe only 10% at a time? See how I do with it?
2. Could it be that forgiving and getting hurt AGAIN are a pattern in this relationship and I've tried this and the repeating of the pattern means it doesn't work? Should I forgive a certain percentage and then see if we can get to the pattern? Should I forgive at all?

3. Does forgiving just put me back in a relationship that I don't want? Am I resisting being back but really quite a forgiving person? Do I have a relationship problem rather than a forgiving or unable to forgive people problem?

4. Has forgiving others (not necessarily this one person) backfired for me in the past and made me unsure or unsafe of the outcome of forgiving?

5. Will my forgiving this person be misinterpreted as a license or permission to do things to me? Will they think they are forgiven and therefore all is forgotten?

6. Am I not forgiving at all because I've forgiven too easily in the past and I need to counter that by really taking an all or none stand in my life. Do I need to start from 0% and work forward rather than at 100% and be hurt again?

If you're not forgiving it's likely there's a reason. If it turns out to be a good reason, it may still be something to address, figure out and even consider fixing.

Sometimes not forgiving at all or getting to 20% and realizing no more will take place is a harsh reality to face in caring and otherwise loving relationships where people are hurt.

Forgiving is up to you at whatever pace you can forgive. Forgiving is a gift and a message of new trust and attempts at finding a safe place in the relationship again. This is a process for both members of the couple relationship.

This is a time for on-going thought and re-evaluation of one's life. Remember feeling safe is a good way to measure how things are going.

SECTION IV: JUST A FEW MORE WORDS **(FROM JOE) ABOUT AFFAIRS &** **SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO GET HELP**

Working with couples means you see a lot of relationships in trouble or At their worst.@ Here=s a few more words (mine and yours)on the subject of affairs

People hurt one another.

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People forgive at different levels.

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After a hurt, 60% of forgiving in a relationship can still be pretty good.

No, it=s not 100%.

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Try to be realistic in what either of you expects.

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No. Chances are slim of being 100% forgiven, especially right away.

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I=m not harping, I=m hurt. If you want to hear my hurt we=ll do better.

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No. I don't think we're supposed to forget this happened.

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I'm trying to forgive you. It takes time. Don't force me to do this.

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I'm afraid once you are forgiven, you will do this again.

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I have forgiven in the past and it has meant little to the other person.

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I'm worried you don't want to be forgiven, you just want something else.

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*I've sincerely asked to be forgiven 3 times, I think we're still at
zero forgiving,
what do I need to know?*

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A FEW PLACES TO LOOK FOR HELP

Book: After the Affair by J. Spring

Book: Divorce Busters by M. Weiner Davis

Your Family Doctor (referral)

Family Services Association(s) in your local community

Call United Way for a suggestion of Agencies that do this work

Psychologist(s)

Social Worker(s)

Psychotherapists

Local Hospital (counseling services, psychology department)

Specialized Services (i.e. Project Connect)

Ask a friend to help you get to help! Sometimes that is the greatest help of all!

