

## FORMAT FOR SETTING THE CONTRACT

1. It 's common nowadays for couples to become disconnected. This can happen spatially as well as emotionally. I think that it is the norm in marriage. And the problem is that most people can't discuss it without becoming defensive, like they are being blamed or criticized. And when couples become disconnected, each partner may feel more alone and therefore vulnerable to an emotional connection outside the marriage. Even if you begin with a "perfect marriage", in time, circumstances change around you. Also, in time, both you and your partner will change as well!
2. Twenty five years ago, few people ever considered rebuilding after an affair. In recent times the prospect of rebuilding has been explored and written about more and more. Although there are still many stories about marriages promptly ending after the discovery of an affair, there are also an increasing number of stories about couples who have negotiated around the affair and developed a stronger relationship.
3. The prospect of rebuilding a relationship should be given some time: roughly speaking, about two years. That amount of time is usually necessary to allow for the healing of the pain and anger involved and then to begin to reestablish some trust. Many people say that the feeling of betrayal (being lied to) is more difficult to overcome than the actual existence of the affair.
4. It must be understood that there can be no hope or success in rebuilding unless the betraying partner ceases all connection and relationship with the third party. We find that this is usually a difficult prospect particularly if there is a lot of pain involved. The betrayed spouse is in no mood to tolerate hearing about or watching this kind of "grieving" and the offending spouse has little patience with constantly "talking about it" and feeling shamed and blamed. It is therefore useful for each spouse to have an individual therapist in conjunction with a couple therapist.
5. The process of rebuilding is also complicated by the fact that the betraying partner often wants "to forget it and move on", while the injured party will continue to obsess about the affair as a way of trying to come to terms with the shock of the knowledge of the affair. If spouses are truly motivated to rebuild they must be able to live with the short term emotional roller coaster which is normal in the first phase of rebuilding...to be able to be patient with the process, to accept that each person will be going through the process differently and may feel estranged from the other and state that they do not feel in love. Often spouses report vacillating (sometimes on a daily basis) between extreme feelings of passion and extreme feelings of resentment. And it is this very struggle that sets the stage for rebuilding.
6. Many people experience the early stages of rebuilding as a loss or a death. In fact some therapists tell couples that their marriage is DEAD. While this sort of language is quite painful, there is not only sad news about this death, but also good news. Whatever wasn't working in the marriage needed to die. As a couple therapist, I represent the relationship between you, and what is possible for your relationship in the future.

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7. In the case in which the betraying party is not sure about wanting to continue the marriage, I give information that almost nobody follows, but is really excellent advice. I direct the offending party to stop contact with both the third party and the spouse and to live in ones own space for several weeks to stop the experience of “free fall”. Each spouse during this time contemplates all the different possible scenarios for their future, not only the possibility of reuniting, but also the possibility of separating and going separate ways. The reason for this is that emotions are so intense that people can’t think clearly. They tend to feel driven or compelled instead of being able to be in charge of their lives. Each partner has the freedom of choice. The injured spouse may set his or her own bottom line for just how long the wait can be. Either spouse has the power to end the marriage spontaneously. Allowing time for thinking may be able to restore a sense of control to lives that feel out of control.

8. Another practical consideration is to decide whom to tell and whom not to tell. In some cases family and friends have already been told, creating even more feelings of exposure and resentment between the partners. Families or friends, by virtue of the need to protect a blood relative or a friend, often err on the side of criticizing a spouse and taking sides, rather than just listening empathically. What is most needed is a non-judgmental confidante who can keep a secret and allow you space to decide what is best for you. Emotional support is a necessary commodity, but also very difficult to attain.

9. While the betrayed partner is trying to recover from “free fall” the betraying partner can use the rebuilding time to explore and fully understand how or why the affair happened. Only then will the betrayed partner be inclined if ever to accept an apology and believe a promise that this will never happen again.