



# why do people

Men – and women – have affairs, whether we like it or not. What makes someone break their partner's trust? And can there be forgiveness?

## Jack (36)

*'I had an affair and decided to tell my wife'*

**I**'m a photographer and my work takes me away from home for long periods of time. During these shoots I work very closely with a production team and models, and sometimes it's difficult to separate taking pictures from reality.

My affair happened on one of these shoots. I suppose I did find Lisa attractive from the start but it was that normal kind of "guy" thing – where we look and admire, rather than touch and feel. We were on a very romantic tropical island (which didn't help) and one night, after having had too much to drink, I walked her back to her little cabin, and ended up kissing her goodnight which, of course, led to the rest. I can honestly say that I never thought about having an affair with her until I kissed her. It was the first time I had had an affair in my marriage.

We continued our affair throughout the rest of the shoot and I became more emotionally involved than I thought I would. I could have fallen in love with her, and that's when I began to realise that what we had could be very dangerous. And I realised that it isn't possible to leave an affair dangling on an island. There are too many feelings at stake.

My decision to tell my wife was based on one thing only: if I didn't tell her, it would be so easy to continue the life of having affair after affair.

Once you have broken the seal, so to speak, it becomes easier, and I really didn't want to live that life. My father had had affairs, and I knew there was a danger that I could enter that cycle as well. And so, as I walked in the front door, I told her that there was something I needed to tell her that might change everything.

And it did. After her initial anger and hurt, she wanted to know everything about the affair – from the most intimate to the least important detail. She became consumed by it and kept asking questions for months afterwards. We began couple therapy, journeying through the most emotional and exhausting period of my

life. It was also the most honest. I don't think she would have stayed if we didn't have kids and, by her own admission, it was the investment of the 11 years together that kept her in the marriage.

Therapy gave us both a chance to grow – together and separately – and for someone who used to judge therapy as "good only for the weak and traumatised", I now know how valuable it is. The process got us talking and laughing again, and it saved our marriage. We are

both more honest with each other and are more connected than before my affair.

In hindsight, this affair was probably a cry for help. Things between my wife and I had become heavy and dreary. I felt superfluous in our marriage and we certainly lacked any form of intimacy. To be honest, I probably could have had an

affair with anyone at that stage. I guess I was open to it without even knowing it.

I don't have regrets – because of the personal growth I've experienced and because our relationship is far healthier now than before my affair.

My advice to anyone contemplating an affair is this: tell your partner how you are feeling before it happens – and then get some help. An affair is not the worst thing that can happen to a marriage – living in an empty marriage is.'

**'AN AFFAIR IS NOT THE WORST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN TO A MARRIAGE – LIVING IN AN EMPTY MARRIAGE IS'**

# have affairs?

## Jamie (40)

*'I had an affair but I never told my wife'*

**I**t's not that I don't love my wife, or that I want to leave her, or that I fell madly in love with someone else...

I had an affair simply because life had lost its meaning. I know it sounds shallow and callous, selfish and deceitful – all the things women label men like me – but it's the truth.

I have a terrific family. My wife and I have been married for 10 years and we have two great kids. I have a well-paid job and on the face of it, it all looks pretty glorious. But every day I came home to a feeling of bleakness and emptiness. I don't know when it started and I can't explain it. If I try, it sounds like a midlife crisis which, I suppose, it was.

I met Janine at a mutual friend's house. She is also married with kids and seemed happy in her marriage. But as soon as we started talking, I realised that it could be dangerous. Our connection was very real and intense. She is an amazing woman and she just shone a light into the places in my character that had been dark for a long time. I felt fantastic with her. I felt alive.

Why did I risk everything? Mostly because we established very early on in our flirtation that this was not going to be about leaving partners, creating debris, or a huge romantic drama. We just never labelled it. She had as much to lose as I did, so the risk was small. I also knew that Janine wasn't ever going to replace my wife, and if something is not forever, you tend to give more freely.

We did the hotel thing twice and it was exciting, I have to admit. Strangely enough, the sex wasn't as great as I'd expected. It was her first affair (and mine) and we both couldn't really let go of the

guilt. The movies make that hotel thing far more romantic than it really is. Feeling another woman's body after 10 years with the same person is a funny thing. But when we met, it was our ability to communicate and laugh that was the bigger turn on. Our time together was light and breezy and fun.

And that's the point. That is what we were both missing in our marriages.

We "broke up" without too much drama and there was no harm done – no one knew, or found out. And oddly enough, things are much better between

my wife and me. I still see Janine on a social basis (with my wife and her husband) – we are so much better as friends – and our liaison has not made us uncomfortable with each other. We don't really talk about it at all.

The lesson in this for me is that I still want to be married, and my wife and I are capable of working at

that light part of a relationship. We are in therapy and it's going well. Those laughing and chatting bits often get lost in the rearing of children. And that's the danger.

I don't regret my time with Janine. I have stopped analysing it and feeling guilty; I just accept that there are lessons in every experience and the trick is to move forward positively.'

**'THE LESSON FOR ME IS THAT I STILL WANT TO BE MARRIED, AND MY WIFE AND I ARE CAPABLE OF WORKING AT THAT LIGHT PART OF A RELATIONSHIP'**

## Joanne (38)

*'I am still having an affair with one of my first boyfriends'*

**C**harles will always be a part of my life. I have just come to accept that.

I met him in my 20s and we had a beautiful relationship that lasted two years. You know, it sounds strange, but I can't really remember the reason we split up. I think it was the distance when he moved away, and then

**'SOMEHOW THERE IS A BIG SPACE FOR BEING FRIENDS, AND A SMALLER, BEAUTIFUL SPACE FOR BEING LOVERS'**

we both met other people. Perhaps we were too young to realise how amazing we are together. But there is not a day that goes by that I don't think about him in some way. Our bond is that strong.

After we ended our relationship, I met Tim, got married and had two children. I thought our marriage would last and it did, for 18 years. And for 16 of those years, we were happy. The long and lonely divorce process nearly killed me and it was Charles who pulled me through. He was there on the other end of the phone for me night and day (he lives in another city) and his advice always came from a place of love and respect. It still does.

He too, got married, had two children, and then six years later, got divorced. And during his dark time, I was there for him. We have the most incredible friendship. And, yes, we do have sex. Mind-blowing sex. Every time. No one comes close to him. And if we don't see each other for a while, we have phone sex. But for the most part, we are deep and fundamental friends. I don't get jealous, and neither does he. Somehow there is a big space for being friends, and a smaller, beautiful space for being lovers. Our relationship transcends social boundaries and will no doubt attract great criticism and anger.

Everyone knows what good friends we are and embraces that relationship, but no one knows about us as lovers. It is our beautiful, sacred secret. He is about to get married for the second time and, once again, I find myself giving objective advice to him, on how to make it work, and how to embrace it all. I can swap from being a friend to being a lover instantaneously. The beauty of the relationship is that we know each other so well, inside and out. It is a very evolved relationship. We often have the same thoughts at the same time. And it goes without saying that we are brutally honest with one another.

The big question is why we are not together now. I do wonder about that and have come to the conclusion that it is merely timing and opportunity. When I was married, he was free, and now that I have three children, and live in another town, logistically, it just wouldn't work. And more importantly, I think we both realise that what we have works, and is so deep, that perhaps marriage would ruin it. I don't want to be his wife. We both know how much we love each other and that is enough for me. I don't need any more from him. This is just perfect. We are what we are. And we will continue to be that throughout our lives. I am invited to his wedding and will go and embrace that special day for him. I have had two relationships since my divorce and he has shown the same respect and support for me. He is like my right arm.

I like his partner, but we know that while he loves her dearly, she can never be what I am to him. That's the thing about this. When I die, they will find him in my heart. And me in his.'

## Natalie (32)

*'My husband had an affair with my best friend and I took him back'*

**A**n affair? What does that mean and how do you define it? My husband and my best friend swear they never had sex. They admitted to "something between them" and to having had "oral sex", but somehow they thought it wasn't an affair. For me, when you are naked with someone other than your spouse, when you are thinking and engaging with someone on any sexual level, then it is an affair.

I had just given birth to my first child when I found a hair clip in the bed. It wasn't mine. It seems like a very small thing, but it was evidence that backed up my very strong instinct that something

wasn't right. At that time, I started getting elaborate gifts from my best friend, out of the blue and for no reason. And then I would find her and my husband whispering and laughing together in the kitchen. This continued over a four-year period. When I put it down on paper, it seems so obvious, but when you are in denial, and you are not connecting the dots, all those things seem to be unrelated.

Once or twice, I did ask my husband and he'd shout at me, telling me not to be ridiculous or stupid – how dare I even think there was someone else? I retreated into denial and pretended things were just fine.

Our sex life was always edgy. My husband wanted to try different, really different things, venturing into role playing. It became more like sex than lovemaking, but I was sure that if I complied he would love me more and this gnawing feeling that he was straying would go away. I think an insecure, terrified wife will try anything.

One day it just got too much, and when I was at the movies with my best friend I just confronted her and, to my absolute horror, she admitted that "there was something between them". But she denied any sex. That night, I told my husband that she had told me about them. I remember so vividly how he sat down on the couch and began to cry – and there I was, trying to console him!

But the anger soon set in, and then I experienced rage like I had never felt before. I screamed inside and out, at myself and at them. I demanded to know every single detail, every meeting, every encounter.

My entire world crashed. I took on the belief that it was my fault for not being sexy enough, for not submitting to his somewhat sinister sexual demands, and instead of moving out, I became his sex slave for two years. As I said, a desperate wife will do anything.

It was during those two years that,

slowly but surely, I started my inner journey. I wrote solidly at every opportunity and started putting all the years of sadness, submission and betrayal down on paper. We did see a sex therapist, who diagnosed my husband with sexual malfunction, and us as a couple, as sexually dysfunctional. We were both treated successfully.

And then I moved out. Quietly and simply, I decided I didn't want that life any more and took our children away

with me. I took responsibility for what was mine (and what wasn't mine). I accepted the full 100% of my 50% for what went wrong between us. I started to use my voice, first through writing and then through speech. I went on a few life-changing personal growth courses and started to retrieve what little was left of my self-esteem.

And I realised that the blame belonged to us equally. My husband was not the big baddie in this.

My husband began to find some humility and gentleness (having never shown the slightest bit of remorse at all), and I moved back into our home. Our sex turned into lovemaking and our relationship began to heal. I have gained a sense of my real self – I now stand up for my feelings, and we are growing as a couple. Every day I try harder to forgive, and some days I get it right. I can't say that I don't worry when he is late, or when he doesn't call. There is always a little part of me that starts to prickle and shake, but I now talk back when that voice becomes too loud. Full trust is the hardest part, and it will be for a long time. But I have learnt a big lesson and I want my children to learn it too: if it breaks, it can be fixed. In addition, we have finally come to realise what true, real, big love is. And we do love each other in that healthy way – more than ever.

My advice to women out there who have a "feeling" or an "instinct", is that your body really knows the truth, so listen to it. Honour yourself and your sixth sense.' ❖

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