



Thinking of an affair? Then think again.

Many persons turn to an affair as a means of coping with a poor marriage. There are websites available to help married persons meet other married persons for such purposes. These websites cite statistics suggesting that since affairs occur in such great numbers, the behaviour is thus normal and therefore acceptable.

Well, that's just evidence of "stinkin thinkin", or as the psychologists would say, "cognitive distortions." (A cognitive distortion is the lie we tell ourselves to convince ourselves that something is OK when clearly it is not.)

There are two kinds of affairs, emotional and sexual. In both instances, the person breaches a sacred trust with their marriage partner. They go outside the marriage to share intimate feelings or sexual behaviour. By definition, affairs are secretive and deceitful. They are fully withheld from the marriage partner. They are a betrayal of the trust that forms the basis of all marital vows and monogamous relationships.

Affairs, as a strategy for coping with a poor marriage do not work. They undermine the integrity of the marriage and the individuals involved. There is tremendous damage done to the sense of trust between the partners that may never be recovered. Further, the individuals involved have compromised their personal integrity and must live with that very serious blemish for the rest of their lives. This is a heavy personal burden – knowing they have acted deceitfully and are now untrustworthy when trust matters most.

In addition to the impact on the marital partner and the individuals involved, children also suffer. The children are witness to the indignity suffered by the parent and they too experience betrayal. Children expect their parents to act properly as role models of virtue and moral behaviour. We teach our children not to lie or deceive. However, affairs are the very opposite of this teaching and hence significantly undermine the relationship and parental authority of the parent having the affair.

Some parents defend their behaviour, falling back on the excuse of a poor marriage. Yet, we teach our children there is no right way to lie or hurt another person. As a result of an affair, a number of parents lose the relationship with their children. Marital fidelity is a line in the sand that cannot be crossed without serious consequences.

If you are experiencing marital problems, do not add to them with an affair. Follow this protocol:

1. Speak with your spouse. Discuss openly and honestly the difficulties you are experiencing in the marriage.
2. If you cannot resolve matters between you, seek outside help together. This can include a family member, trusted mutual friend, clergy or counseling professional.
3. If you then cannot resolve matters, you may consider separation or divorce. If children are involved, consider mediation to resolve ongoing parenting plans.
4. Consider intimacy with another adult only after you have first separated or divorced. If you have children, such intimacy should be handled with caution and sensitivity to your children's adjustment to the marital separation.

Not all marriages work. How the break-up of a marriage is dealt with will have profound implications for resolving matters amicably or with further conflict. It will also determine parents' future relationships with their children and even grandchildren.

Thinking of an affair? Think again.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW
(905) 628-4847
gary@yoursocialworker.com
www.yoursocialworker.com

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report.

Search Gary's name on GOOGLE.COM to view his many articles or visit his website. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. His services include counseling, mediation, assessment and assessment critiques.