

## **An Affair is No Way to End a Marriage**

Marriage can be a struggle for so many reasons. Struggles may be as simple as; immaturity of one or both partners; financial pressures; caring for aging parents; sexual boredom; care of children; juggling jobs and so on.

In a healthy marriage as struggles ensue, the partners raise issues between themselves and seek to resolve them through direct dialogue. In other words, they talk.

Talking is by no means always easy. Issues raised may be sensitive for any variety of reasons. A spouse may need to comment on his or her in-laws, care of the children, sexual needs, money, etc. Owing to the sensitivity of the subject and the ability of spouses to be forthright and also receptive to comment, issues may be addressed entirely, partially and sometimes, not at all. When issues are only partially addressed or not addressed, spouses may harbour any number of feelings including, upset, resentment, sadness and anger. Unresolved, these feelings can fester, leaving spouses feeling more upset, either one to the other, or equally between themselves. In some marriages, this shows up as conflict with fighting sometimes erupting over seemingly trivial events. For others, festering feelings can lead to a distancing between the spouses where they no longer talk at all.

Left unresolved, spouses can find themselves angry and/or lonely in their marriage. For some this may lead to feelings of retribution – wanting to get back or in other situations, an emotional vulnerability or neediness. Some persons may at this point consider an affair as a solution to the issue of a now problematic marriage.

By definition, affairs are harmful. They are secretive events that when discovered bring more turmoil to the marriage and undermines the integrity of the participants. If undiscovered, the participant must live with the wound to his or her own integrity, as an affair requires deceptive behaviour and demands lying to carry on. If caught, lies not only continue but often escalate as the participant seeks to minimize or obscure their participation therein. Once determined

by the marital partner, the integrity of the marriage is undermined in a way that tends to trace back to the spouse having the affair. Hence whatever else had transpired leading up to the affair, the affair becomes the focal point and that spouse is branded a cheater. What follows next is a cascade of problems. The non-offending spouse feels betrayed, embarrassed and humiliated at the hands of the spouse having the affair. The spouse having the affair is subject to scrutiny from friends, family, and workmates. He or she may be thought of as untrustworthy, tainted, out of control and even dirty. When the marital couple has children, they are immediately thrust into the turmoil and are likely to align with the non-offending parent. Hence an affair not only fractures a marital bond, but also parent-child relationships.

In lieu of an affair, couples in distress are advised to talk and work things out between themselves. If they cannot address matters and resolve them between themselves, they should seek help from a reputable marriage counsellor. In the event that the marriage cannot be improved and one or both spouses seek to end the marriage, they can do so without the added injury imposed by an affair. Ending a marriage before an affair improves the likelihood that they both may enjoy ongoing relationships with their own children as well as extended family and friends.

Not that anyone wants to see a marriage end, but certainly some ways are better than others. Seek help and do all you can before ending a marriage. If it ends, spouses should not have to endure any extra pain and upset for an affair along the way. An affair is no way to end a marriage.

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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. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.