

## Episode 1.08 ~ Infidelity and Cheaters

### **TODAY ON**

Emily and John have been in a committed relationship for three years. Recently, Emily started working with a new colleague, Mark, who she gets along with really well. They have a lot in common and enjoy spending time together at work. Over time, Emily begins to confide in Mark about personal issues she's been having with John, including their recent arguments and struggles with communication.

As their friendship continues to develop, Emily finds herself turning to Mark more and more for emotional support. She feels like he understands her better than John does and enjoys the validation she gets from their conversations. They even start texting outside of work hours, often sharing personal details about their lives and their relationship problems.

John starts to notice that Emily is spending more time with Mark and becomes increasingly jealous and insecure. He asks her about their relationship, but Emily brushes off his concerns, saying that they're just friends and that he's being paranoid. However, John can't shake the feeling that something is off.

One day, John discovers a series of text messages between Emily and Mark that make it clear that they've been emotionally involved for some time. Emily is devastated when John confronts her about it, but she doesn't know how to stop the emotional attachment she's formed with Mark. John is hurt and feels betrayed, not only by the emotional infidelity but also by Emily's refusal to acknowledge the impact it's had on their relationship.

Does their story sound familiar to you? Or sound like something a friend has had happen? Infidelity has been on the rise for a few years now, and honestly I have seen a lot of couples that went through lockdown together, and now they are spreading their wings so to speak. And they are not always leaving relationships to be with other people either. So let's have a chat about cheating, shall we?

### **WHAT IS INFIDELITY?**

Infidelity is the breaking of trust in a relationship by engaging in intimate and sexual relationships with someone outside of the relationship. While most people think of infidelity as a physical act, it can also include emotional and online infidelity.

Let's start with physical infidelity. This is when a person engages in sexual activity with someone outside of their committed relationship. According to a study by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 15% of wives and 25% of husbands reported having engaged in sexual infidelity at some point during their marriage.

Emotional infidelity is another form of infidelity that can be just as damaging to a relationship. This is when a person becomes emotionally invested in someone outside of their committed relationship. It can include sharing personal and intimate details with someone else, confiding in them, and seeking emotional support from them. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, 45% of adults in a relationship reported having engaged in some form of emotional infidelity.

Online infidelity is another form of infidelity that has become increasingly common in recent years. This is when a person engages in intimate or sexual activity with someone online, either through chat rooms, social media, or dating apps. In fact, a study by the Institute for Family Studies found that 20% of men and 13% of women reported having engaged in online infidelity.

## **IMPACT OF CHEATING**

Infidelity can have devastating effects on those involved, and the road to healing is often long and difficult. According to research, up to 25% of married couples experience infidelity at some point in their relationship, which means that millions of people worldwide are grappling with the aftermath of cheating.

Betrayed partners often describe experiencing a range of emotions, including shock, anger, hurt, and sadness. The emotional pain can be so intense that it feels like a physical blow. Many people report feeling as though they have lost a part of themselves, and their sense of self-worth is often diminished.

One of the most significant challenges of rebuilding trust after infidelity is the difficulty of overcoming the betrayal. Betrayed partners may find it hard to believe their partner's words or actions, even if they want to. It can be challenging to know when to trust again, and the betrayed partner may be on high alert for any signs of infidelity. This heightened vigilance can cause ongoing stress and anxiety, making it hard to relax and feel secure in the relationship.

Let me share with you Charlotte's story. After discovering her husband had been cheating on her for several years, she described feeling as though the life she had built with him was a lie. She struggled to reconcile the person she thought he was with the person he turned out to be. She wondered if he had ever loved her at all, and wondered if she was a fool for loving him. Although she eventually decided to work on the relationship, it was a long and painful process that required ongoing effort and commitment.

Despite the challenges, it is possible to rebuild trust after infidelity. Many couples seek therapy or counseling to help them navigate the aftermath of cheating, and some report feeling even closer and more connected after the experience. However, it's important to note that healing takes time, and there is no magic formula for overcoming infidelity. Each couple must find their path, and it can be helpful to seek support from friends, family, or professionals along the way.

## **WHY PEOPLE CHEAT**

Samantha and David have been together for five years, and they've always had a strong connection. However, lately, Samantha has been feeling unfulfilled in their relationship. David has been working long hours and hasn't been able to spend as much time with her as she would like. Samantha feels lonely and neglected, and she's not sure how to communicate her needs to David.

One day, Samantha meets a man named Alex at a work conference. Alex is charming and attentive, and he seems genuinely interested in Samantha. They talk for hours, and Samantha feels a connection that she hasn't felt in a long time. They exchange numbers and promise to keep in touch. Over the next few weeks, Samantha and Alex text and talk on the phone regularly. Samantha enjoys the attention and validation she's getting from Alex, and she begins to feel more confident and happy. However, she knows that what she's doing is wrong, and she feels guilty about betraying David.

Meanwhile, David has noticed that Samantha has been distant and preoccupied lately. He senses that something is wrong but doesn't know what to do to fix it. He tries to talk to Samantha, but she brushes him off, saying that she's just busy with work.

One day, David discovers that Samantha has been exchanging messages with Alex. He's devastated and confronts Samantha about it. Samantha is torn between her love for David and her feelings for Alex. She knows that what she's done is wrong, but she's also struggling with feelings of loneliness and unfulfillment in her relationship with David.

While there are many reasons why people cheat, the most common ones are feeling unfulfilled, seeking excitement or validation, or experiencing a lack of emotional or physical intimacy in the relationship. One of the most common reason why people cheat is because they feel unfulfilled in their current relationship. This could be due to a lack of emotional connection, a feeling of stagnation, or simply feeling like they're not getting what they need from their partner. For example, a person may feel that their partner isn't meeting their needs for intimacy or emotional support, and so they may turn to someone else to fill that void.

Another reason why people cheat is because they're seeking excitement or validation. This could be due to a desire for new experiences, a feeling of boredom or routine, or simply wanting to feel desired and attractive. For example, a person may feel like their partner has lost interest in them, and so they may seek validation from someone else to boost their self-esteem. You just want to feel sexy and wanted again, to feel that passion and spark again...

Finally, a lack of emotional or physical intimacy in the relationship can also be a reason why people cheat. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as busy schedules, stress, or unresolved conflicts. For example, a person may feel like they're not getting enough attention or affection from their partner, and so they may seek it elsewhere. I was in this boat myself in my first marriage. We hadn't really been getting along, we certainly hadn't been having sex, and things were just so disjointed. And there are a lot of women out there in this boat...and they will try ANYTHING. I have seen women offer threesomes, get boob jobs, buy really slinky lingerie - all to get his attention back.

It's important to note that while these are common reasons why people cheat, they don't excuse the behavior. Cheating can have serious consequences, both for the betrayed partner and for the relationship itself. Rebuilding trust and repairing the relationship can be a long and difficult process, and in some cases, it may not be possible.

## **THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION**

It's no secret that communication is the foundation of any healthy relationship, and this holds true when it comes to preventing and addressing infidelity.

Studies show that couples who communicate openly and honestly with each other are less likely to experience infidelity. In fact, a survey conducted by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy found that couples who sought therapy together reported a decrease in infidelity by up to 50%. This statistic highlights the importance of addressing relationship issues before they escalate into something more serious.

But what exactly does communication in the context of preventing infidelity entail? It means being able to talk about your feelings, needs, and desires with your partner without fear of judgment or reprisal. It means being able to listen actively to your partner's concerns and working together to find solutions that benefit both of you.

One common reason people cheat is because they feel neglected or unfulfilled in their current relationship. By fostering open communication, couples can identify and address these issues before they become insurmountable. In fact, simply discussing the possibility of infidelity can help prevent it from occurring. We have covered a number of tools in both the episode on communication skills, but also fighting fair.

Therapy, which years ago was almost taboo to speak of, is an important tool. Remember Emily and John from the beginning of the episode? John was devastated but was willing to work through it with Emily. They went to counseling together and were able to identify the underlying issues that led Emily to cheat. Through open and honest communication, they were able to work on these issues and rebuild their relationship.

In addition to therapy, there are other communication strategies that can help prevent infidelity. For example, setting clear boundaries and expectations can help couples stay on the same page. Regular check-ins to discuss how the relationship is going can also be helpful.

Let's talk about boundaries for a moment. Too often I see people who just assume that everyone has the same views about what is infidelity. Some people consider even talking to a member of the opposite sex to be problematic, while others don't see it as cheating unless there is actual sexual intercourse. And as I am sure you can imagine there are plenty of things in between those two

extremes, right? And if you don't talk about what you consider to be your line in the sand, then you are setting your partner up for failure.

## **CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL FACTORS**

In this segment, let's talk about the cultural and societal factors that may contribute to infidelity, including gender roles, unrealistic expectations of monogamy, and the normalization of cheating in media.

Let's start with gender roles. Traditional gender roles often place pressure on men to be sexually aggressive and dominant, while women are expected to be passive and chaste. This can lead to a double standard when it comes to infidelity, where men are sometimes excused for their behavior while women are harshly judged. I mean how many times have you heard a man who sleeps around be called a "stud" while a woman who does so is called a "whore" ? This suggests that men may feel more social pressure to conform to traditional gender norms and engage in extramarital affairs.

Another factor that can contribute to infidelity is what some see as unrealistic expectations of monogamy. Monogamy is often seen as the only acceptable way to be in a committed relationship, but it's not always realistic or feasible for everyone. Some cultures and religions, such as Islam, some traditions of Hinduism or even the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania. According to a survey conducted by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 15% of wives and 25% of husbands report having engaged in extramarital sex at some point in their marriage. This suggests that some people may feel trapped by societal expectations of monogamy and may be more likely to cheat as a result.

Finally, let's talk about the normalization of cheating in media. From movies and TV shows to music and social media, we are constantly bombarded with messages that romanticize and normalize cheating. Showtime has a show called "The Affair" , and "Scandal" revolved around Olivia Pope having an affair with the President. And who can forget the 1995 film "Bridges of Madison County" where the main characters fall in love even though they are married to other people. This can lead to a desensitization to infidelity and make it seem like a more acceptable behavior. For example, in a survey conducted by Ashley Madison, a dating website for people seeking affairs, 40% of respondents said that they were influenced by movies and TV shows that depicted cheating in a positive light.

Let's talk about Maria and Ahmed, who come from different cultural backgrounds. Maria grew up in a Western society where monogamy is the norm and cheating

is considered a serious breach of trust. Ahmed, on the other hand, comes from a culture where polygamy is accepted and even expected of men. Despite their different upbringings, Maria and Ahmed fell in love and got married. At the beginning of their relationship, they discussed their values and beliefs about monogamy and agreed to be exclusive to each other. However, as time went on, Ahmed began to feel increasingly restricted by the Western concept of monogamy. He missed the sense of freedom and autonomy that came with having multiple partners. Maria, on the other hand, was completely unaware of Ahmed's growing discontent.

One day, Ahmed met an old friend from his home country who encouraged him to pursue polygamy. Ahmed was torn between his desire for multiple partners and his commitment to Maria. He felt that he couldn't openly discuss his feelings with her because he didn't want to hurt her or risk their marriage. As a result, Ahmed began to secretly see other women. He justified his actions by telling himself that it was part of his culture and that Maria would never understand. Meanwhile, Maria noticed that Ahmed was becoming more distant and withdrawn, but she couldn't pinpoint the reason. Eventually, Maria discovered Ahmed's infidelity and was devastated. She felt betrayed and hurt that Ahmed had gone behind her back instead of discussing his desires with her openly. Ahmed was also hurt that Maria couldn't understand his cultural background and accept his desire for multiple partners.

This hypothetical situation highlights how cultural and societal norms can lead to infidelity if couples don't openly discuss their values and expectations. In Maria and Ahmed's case, their different upbringings and cultural backgrounds created a disconnect that eventually led to infidelity. However, if they had communicated more openly about their beliefs and desires, they may have been able to find a solution that worked for both of them.

## **GROWTH AND HEALING**

Infidelity can be a painful and challenging experience for couples, but with the right approach, it is possible to overcome the trauma and rebuild a stronger relationship.

Because 1 in 4 married couples experience infidelity at some point it's important to remember that not all relationships end as a result of infidelity. In fact, some couples report feeling closer and more connected after navigating the challenges of infidelity together.

One important factor in healing after infidelity is self-care. This can mean different things for different people, but generally involves taking time to focus on your own needs and well-being. This might include things like exercise, meditation, therapy, or spending time with supportive friends and family.

Forgiveness is also an important aspect of healing after infidelity. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or condoning the behavior, but rather, it means letting go of resentment and anger and moving forward in a positive direction. Research has shown that forgiveness can have a positive impact on mental and physical health, and can help to strengthen relationships.

Working through difficult emotions is another key component of healing after infidelity. This can involve acknowledging and expressing your feelings, whether it's anger, sadness, or betrayal. It can also mean learning to communicate more effectively with your partner, and being open to listening and understanding their perspective.

Jack and Lily had been dating for two years when Jack had a one-night stand with a colleague while on a business trip. Lily was devastated and heartbroken when she found out about the infidelity, but after some time and reflection, the couple decided they wanted to try to work things out. For the first few weeks, things were tense and awkward between them. Lily struggled to trust Jack again and felt overwhelmed with a mix of emotions, ranging from anger and betrayal to sadness and confusion. Jack, on the other hand, felt guilty and ashamed for what he had done and struggled to find the right words to apologize. To start the healing process, the couple decided to attend therapy together. They wanted a safe space to talk about their feelings and work through their issues with the guidance of a professional. In therapy, they learned new communication techniques to help them express their thoughts and feelings more effectively. Lily also began to prioritize self-care, making sure to take time for herself to process her emotions and focus on her own well-being. She started going to therapy on her own to work through the trauma of the infidelity and learn strategies to cope with the negative feelings.

As time went on, Jack made a concerted effort to show Lily that he was committed to the relationship and earning back her trust. He became more transparent with his actions, checking in regularly and sharing details of his day-to-day life. He also worked on being more emotionally present and attentive to Lily's needs. For Lily, forgiveness was a slow and gradual process, but with the help of therapy and her own self-reflection, she began to see progress in the relationship. She felt more comfortable opening up to Jack and sharing her



thoughts and feelings, and she began to trust him again. While there were still bumps in the road, and the healing process was far from easy, Jack and Lily were able to come out on the other side with a stronger and more resilient relationship. They had learned to communicate more effectively, prioritize self-care, and work through difficult emotions together.

## WRAP UP

The likelihood that a partner will cheat again after they have cheated once depends on a variety of factors, including the circumstances of the initial infidelity and the actions taken by both partners to repair and rebuild the relationship. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer or exact statistics on the likelihood of future infidelity. However, research suggests that repeat infidelity is relatively common. In a study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, it was found that approximately one-third of individuals who cheated in the past were likely to cheat again in their current or future relationships.

Factors that increase the likelihood of repeat infidelity include a history of infidelity, poor communication and conflict resolution skills, and a lack of commitment to the relationship. Additionally, if the cheating partner does not take responsibility for their actions, show remorse, and take steps to repair the relationship, the likelihood of future infidelity may be higher. So if your partner is not actively trying to fix things....and I mean actually trying, not just telling you that they will then it's not a great sign.

It's important to note, however, that not all couples who experience infidelity end up with repeat cheating. Many couples are able to work through the challenges and rebuild their relationship in a positive way. With effective communication, commitment, and the willingness to work through difficult emotions, it is possible for couples to move forward after infidelity and strengthen their relationship.

Coming up on our next episode, we're diving deep into the difficult topic of abuse and gaslighting in relationships. I'll be sharing stories from experts and survivors to shed light on this pervasive issue and provide resources for those who may be experiencing or recovering from abuse. We'll discuss the signs of abuse and gaslighting, including the subtle and insidious ways that perpetrators can manipulate their victims. We'll also explore the impact of abuse on survivors, including the emotional and psychological toll it can take, and provide advice for those who may be struggling to heal. Join us as we delve into this important and timely topic, and learn how we can all work together to raise awareness and support those affected by abuse and gaslighting in relationships.

