

I Cannot Get These Images out of My Head

Several months ago a husband asked me this question: “How can I get the images of my wife with another man out of my head.” Note that the husband never saw his wife with the other man. However, it is not uncommon for spouses to imagine, ask questions, and create their own images of their partner’s unfaithfulness.

It very emotionally painful when a spouse finds out his or her partner has been sexually unfaithful. What is even more painful is when the unfaithfulness has ended a long time ago and the erring spouse informs the other spouse about it months or years later. The thoughts about deception and lies jump into the head of the one who did not have the affair. Anger often takes over and trust is blown out of the window. There are countless questions piling up in the head of the faithful one. Who is the person? When did it happen? How many times? Where did it happen? Am I not good enough for you? What color clothes you have on? Etc.

Then the faithful spouse start producing his or her own movie scripts or a photo album in one’s head about the partner’s sexual escapades. These photos soon become so vivid and clear they leave the person shaking, doubtful, and full of anger. But these photos are only the imagination. They are not actual or real. The longer one dwells on these imaginary photos the more vivid they become and the more they are factual. So dear husband, what can you do about those picture in your head?

One author writes “Getting the image out of your head can be extremely difficult. As one cheated-on husband says, “Now that my wife cheated on me, the image of her with another man haunts me constantly!” Even if your wife is working as hard as possible to restore the trust in your marriage, the awful image of her cheating is not something that is easily forgotten.”

Here are a few points to remember. I decided to share in full what I read without editing because I think it is so helpful. These are by psychologist, Andrew G, Marshall in the article “Forgetting Details of Affairs – Does It Matter?” **(1) You may never literally forget your wife’s affair.** “This is the truth, an affair is such an destructive, enormous circumstance that there is a very low chance of you ever forgetting that it happened. You cannot change what has already happened, and that memory is there to stay. Just remember, this isn’t about pretending that the affair did not happen, or that your reactions at the time are gone as well. That is not a healthy, constructive way of moving forward. Lying to yourselves is a terrible way of trying to restore trust. However, you are not trying to forget the affair. What you need to focus on is being able to love your spouse once more without having these feelings of anger and resentment intrude on your relationship. These feelings need to be processes and dealt with. Just remember, trying to forget is not realistic. What you should be aiming for is to try to leave the affair behind.”

(2) Treat the affair as a learning experience. It is not about placing blame on a single party. Learning from the affair is an enormous part of learning to get over what happened. Affairs usually have complex underlying reasons. Elements in the dynamics in the

relationship that can often be changed to make sure an affair does not happen again. You may say, “My wife cheated on me! It’s her fault!” While this may help you vent your anger, getting an affair is an opportunity to examine the habits and dynamics in your relationship that led to infidelity in the first place. Focus on what you have been doing that may have contributed to the affair, and examine the choices you have to change your habits and behaviors in a positive way. This is often more about finding out whether your needs are not being met, and making your partner aware of that.

(3) Live in the present. Expecting to forget an affair immediately is unrealistic. You will need a lot of time and space to recover from the grief and anger associated with infidelity. However, it is best to focus on your present feelings rather than on your expectations of the future or on what happened in the past. By focusing on your emotions, you will have less of a problem living in the present, an essential part of moving forward and putting the affair behind you.

It is a good thing that you really do not forget the affair. The author said because never forgetting builds trust, and discourages moving too quickly. You cannot heal overnight. It might take a year or so.

Dear friend, it is not fair to leave your spouse who was unfaithful without honestly seeking to heal and looking deep within your own heart. In more than 95% of affairs the faithful partner is not really innocent. I wrote in a previous article on affairs that often the innocent partner creates the reason for the affairs--lack of affection, love, spending time, etc. So before you rush out of the house and leave your spouse you have to humble yourself, suck in your pride and take a good look at yourself. You might need your partner to help you to do this. Your coldness toward your spouse is not an excuse for your partner’s affair but it certainly helps you to understand why it happened.

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, is a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980 or 242-477-4002.