

## Why Do People Cheat?

"Why Do People Cheat?" *Relate*, Relate, [www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-relationships/affairs/why-do-people-cheat](http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-relationships/affairs/why-do-people-cheat).

When someone's cheated on by their partner, they're often left asking: why?

How could someone they trusted and loved - and who they thought loved them back - betray them in such a shocking and hurtful way? There's usually not only a sense of anger and upset, but also total disbelief.

The reasons people cheat are varied, but there are a number that crop up time and again in the counselling room. If you're currently struggling to understand why this has happened to you, you may find it useful to think about some of the following.

### Disconnection

One of the most common reasons for infidelity is the feeling that you and your partner have drifted apart. In this case, cheating can feel like a way of finding something new and exciting when your relationship has become predictable and familiar. A sense of disconnection from one's partner can happen for a variety of reasons. There may be a lack of proper communication in the relationship (talking about specific issues or just generally keeping in touch about how you feel). Or life may have become dominated by work or looking after kids, so time together has become more functional than loving.

### Feeling unloved

In counselling, we often use the term 'love languages' to describe how people express affection to one another. Some partners communicate more verbally by saying nice things, whereas others might prefer to express affection physically by cuddling or kissing. If your love language is different to your partners, that can leave you feeling unloved - and potentially more open to the affections of someone who seems to understand you better.

## Imbalance

If there's a lack of balance in a relationship, one partner can begin to feel a bit like a parent and the other like a child. For example, one partner may feel like they have to be the responsible one, making all the decisions, organising the home, managing the finances and so on, while their partner doesn't pull their weight. An affair might then be tempting in order to feel appreciated and equal. Equally, the partner in the 'child' position may feel criticised and as if nothing they do seems to be enough, meaning an affair might feel like a way of reclaiming some sense of independence and authority.

## Fear of commitment

Sometimes, affairs occur at times when you might assume people would be the most secure in their relationship, such as after getting engaged or when someone is pregnant. But worries over commitment can be very destabilising. Sometimes, people can sabotage what they have, consciously or unconsciously, as a way of rejecting feelings of responsibility.

## Issues related to self-esteem

Affairs can also arise from personal insecurities. Low self-esteem can cause people to be very dependent on the attentions of others—and in some cases, the attention of just one person isn't enough. It may also cause someone to feel insecure in their own relationship, so much so that they might cheat as a way of rejecting rather than being rejected.

## Sexually addictive behaviour

Affairs can commonly be linked to problems with sexually addictive behaviours. This is where someone habitually engages in sexual activity as a way of satisfying desires and relieving negative feelings they find hard to control. These desires can be compulsive in the way that a drug or alcohol addiction might be. For some people, this can mean they end up engaging in affairs repeatedly or in multiple relationships.

## So what now?

As hard as it might be to believe, an affair doesn't have to mean the end of your relationship. If your partner truly regrets what has happened, is willing to end the affair and you're both prepared to put the work into finding your way back, there's no reason why you can't save your relationship. Of course, many couples come to the conclusion that their relationship has run its course—with the affair being a symptom of what was wrong, rather than the cause.

Whatever the case, trying to examine the issues together is your best chance to make sense of things. The person who has cheated will need to take responsibility for their own their behaviour as wrong and not make excuses and—although it can be very difficult for the person who has been cheated on—both partners will need to acknowledge their responsibility for what was wrong with the relationship prior to this happening.

It's likely you'll need some form of help to process what's happened. Relationship counselling can help you talk about the affair and what caused it in a safe and confidential environment. Your counsellor won't take sides – they'll just listen and help you to make sense of what made your relationship vulnerable to an affair and fully explore your feelings and the impact of the affair.