

Overview of Affairs -Expert Advice from Peggy Vaughan from her keynote speech "The Monogamy Myth" at the 3rd annual Smart Marriages conference July, 1999 in Washington, DC.

Why Affairs Happen: (The reasons for affairs are a combination of 3 different kinds of factors.)

- ❑ Factors that PUSH people into affairs (problems/faults/shortcomings of individuals or relationship).
- ❑ Factors that PULL people into affairs (excitement, curiosity, enhanced self-image, "falling in love").
- ❑ Societal factors that contribute to affairs (fascination with affairs, using sex to sell, deception learned as teens due to our inability to talk honestly about sexual issues, and the secrecy surrounding this issue that serves to protect those having affairs from dealing with the consequences of their actions).

How to Prevent Affairs:

- ❑ What will NOT work: Assuming it can't happen to you, being "in love," promising to be faithful, threats or ultimatums, religious commandments, having more children, repeating the marriage vows, spicing up your sex life, trying to be "perfect," and trying to meet all your partner's needs.
- ❑ What is more likely to work: Being aware that no one is immune from having an affair, making a commitment to honesty (rather than just a promise of monogamy), and engaging in ongoing, honest communication about everything that impacts your relationship, including attractions to others.

**How to Recover if an Affair Occurs:
Rebuilding the Marriage:**

- ❑ Answering all questions and hanging in through the inevitable emotional turmoil.
- ❑ Severing contact with the third party and building trust through actions, not promises.
- ❑ Making a commitment to Honesty and to ongoing honest communication.
- ❑ Accepting the fact that monogamy is an issue that's never settled "once and for all."

Personally Recovering from the Emotional Impact (regardless of whether the marriage survives):

- ❑ Accepting the fact that it happened (no more "if only..." or "why me?")
- ❑ Deliberately focusing on dealing with it and talking openly about what happened.

- Allowing time to heal and, most of all, believing it's possible to recover.
- Understanding that this is not just personal failure...that societal factors play a part as well.

NOTE: Seeing affairs ONLY as a personal failure of you or your spouse or your particular marriage inevitably leads to personal blame, personal shame, wounded pride, and almost universal feelings of devastation. Self-help strategies alone seldom bring full recovery from this experience, either as a couple or individually. Recovery depends on getting beyond our strictly personal view of affairs and gaining an understanding of them within a broader frame-work.

The "Monogamy Myth" includes the belief that:

- Monogamy is the norm in our society and society as a whole supports monogamy. You can assume monogamy when you get married, so there's no need to discuss it.
- Most people are monogamous, so an affair indicates a personal failure of your particular marriage.

Challenging Society's Monogamy Myth:

- Monogamy is not the norm. Society gives lip service to monogamy, but actually supports affairs.
- No marriage is immune from affairs. There needs to be ongoing honest communication.
- No couple can fully understand why an affair happens by looking ONLY at their own marriage.

Bottom line - recognizing the POWER OF HONESTY:

- Definition: Honesty is more than just "not lying;" it's "not withholding relevant information."
- Prevention: Despite whatever factors lead someone to be tempted to have an affair, whether or not they act on the temptation depends on their willingness to be dishonest and deceptive.
- Recovering: Ongoing honesty is essential to both personal recovery and to rebuilding the marriage.
- Society's Role: While this is an intensely personal problem, it is also a societal problem. Any effort to help people deal with this issue on a personal basis requires that we also address the societal factors, especially replacing the general secrecy and hypocrisy about this issue with responsible honesty.