

How Can I Trust You Again?

The anxiety connected to a breach in relational trust is one of the biggest obstacles for a couple to overcome. For example, let's say your spouse broke your trust in a significant way and you both were trying to recover the lost sense of trust in the relationship. First, you would have questions. Second, you would want assurances. This is natural and should be expected by all involved.

One of the questions would likely be, "Why did you do it?" followed by, "How can I trust you never to do it again?" These and many other questions are familiar to those who have had their trust broken by someone close to them. The reality is that having one's trust broken is very hurtful, but what normally follows is usually more hurt accompanied by the struggle to find a way to believe that person can ever be trusted again.

Next there is the need for assurances. Normally a great deal of scrutiny is focused upon the person who needs to prove themselves trustworthy. There is a need for them to make an all-out effort to redeem themselves in the eyes of the other. Countless conversations will take place regarding the need to be dependable, trustworthy, honest, transparent, and more. Often the person may feel they are placed under the microscope constantly and resentment may build due to the frustration of the storm not passing quickly. The person may complain they feel the entire process of trust restoration has fallen squarely on their shoulders and they feel unable to complete the task.

The truth is, the person who had their trust broken has almost as difficult of a job. They must venture out essentially on faith at some point and choose to believe the other person to be trustworthy. This is difficult for many reasons, but one particular reason is the nagging question of "what if": what if they do the same thing again, what if they fail me again, what if they lie to me again?

I don't have words of comfort here. In reality, the person seeking to prove themselves can never prove to anyone what they will *not* do. They can only prove what they *will* do. This is a big frustration for everyone because we all would like for it to be black and white—clear-cut. Be that as it may, he can only prove what he will do. He may prove what he is capable of doing. He might even be able to prove what he did not do. However, he can never prove what he will *not* do.

Even if the person seeking to show himself to be trustworthy does an excellent job, and his behavior raises no red flags, the other person in the relationship may still be plagued by "what if" questions. At some point, after he has done all he can do to be trustworthy, the other person must choose to trust him. Doubts and fears ultimately must be addressed, challenged and conquered. For this you need to be prepared.

First, challenge what you think you have to have. Accept there will always be a measure of uncertainty to life. No one in a relationship ever has a 100 percent guarantee and yet people have happy relationships all the time. As unpleasant as it is, learn to tolerate uncertainty. It will pay off in all areas of your life.

Secondly, challenge the "what if" questions with the question of "How?" In other words, "How would I handle this?" What would or could you do? Do not allow yourself to feel powerless. Empower yourself through productive and proactive planning for your well-being.

Thirdly, monitor your emotional and physical health. Chronic or prolonged stress can help produce or increase depression and anxiety. The better one feels the easier it is to think clearly and productively. I have seen relationships improve, in part, just by each person working to improve his or her mood or reducing existing anxiety and depression. Exercise, interact with supportive and emotionally healthy people.

Fourth, do not rehearse your hurt with friends and family. As a rule, they will only sympathize and side with you—essentially help you ruminate. Bad idea. Instead, see a professional therapist who can be objective and guide you to healing and can provide you with additional help specifically tailored to your needs.

Do not be disheartened, restoring broken trust is never an easy task, but it can happen if both do their part to restore what was lost.

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