**Sexual Betrayal Recovery Kit**

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| **Early Recovery Plan** | |
| **Coping with the crisis of betrayal** | * Understand your reaction through the lens of trauma * Read this kit * Begin *Facing Heartbreak* workbook by Stephanie Carnes et al. * Complete iPAST (online assessment) |
| **Developing self-care** | * Complete boundary list exercise * Start 90-day sexual abstinence plan (minimum) * Obtain an STI test (through your physician or by visiting the STI clinic) * Focus on your own interests and healing * Address sleeping + mental health |
| **Developing a support team** | * Access 12-step programs like [S-Anon](https://www.sanon.org/meetings/meetingscanadaab.html) or [COSA](http://www.cosa-recovery.org/states/Canada.html) (for partners) * Tell at least one trusted friend or family member about your situation (if they support your relationship) * Watch videos about [sex addiction for partners](http://www.christinabell.net/videos/) (if applicable) |

**Common Symptoms of Betrayal Trauma[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| *1. Hypervigilence:* The sense of impending doom that results from ongoing fears of being betrayed again. Often results in safety seeking behaviours like checking and questioning. |
| *2. Re-experiencing:* Reliving the experience (e.g., dreams, replaying discovery over and over again, body sensations). |
| *3. Avoidance*: Avoiding the places that remind you of the betrayal (e.g., beaches, restaurants). |
| *4. Negative self-beliefs:* (e.g., “If I were more attractive, he wouldn’t have acted out”). |
| *5. Emotional Dysregulation:* Increased emotional activation (e.g., quick to anger, mood swings, racing thoughts, anxiety) |

**What Helps**

* Obtaining information about betrayal trauma (see my [trust recovery kit](http://www.christinabell.net/downloads/) for resources)
* Developing a culture of support (therapy, groups, supportive friends)
* Engaging in effective self-care (yoga, healthy eating)
* Establishing boundaries and requests (see my [boundary starter kit](http://www.christinabell.net/downloads/) for additional information)
* Developing emotional regulation skills (see my [emotional regulation starter-kit](http://www.christinabell.net/downloads/))
* Receiving treatment for the trauma triggers (I have been finding [EMDR](http://www.emdr.com) to be helpful in my work)
* Addressing negative self-beliefs and self-blame ([cognitive therapy](https://www.amazon.ca/You-Are-Not-Your-Brain-ebook/dp/B004XFYRMA/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1511635732&sr=8-1&keywords=you+are+not+your+brain) and [self-compassion exercises](http://self-compassion.org) can be helpful)

**Establishing Safety Through Boundaries and Requests**

**Boundary =** a personal limit or decision about your behaviour that you have control over. The purpose of a boundary is to create space to promote your wellbeing, versus trying to gain a certain outcome from your partner. Please keep in mind that these boundaries are suggestions and every situation is individual.

***Examples*** *of Physical and Sexual Boundaries*

* Receiving a sexually transmitted infections test
* Abstaining from sexual contact until you have proper information about the nature of the betrayal
* Sleeping in separate bedrooms
* Separating finances or bank accounts
* Limiting or eliminating contact with family or friends who participated in your partner’s deception
* Limiting time spent together as a couple
* Therapeutic separation (living separately in the same home or apart)
* Not showering or undressing in front of your partner
* If you are sexual with your partner, not engaging in sexual behaviours that make the other person feel objectified or uncomfortable
* The clients I work with will often agree to a 90-day abstinence agreement in order to establish some stability in the relationship

*Listening and Talking Boundaries[[2]](#footnote-2)*

* Taking a time-out from conversations when interactions are experienced as out-of-control or deceptive
* Choosing to confront your partner when you believe that there is a discrepancy between their words and actions
* Protecting yourself from harmful details about your partner’s deception
* Deciding how much to share with outside people about your situation
* Being honest with your partner about the impact of their behaviour on you

**Making a request =** asking someone for help in meeting a need.

In healthy relationships, you have the right to ask your partner for what you need. When someone has been betrayed, this skill becomes even more important.

You may ask your partner to:

* Obtain a STI test and share the results with you
* End contact with their affair partner and provide proof
* Abstain from problematic sexual behavior (e.g., chat rooms)
* Provide access to electronics and share passwords
* Inform you within 24 hours if there have been any setbacks or contact with affair partner
* Engage in therapy and read books about betrayal
* Ask permission before touching you
* Go with you to couples therapy
* Check-in with you regularly to discuss your relationship
* Block access to certain websites, social media platforms associated with the betrayal (internet filtering software)
* Respond to questions non-defensively

**How to Discuss Boundaries and Requests**

1. Make a list of some of the most important boundaries and requests. It’s a good idea to discuss this list with a therapist.
2. Schedule a time to meet with your partner or discuss it in a therapy session.
3. You can start by saying, “In order for me to start to feel a sense of safety, here are a few boundaries and requests I’d like to discuss.”
4. Have a sense of your non-negotiable boundaries but also be open to hearing your partner’s perspective. This is a process that involves several discussions and revisions
5. Give your partner some time to process the information and respond.

**Consequences**

If these requests are not honoured, I may choose to:

* Further limit contact in the relationship in order to protect yourself from negative impacts
* Live separately
* End the relationship

**What to Avoid**

* *Making demands*. We cannot control the behavior of other adults, we can only invite them to make changes. If your partner is not willing to respect any of your boundaries or requests, this gives you information about the health of the relationship.
* *Repeatedly expressing rage or taking revenge on your partner.* It’s natural to be hurt and angry at your partner and want them to experience the level of pain you have endured. However, long-term emotional abuse and punishment keep. Accessing a skilled couples therapist can help you to communicate more effectively.
* *Relentless discussion of the betrayal*. It is very understandable to need to discuss the details of the betrayal to gain clarification at the beginning. However, sometimes betrayed partners can stay stuck in this state and it can be exhausting for both parties. I recommend that couples create boundaries around discussing the betrayal, which typically involve only discussing it at couples therapy and pre-designated check-in times.

**Coping With Triggers**

**Trigger =** a reminder of sexual betrayal often accompanied by intense emotional reaction (e.g., panic, rage despair). Triggers can feel that your body is being hijacked into a state of fight or flight.

When a trigger happens, it can feel like your body is being hijacked and you may experience panic, rage, or despair.

We experience triggers because your body is trying to remind you not to be betrayed again.

Examples:

* Seeing TV or movies that remind you of the betrayal
* Observing your partner look at someone attractive
* Certain times (e.g., Tuesday evenings)
* Being unable to reach your partner
* Hearing the name or any details about the betrayal

When people experience a trigger, they typically engage in the following safety-seeking behaviours:

* Asking their partner questions repeatedly
* Phoning or texting their partner
* Checking/monitoring their partner’s activity
* Searching for information online
* Worrying/ruminating
* Scrutinizing themselves (i.e., feeling inferior)

These behaviours are very understandable and common and provide short-term relief. However, they can become entrenched habits that can hold people back from healing.

One of the biggest challenges is coping with the intense waves of overwhelming emotions that come with triggers (e.g., anger, panic, and sadness). While we cannot control these waves, we can learn how to surf.

Part of the reason why these emotions are so overwhelming is that our bodies react to these threats like our life is in danger (this is called primal panic). When our connection feels threatened, we are designed to seek proximity to our loved ones because our survival as a species depended on it.

This experience of primal panic often leads to unhealthy coping strategies like phoning a partner multiple times, checking on their whereabouts, or emotional eating.

As mentioned above, there are times where you can ask your partner for what you need and hopefully that will sooth the discomfort. However, it is equally important to develop emotional regulation skills so you can feel a sense of control over your internal states.

**Trigger Action Plan**

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| **Trigger** | **Self-care** | **Partner request** |
| Seeing a story about betrayal in the media (e.g., Netflix, the news, social media) | Stop the program and take a break | I’m feeling upset by what we just saw. Could you please hold me and tell me that you love me? |
| Unable to get a hold of partner | Engage in healthy distraction (e.g., exercise) | Make an agreement on how long you will go without contact |
| Certain times or days  (e.g., Tuesday evenings, anniversary of discovery) | Engage in compassionate self-talk (e.g., “thank-you body for trying to protect me but there is no danger right now”)  Finding healthy outlets to express your emotions (e.g., art, writing, therapy, yoga) | Asking your partner if you can work toward creating new rituals or memories for these times  Talking to your partner about how you have been impacted |
| Longer separations from each other (e.g., holidays) | Create a plan to keep yourself busy with pleasurable activities  Engage in healthy self-talk (e.g., “separations are scary but they are healthy for us; I cannot control what my partner does”) | Creating a plan for contact, and ways to verify plans (e.g., spouse sending pictures of where they are) |
| Excessive checking and searching of spouse’s belongings | Engage in healthy distraction and self-care  Cultivate a spiritual practice (e.g., prayer, meditation, yoga) | Discuss with your partner what you need to build trust (e.g., installing a gps tracker, random cell phone checks, installing an internet filter) |
| Spouses relapses into old behaviours | Book a session you’re your therapist  Take a few days of off work to rest | Ask spouse for increased accountability and engagement in treatment  Set boundaries with sexual contact |
| Suspicious behaviours (e.g., spouse going into bathroom with their phone) | Deep breathing / centering practices | Being honest about your concerns with your spouse (“when I saw you go into the bathroom, I had the thought that you might be acting out. It would be helpful if I could see your phone.”) |
| Seeing an attractive person or something that reminds you of the betrayal | Trying to stay in the present and remind yourself of your worth (e.g., “I am getting triggered right now and comparing myself to this person. My partner’s behavior is because of an issue they struggle with and not a reflection of my self-worth.” | Discuss your emotions with your partner in a moderate way (e.g., “today I saw an attractive woman and I felt really sad and hurt because it reminded me of what you did.”) |
| **Notes** | | |

**3Rs for Emotional Regulation**

**1. Recognize:** Slow down and put what is happening into words. Saying to yourself: “Right now my husband is 15 minutes late from work and I’m worried that he may be acting out” has a soothing response on the nervous system and puts some distance between your immediate activation.

**2. Regulate:** Practice some distraction or soothing activity for at least 15 – 30 minutes. Avoid making any decisions. Try to let the rapid thinking go and stay present in your body. Here are some options:

* ***Grounding:*** Looking around the room, touching something and noticing the physical sensations
* ***Breathwork****:* Breathing in for 5 counts, holding for 2, breathing out for 5
* ***Movement:*** Getting up and walking around, shaking your arms, cleaning up

**3. Return:** Now that your body is less activated, try to use your mind to analyze the situation. Is there evidence to support your fears, or is this a false alarm? What do you need to do to feel better? (e.g., ask your partner for what you need in a calm way)

When you slow down, your mind might be screaming: “Do something!” If you trust the process and let go, you will see that most emotional reactions are temporary and your ability to manage these upsets will get better over time.

**Other Strategies**

* Grounding exercises ([Mindfulness Meditations for Anxiety](http://www.christinabell.net/store/): Track 4)
* Practicing mindfulness – becoming a curious observer to your experience with non-judgment
* Deep breathing: Take 6 deep breaths and focus on relaxing muscle tension (especially in your jaw and shoulders)
* Thanking your anxiety: “I know you’re trying to alert me to danger right now, but things look okay. Thank-you for trying to protect me but I can take things from here.”
* Calling a friend or sponsor (if they are supportive of your relationship)
* Guided imagery
* Exercise
* Prayer
* Time out: 20-30 minute time out with healthy, soothing distraction (Moving Beyond Betrayal book, p.180)
* Journaling
* Expressing your thoughts and feelings to your (if emotionally safe)

It’s important to note that it takes times and practice for this exercise to work. You may have to surf the waves many times a day and it might be exhausting. In addition to the exercise above, it is also important to have a daily calming practice, such as yoga, qui gong, breathwork, or meditation.

**Additional Resources**

**Online groups and communities**

[Bloom for Women – Betrayal Trauma course](https://bloomforwomen.com/pages/betrayal-trauma.php)

[Vicky Tidwell Palmer](file:///Users/christinaschmolke/Desktop/Free%20/Sexual%20Betrayal%20Recovery%20Kit/vickitidwellpalmer.com)

[Sex and Relationship Healing Webinars and Groups (Rob Weiss)](https://sexandrelationshiphealing.com)

[In the Rooms – Online Meetings for Co-dependency Anonymous](http://www.intherooms.com/member/home)

[The Partner's Healing & Empowerment Online Community Forum](https://www.vickitidwellpalmercourses.com/store/VjMFiUHr) is a

confidential, online space for partners anywhere in the world to connect

with other partners 24/7 to share experience, get support, and exchange

ideas and information.

[Center for Healthy Sex: Facing Heartbreak online class](http://centerforhealthysex.com/partners-of-sex-addicts/facing-heartbreak-online-class/)

[Daring Ventures – Online groups for betrayal trauma](http://www.daringventures.com/services/groups/)

**Podcasts**

[Betrayal Trauma Recovery](https://www.btr.org/podcast/))

[Top infidelity podcasts article](https://blog.feedspot.com/infidelity_blogs/)

**Other Notable Websites**

Free e-book: <https://partnerhope.com>

[Partners of Sex Addicts Resource Center](http://www.posarc.com)

**Meetings**

* [S-Anon](https://www.sanon.org/meetings/meetingscanadaab.html)
* [COSA](http://www.cosa-recovery.org/states/Canada.html)

**Videos**

* Visit [this page for videos](http://www.christinabell.net/videos/) on sex addiction

**Books (some are available in an ereader or audio format)**

* *Facing Heartbreak –* Stephanie Carnes, Mari A. Lee & Anthony D. Rodriguez
* *Not “Just Friends”* – Shirley Glass
* *Intimate Deception –* Sherri Keffer (some Christian content)
* *Moving Beyond Betrayal – Vicki Tidwell Palmer*
* *Treating Trauma from Sexual Betrayal – Kevin B. Skinner*

**For Partners of Sex Addicts**

* *Sex Addiction: The Partner’s Perspective* – Paula Hall (try abebooks.com)
* *Living With a Sex Addict -* Linda Hatch
* *Deceived -* Cynthia Black
* *Intimate treason* *–* Cynthia Black & Carla Tripodi
* *The Storm of Sex Addiction -* Connie A. Lofgreen
* *Facing Codpendence –* Melody, Miller, & Miller
* *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse –* Barbara Steffen & Marsha Means
* *A House Interrupted–* Maurita Corcoran
* *Letters to a sex Addict –* Wendy Conquest & Robert Weiss
* *Mending a Shattered Heart –* Stephanie Carnes
* *Sex Addiction –* Catherine Elliott
* *Surviving Disclosure –* M Corley & Schneider
* *Living and Loving After a Betrayal –* Stephen Stosny

1. Adapted from Kevin Skinner’s [Treating Trauma From Sexual Betrayal](https://www.amazon.ca/Treating-Trauma-Sexual-Betrayal-Essential/dp/0977220869/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1511634818&sr=8-1&keywords=treating+trauma+from+sexual) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I want to acknowledge the work boundary work of Pia Mellody in influencing this material. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)