

Choosing Change: Understanding and Empathizing with Survivors of Betrayal Trauma

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This post on the subject of Betrayal Trauma, Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), Sex Addicted Induced Trauma and Emotional Flashbacks was inspired by reading literature on the subjects as well as from listening to “partners” who I’ve counseled with over the past decade. Authors like Pete Walker, Michelle Mays, Jasmin Lee Cori, Dr. Omar Minwalla and other contributors have produced insightful, practical and helpful materials to understand the insidious effects of betrayal trauma upon the person, and how the effects of CPTSD impact the recovery of the person and the relationship that has been traumatized by betrayal. A short and brief [definition of CPTD](#) (for the purpose of this subsection) from Shirley Davis is: “a psychological disorder formed in response to prolonged exposure to interpersonal trauma.”

When couples come into my office and seek treatment for a recent discovery or disclosure of infidelity, I’ve realized that it’s my job to help them see that underneath the “tip of the iceberg” of this devastating experience lay complex forms of trauma and posttraumatic stress that has and will impact their day-to-day life. As invited, I partner with them to learn about the harmful effects and experience of CPTSD, with the goal of helping them to understand and empathize with the experience of the Partner and the almost predictable behavior that accompanies betrayal trauma.

Again, please keep in mind this is a short primer and not an exhaustive review of the literature on these salient subjects. As time permits, I encourage you to follow up on the subjects to educate and inform yourself about how this form of trauma has impacted you, whether you are the “Offender,” the Partner/Survivor, or if you have children who are living in a family system where the effects of betrayal trauma could cause adverse consequences in their lives as well.

To understand and gain an empathetic view about the effects of Betrayal Trauma upon a Partner/Survivor, I’m going to suggest that you look at and take in the information below from four different vantage points. I say empathetic because it’s my hope that by reading the entries below that **you take in what the other person may be seeing and experiencing** at any given moment, and hopefully, the comments will enlighten, inform and subsequently guide you to change your behavior toward the Partner, as you understand what is occurring with her body, mind and spirit and family (past and present). I have embedded in each of the entries vital information about betrayal trauma, sex addiction induced trauma, how it affects the person, and what you may need to know in order to increase your understanding of some significant factors that arise in her process. The way it is presented may trigger strong emotion in the Partner and the Offender. If that occurs, I do encourage you to pause and take a look at some of the self-care suggestions at end of the “Do’s and Don’ts to Me” where you’ll also find additional tools that will hopefully provide assistance as you work to convert past and harmful behavior into current and healing behavior that’s connected with the trauma. So are you ready to take a look?

First, look at trauma from the perspective of the Partner, who more than likely will manifest “triggers” and symptoms of Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder or Sex Addicted Induced Trauma as a result of the betrayal. From this vantage point, the statements below provide a window into her

world for anyone who empathetically wants or needs to know this vital and valuable information about her psychological and physiological state. So read through and **consider what the Adult person is conveying to you.**

Second, consider the information the Partner is conveying from the perspective of her Inner Child, as trauma activates, triggers and causes regression to distant (or recent) traumatic experiences from the past, and this form of psychological regression causes the Partner to feel as if they are re-experiencing the horrific effects of trauma all over again in real-time (remember the process discussed in *Choosing Change #5: Traveling with Intention*). Trauma causes a child to feel fearful, helpless, powerless, vulnerable, abandoned, angry, etc., and at any given time, although the Partner lives in an Adult body, betrayal trauma may create a dynamic that results in her feeling much younger or smaller than she actually is. So read through and **consider what the Inner Child wants and needs you to know** about trauma.

Third, consider the traumatization from the perspective of your own experiences with trauma. It goes without saying that you may have experienced trauma and abuse in your own life, and perhaps compulsive, impulsive, addictive or dissociative behaviors have been accessed in your effort to numb, escape or self-medicate your own pain and suffering from your previous traumas. If this is your situation, then read through the material as if you are looking in a mirror and consider naming versus avoiding the trauma in your own past. If reading the material causes a visceral reaction in your own body, consider it a sign that begs for greater exploration regarding how you may have been traumatized and impacted in the way described as well. If you discover and become aware of what's going on, then the Adult in you has the opportunity to do something productive and therapeutic about it. You have the option to seek treatment that helps you to come to your own assistance in positive and loving ways

versus continuing to engage in behaviors and processes that harm yourself or others. So **consider what your own trauma experience is revealing to you.**

Fourth, if there are children in the home, then read, consider and learn about what they are going through. Children who are exposed to traumatic experiences may hide their true emotions behind smiles, silence, inseparableness or aloofness, or develop a host of other reactions to manage adverse childhood experiences. Although it may not be your intention, their inner world could be horribly shaken and destabilized, and their anxious, depressed, “parentified” or “perfect” reactions may be data they’re wanting you to pick up on to know the trauma in the family system is creating “collateral damage” and they’re the unintended recipient and victim of it. Today, if reading the entries causes you to hear their voice, then as an Adult, you can do something constructive to love and help them versus replicating any form of harm or abuse. So I urge you to **consider how children are impacted by trauma.**

Finally (sorry to sneak this one in on you, there are five actually!), if you’re able, **read the information from the perspective of a loving Higher Power**, who weeps when trauma is demonstrated (“*God does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men*” – Lamentations 3:33)), is not trying to teach anyone a lesson by allowing this to occur, but does want harmful and traumatic behavior to cease and to compassionately help and assist the Partner, and each member of the family impacted by trauma. This could be a difficult point to consider because some forms of traumatization may have involved religious, ritualistic or spiritual abuse, which intended or not, may have hijacked or contaminated one’s viewpoints about how matters of faith or healthy spirituality could be beneficial. If you’re open, I hope you’ll consider how spirituality and your views about faith could provide life-giving, empowering and affirming experiences, especially in a season like this in your

life. When you are ready, **please read and consider the information from the perspective of a loving and benevolent Higher Power who wants health to be infused into the family system.**

The information is presented in two sections: First, please consider the things that you are to “DO,” and second, are the “DO NOT” behaviors. Since these entries are written and presented in the first-person narrative, all of the informative words are followed by the word “Me” (i.e., “Do **Support Me**” or “Do not **Deceive Me**”). Let these words inform, validate, instruct and guide you, and feel free to “personalize” the sentiment with words and descriptions that capture and describe your experience.

Finally, I leave you with the image of the Butterfly. During the course of its life, it experiences a process of transformation and growth, from the chrysalis of old to the changed, transformed and beautiful creature of the present. When you think about Betrayal Trauma and Complex PTSD, no matter who you are, I hope there is a definitive and permanent change in the person and process of who you are: from one type of “old” life experiences to a beautiful and empowered new life. No more trauma, only transformation.

Thank you for taking this necessary step to learn about, empathize with, empower yourself and to heal from and eradicate the harmful effects of betrayal trauma – Dr. Ken McGill

“Do...”

1. ***TELL me the truth! We can't move on if there isn't a commitment to tell the truth. Deception and dishonesty have rocked me to the core, and it's unthinkable to believe I can move on without the knowledge of what has occurred. Are there more things that I don't know that I need to know? You may be protecting the other person, your addiction or your ego by not disclosing the truth, but***

a lack of honesty does not protect me nor make me feel settled or reassured. More lies and deception mean you're thinking about yourself and I will not allow myself to be traumatized by more half or untruths. No one ever died from telling the truth, but you are killing off something in my soul by telling me lies.

2. **FACE me** and become familiar with the devastation and pain that I've carried for (days, weeks, months, years, decades). I haven't slept or eaten for two days now and the thought of eating makes me feel sick. My whole world that I thought was true is a lie...I can't believe anything you say! I feel trapped because you're embarrassed and you don't want me to tell the children or my family, so I have to keep this locked up inside of me and it is destroying me. You knew that the one thing I feared the most coming into our marriage in light of my parents was unfaithfulness, and now it's happened to me. The most intimate thing I could share with you has been taken and shared with someone else. I'm devastated and you can't even look at me? Look at me and see what this is doing to me!
3. **ACCEPT me**, as I am. My heart is beating through my chest and I feel terrified because your actions look like you were intending to replace us. You tell me that this was your addiction and to understand it, but all I can see is behavior that is akin to murdering my soul. I need you to know this was like a bomb going off in my head, my body and my spirit, and it's going to take a long time to get beyond this. I'm working on me, but you need to understand the trauma and downright fear, rage, confusion, self-doubt and horror that comes with this new chapter in our lives. If we're going to recover from this then I need you to accept me as I am, feelings and all, and to not pressure me with this; you need to be patient with me. I need your reactions to me to be understanding, loving and kind. You need to understand I need to feel safe with you if I'm going to open my heart to you again.
4. **KNOW me** and realize that I'm living in a constant state of fear that this will happen again and that it's difficult for me to relax, focus, think straight, function, trust, look at and be in the same room with you at times because the safe world that I thought I lived in has been decimated. I know I will find a good Therapist to help me understand what I'm going through, but you need to know how this has really hurt me and traumatized me to the core of my being. All I can think of and see when I close my eyes are the words and pictures I saw on your phone. If you want me to understand you, you have to understand me completely and know what I'm going through.
5. **COMPREHEND me**, and know that my "come here, go away" behavior you've seen in me is because there are certain things you do that triggers an emotional flashback of fear that I'm going to be hurt if I get close to you; it takes me back to the "ground zero" of Day 1 when I discovered your unfaithfulness. You have to know that I love you and there are times where I want to be close to you and I want to be there with you, but at any moment something goes off in my brain and I'm just as likely to avoid you because my survival instincts kick in. You've got to know that I'm

doing the best that I can to deal with this. I read something that said this kind of trauma reaction might take a long time for me to get over. This is the kind of reaction that comes with betrayal. I just need you to know this and to be patient with me as I figure out why this happened, why I'm with you, and what I need to do to heal from this

6. **INSPIRE me**, by praying and practicing any spiritual discipline that helps you so that God can be with you because there are going to be times when I'm not able to be there for you because I need to attend to my mental health and my own wounds. We both may need to get into a Therapist-led group so we each have a safe and supportive place to be real with others about what we're going through. My friend Lana said that for 166 hours of the week she can feel like she's going crazy but for those two hours that she's in her group she knows she's sane because she feels validated by women who "get it." Right now I need this kind of help, and perhaps you might want to consider getting this type of support or treatment so you can understand why you do the things you do.
7. **HELP me** to overcome the distressful symptoms when they unexpectedly and involuntarily arise. At times I feel like I can't trust anyone and anything that they say to me. Help me to silence the negative thoughts that I have about myself by helping me to see the positives that are in me. Tell me that you are not the Victim here because your past statements have draped me with guilt over what I wasn't doing and how I was the cause of our problems. Understand my sudden shifts in mood. I can be up one minute and rageful and depressed the next. I need to vent my hurt and pain, and I'll try not to hurl it at you. Help me and the kids by honestly getting help for yourself. We can't keep on living this way, it's too toxic. Help me...
8. **GROUND me**, because being exposed to traumas from our present and from my past have conditioned me to expect mistrust, confusion, and fear. Know that I'm not intentionally trying to make our life difficult! When you (and I) see me either attempting to distract myself through busyness with work or detaching from you and the kids through avoidance or shutting you out, gently pull me aside, encourage me to take some deep breaths. Tell me that you understand what I'm going through. Ask me if I'm open to hearing what you want me to see and hear. This is one of the most respectful and considerate ways that you could pass along insight and feedback to me.
9. **SUPPORT me**, by affirming me with positive words that build me up. Protect me, because I love you and I know there is more to you than the devastating behaviors you've committed against me, but I need to see the work versus being told that you're working. Esteem me by practicing this component of Agape, where the inhabitants of the castle feel esteem because the King uses his intellect and resources to protect those he loves. Empower me because I don't need you to use your energy to defend, critique or dismiss me, but to be sensitive to how horrible I feel every day. Support me, understanding that it's going to take time to overcome the voice of my Inner Critic, who is screaming at me to "trust no one, especially not you" and to live exactly like that. Will you support me through this?

10. **UNDERSTAND me**, because some behaviors make me comfortable and some don't. It's like I'm on a roller coaster...I'm up and down and all over the place. One minute I think I can get over and beyond this, but in the next minute this trauma tells me to back up, pack up and leave even when I just had a hopeful moment. I need you to understand that I really hurt, but I know I'm going to survive. Listen to me and be patient with me, because in my mind I say and hear "What if..." all the time. What if he recovers? What if he relapses? What if I catch you lying to me? What if I don't know when you're lying? Do you understand my reality here? It's been shattered into a million pieces and my mind is having trouble putting the pieces back together to just to get through another hour, much less another day. I need you to understand this and not blame me, critique me, or become impatient with me, because this is my reality.
11. **FEEL me**, when I'm grieving the past life that I thought we had, the good life that I thought we were enjoying, and the future life that I now know will never be. I'm feeling incredible grief about the losses that unexpectedly wash over me at any given time. This is going to take some time. I need time to be sad and angry, and I need time to feel these feelings. I ask myself "how did this happen, and was there something I missed and could have done to avoid this outcome?" I realize that my grief seeks, wants and needs answers to these questions, and perhaps if I have the answers then maybe I could have (or will) protect myself from being hurt in the future. I know I didn't cause you to do the things you did, but I still ask these questions. The best thing you can do is to make our home a safe place and give me the time and opportunity to ask questions, express my feelings and to honor and validate my experience by recognizing that I have a right to have and express my feelings.
12. **CONSOLE me**, with positive and uplifting words, and by making our environment safe and peaceful. For too long our home life has been fraught with behavior that has ruptured and damaged our relationship, and my body and brain need a break from the traumatic, dysfunctional, crazy and hurtful behavior! This kind of crazy takes me right back to the home life I thought I left behind when I went to college. I can't go back to that kind of life and now I understand why, for the past two months what's been causing me to feel like I'm back in my dysfunctional family again. Please, at a time like this I need comfort, compassion, kindness, tenderness if my heart is going to soften up to you again. I need someone who's going to encourage me, not harangue me.
13. **STRENGTHEN me** and give me hope for our future by understanding that I need to have certain boundaries in place in our home and when you travel. I know I can't control you but if we're going to collaborate together to create a new relationship then there are some things I need to consistently see in your behavior in order to feel better about moving forward. I want to get over these challenges, but I need your commitment to helping me overcome them by making the specific,

concrete, tangible, measurable, structured and real changes in the time frame we discussed. Doing this will help my heart to feel safer with you.

14. **HUG me**, (when permitted) until my thorns go in, and then don't let me go, because when I'm hurting, crying and telling you I'm overwhelmed with pain then I need to gently and compassionately feel your touch, love, sympathy, and care. This simple action helps to "regulate" me, which feels like my brain has just been freed from being in a hostage situation. I know that when I'm regulated (and it's my job to get there but you can help) I can make clear and rational decisions again. So when I'm hurting, ask me if I'm open for a hug; it's the right and compassionate thing to do when I hurt, and you see me like this.
15. **HEAR me** and know that I don't want to obsess nor dwell on the past each and every waking moment of the day but know that I'm working through my struggles to be present and hopeful for our future. The book says that one of the best ways to get beyond the pain of the past and the present is to create new memories to replace the old ones. I'm going to start doing that for myself, but then you can brainstorm with me or think of things that we can do that result in me feeling like I'm number one and a priority to you. Let's develop some new routines where we point out when we see each other doing something good, new and beneficial. I like the journaling idea where each day we record the one thing we appreciated seeing or receiving from the other person. I know that coming up with new rituals that breathe life and inspire us will be good for us.
16. **SEE me**, versus your own guilt and shame with your behavior. I know you feel bad and regret what you've done. But I need to know you that you see and feel my pain and anguish, not just yours. I need to know that you see my strength, effort and my ability to bounce back from this as well. For a long time, I don't think that you've seen the real me, and I'm really sad and angry about that because you've said it was what you saw in me that caused you to drift in the first place. I'm really hurt about that. I don't know if you see what I see. Our marriage has taken a serious hit and there are times that it's difficult for me to see and know if it will survive. I'm not trying to throw this in your face, but I see recklessness with your behavior, arrogance in your thinking and dullness in your hearing when I asked you to work with me on our marriage. You've not seen me, nor heard me or known me for a while, especially how it hurt me and how and broken up I've felt when you rejected me and my efforts to work on us.
17. **NURTURE me**, with words of encouragement and affirmation that generate hope about our situation. I need to hear messages of reassurance like "we will get through this together" or "this too will pass." When I hear these words, they help to "re-mind" me and create the "cortical override" in my brain that helps me to get over the fear and the other strong emotions I feel, in addition to the negative and critical messages that hijack my brain and tend to (want to) take me where I don't want and need to go.

18. **PROTECT me** and us, and our future, by taking good care of yourself and your health. This means making your Doctor's appointments (Medical, Psychiatric, and Psychotherapist) so that the trauma and craziness that's been created will be treated. If they prescribe medicine, take it. If they suggest exercise, follow up with it. If they recommend a nutritionist, then go. I'm going to recover from this and if I'm given homework, I'm going to do it because I can't afford to not get better, and you doing the same will show me that you are taking dedicated, focused and intentional steps to create a better future for us. Therapy and working toward therapeutic outcomes in all areas of our life could provide some of the best protection we need to get better!
19. **RESPECT me**, because I need to know that I'm worthy of dignity and respect. I know that this is a self-message and experience that I have to develop and experience for myself, but I also want you to respect yourself and our relationship by being or becoming the best person I know you to be. One of the ways you can show this to me is by taking responsibility and being serious about our recovery. These actions will show me that you mean what you say and that you truly do care to fix and repair yourself and our relationship.
20. **PRIZE me**, because another component of Agape is the work to give me the "gold medal and blue ribbon" behavior and attention that says I'm your priority. This is what you vowed on our wedding day and I want you to live up to your vows. I need to see and know that I matter to you because right now, the behavior you engaged in makes me feel worthless and insignificant.
21. **TOUCH me**, when I grant permission because for too long you (or I) either ragged on and on about my body and how out of shape I am. This trauma brings up horrific things that my daddy used to say about me and now (after childbirth), I have to deal with being rejected because I'm compared to someone on a screen, who's a person that I'll never look like. This kind of trauma brings up horrible memories about my body, how I see myself and I need you to never critique what I look like. I'm going to take care of myself but hurtful messages about who I am won't help.
22. **ENCOURAGE me** tenderly when I'm having a flashback to engage in self-regulating behaviors like deep breathing and walking. I need you (and I'll do this for myself too) to practice the "Therapeuo" components: Provide reasonable care, attention, help, service, minister to me as I also minister to myself so that (I and) we are closer to the outcome of what this word means and could deliver to us: Healing.
23. **COMFORT me**, by listening and being present with me through this. This will help both of us to carve out safe and positive moments to create "good interpersonal neurobiology" that Dr. McGill talks about. Speaking of that, one of the most comforting things that I like about that is the "cooking with C.O.A.L." remember, being curious, open, accepting and loving when we talk about things. It helps me to know that even though we see things differently, I still felt respected by you because you valued my opinion like I did with yours.

24. **CELEBRATE me** because I hope you see and acknowledge the fact I'm fighting and winning the battle with the harsh voices of the Inner Critic. I'm angry and I'm a fighter. I'm angry with the lies and the behaviors you've committed and I'm going to use my energy to fight and build boundaries against addictive behavior. I'm angry at how the Inner Critic wants me to give in to fears and I'm going to fight because I'm not giving up on myself and healthy living. I'm angry because trauma wants me to respond in a child-like dissociative way, but I'm fighting because the Adult in me is proud that I'm resilient and I won't give up on living and being a healthy ...(woman, man, child)." For me, that's a reason to celebrate the person I am and will continue to become!
25. **REASSURE me** that you're going to be here, even when it appears I'm the one who's withdrawing and pulling away. Let me know by your words but more importantly, your actions that you'll commit to safety, develop and use your Safety Plan, commit to your recovery and becoming the safe man that the kids and I can hopefully trust in and believe in again. If I see this then it'll probably help to change my opinion of who you are and hopefully our future. I wish I could give you more reassurance about our marriage but right now I can't. You work on you and I'll work on me.
26. **VALUE me**, as I need to value myself, and live according to the values, virtues, mores, ethics, and principles that make sense to me. Right now, I value safety, so I may ask you to depart on a Therapeutic Separation so I can give myself time to think about what I need to heal and then what to do next. I understand that you feel sorry for slipping or relapsing, but I really need to decide how to value myself, and this means grieving, crying, thinking, praying and consulting with others about what I need and want to do about my future. I hope you can honor and value that I need to be able to make a choice, and that I will have confidence in my decisions when I'm calmer, healthier and less stressed. In the past, I froze and didn't know how to respond. Today, I know how trauma from my past caused me to do this, but I also know that today, to overcome traumatic experiences from my past, I need to intentionally pause, reflect and decide, without pressure. So while separated, I'm going to take the following therapeutic steps to deal with the betrayal trauma that I've experienced...
27. **FORGIVE me**, if I'm unable to continue with this marriage or relationship. My departure isn't an indictment of who you are, nor of the work that perhaps you're contributing. My departure is a statement that I've done my therapeutic and reparenting work and after many months of considering how I wish to live the remainder of my life, I'm making the choice to leave processes and people who have wounded me, and to embrace a lifestyle that reflects, accepts, protects and champions the values that make sense to me and will dictate how I will, and need to live. Forgive me when the Victim in me said cruel, mean and disparaging messages to you (and to myself); today, I want to live as a Functional Adult, who expresses ...

28. **COURT me**, if I choose to remain in the relationship. I need a new start, and the new start has to be based on values and behaviors that honor, cherish, esteem, protect and demonstrate love to each other. Our commitment to becoming healthy people where our recovery, spirituality, and choices that reflect health, truth, trust, intimacy, openness, and other relationship-building behaviors that have eluded us is what I want to cultivate. It goes without saying that I want you to work to win my heart back, and then work to protect my heart and our relationship.
29. **CENTER me**, by focusing on behaviors that create connection, availability, protection, and awareness between us. I don't want to trigger and fire at you; I want to create and renew a relationship that in no way resembles what we had prior to our recommitment. I hope that you reconnect with your Higher Power. You seemed safer, friendlier and you were so much more aware and happier when you connected with God. I hope you revisit and embrace what helps you to be spiritually alive, and that you protect that connection and relationship with your life-altering source.
30. **LOVE me**, like you never have before! It may feel like I have a checklist waiting for you to mess up, and to some degree that's right. But the one thing that will help me to put my pencil down and to move on from this painful past and to a focus on a positive present and a hopeful future is to create newer and better memories grounded in loving, compassionate and trustworthy behaviors that I need to see consistently.

What follows below are the behaviors to bypass, eradicate, to extinguish and to eliminate as soon as you notice them, because they never did, nor ever will promote growth. More than likely, they usher in additional traumatization to the Partner, regret by the Offender, and possibly the death of a relationship that could have benefited from the absence of these damaging behaviors. The "DO NOT words are...

"Do Not..."

1. **DECEIVE me**, nor yourself. I'm done being lied to. You know, I always think that there's more you haven't disclosed to me and that I'm just being kept in the dark, and I live in fear that I'll be blindsided by what you've not admitted to. I feel like I married a skillful liar, and I'm tired of living in a cognitive distortion. But you need to know how much I fear deception, and that I fear

being lied to. You're right. I tried to manage your recovery in my effort to feel safe living with you. I can't and won't do that anymore. But I need total honesty and the truth if I am to go on living with you. So don't...

2. ***GASLIGHT me***, because CPTSD occurs due to repeated exposure to lies and dishonesty, and yours have made me doubt myself, my reality and worst of all, made me think I was the problem, only to find out it wasn't. Subjecting me to your reality (which wasn't real after all) made me feel like I couldn't believe what I saw and that I couldn't trust others either. That kind of brainwashing left me not being able to trust and rely on my own instincts, intuition, interpretations, and conclusions, and I need those skills to be able to survive in this world. Worst of all, your fabrications almost drove a wedge between me and my family!
3. ***HURT me***, because I hurt enough. Do you realize what this has done to my body? My mind? Do you know how stressful the past twelve years has been? My body feels like it has been through war only to find out that your acting out behavior has put me at greater risk of harm while I've been trying to recover from my medical procedures! How could you do this and only think about yourself? Do you know how hard it has been trying to find the energy to care for you and the kids only to find out you've given the best of your energy to someone else? That's devastating to me!
4. ***CONFUSE me***, because today, I know who I am! Living with you over the past 8 years has caused me to change inside and become someone who my family and friends and I didn't even recognize! Every day your anger, bullying, insecurity, rage, and pleas for forgiveness dripped black ink into my mind and changed my whole demeanor. You made me think I was the problem; I was a failure and I needed to change. I need to change alright. You've lost your power and your control to make me think I'm someone that I'm not.
5. ***TRIGGER me***, as sounds, smells, TV shows or surprises may create emotional flashbacks, where I feel flooded with a range of emotions (and with betrayal trauma, none of them are good!). It feels like I'm re-experiencing the painful event all over, right now, intensely, in real-time. I just feel like something dangerous is going to happen to me. Know that when I say I'm triggered my feelings are connected to some current stimuli, and your commitment and behavior to be a safe person who engages in safe processes and safe behavior helps my body, brain, and mind to calm down. That's why eliminating triggers and behaviors that cause triggers and flashbacks is so important to me. So don't...
6. ***"CRITIC" me***, because I have a horrible Inner Critic that wants me to see you as someone who is unsafe and is a threat to me and that Inner voice calls me a fool for thinking that reconciling with you could work. I know it can seem unfair that I get upset and angry at you when I need to get upset and angry at the abusive people in my past that saddled me with these negative messages about myself. Your behavior didn't help and I'm trying to become more aware of my thinking to stop this, so please, don't critique me; if you want to help me then remind me to replace the old

tapes of self-doubt and to play the new tapes that consist of positive messages that affirm who I am that I've "acquired and uploaded" into my brain. That's what I need to hear.

7. **FOOL me**, because I already feel stupid for letting you take advantage of me in the first place. One of the worst possible things you could do is to begin to earn back my trust and then deceive me by returning to the old behavior and keeping it from me. I'm already triggered, traumatized and I just said I have to fight to not replay nor hear the Inner Critic's voice throughout the day, and if you mislead or deceive me then I'm going to have a really hard time coming back from that...I know I can, it's just that it's getting harder thinking that it will be in a marriage with you. So that's why it's so important for you to tell the truth and back it up with your actions. That creates safety in our home, and it helps with the messages in my head because seeing you do the work helps me to know you're serious about recovering from this and seeing is believing.
8. **JUDGE me** and complain to me about how I'm not healing fast enough for you, or that I'm doing things to sabotage our efforts at repair. If you only knew how exhausted I feel because of the negative thoughts that are in my brain, and how much I have to fight them throughout the day, then perhaps you'd understand how hard it is for me to try to work on this. I need you to show me a bit more empathy, compassion, and understanding versus sighing and snapping at me when things don't go your way and you don't get what you want in the time frame you expect it.
9. **IGNORE me**, nor give me the "cold shoulder when I "freeze up" on you. That happens because my mind is constantly scanning my environment for danger and is sure that another episode is right around the corner or has already taken place and I'm about to get hurt, and I'll be abused, left or abandoned. This is what trauma does to a person; this is no way to live and I'm certainly not wanting to live this way! So I request that we use our tools so we can work things out versus sweeping it under the rug and letting things pile up like we did before.
10. **STRESS me**, because in the past I've felt immense pressure when the kids and I don't do things your way, and I don't know if you're aware of what that kind of stress does to our brains and our body. The distress signals have caused me to feel belittled, unappreciated and to burst into tears in front of the kids. Our son tries to comfort me and keeps saying it's his fault that he's making daddy mad at me and that he'll be better. That's not his problem! I know if I'm feeling distressed and unsafe his world has got to be in shambles too! In an effort to help myself and them, we're going to need to discuss putting those boundaries in place regarding how and when you and I talk and certainly how you treat all of us if this relationship is going to have a chance to survive. I don't want to feel stressed, pressured or made to feel guilty because of (sex, money, your impatience, your abrasiveness, your blaming me for turning the kids against you, etc.).
11. **ABUSE me**, because this develops toxic stress in my life and I'm certain it's creating "adverse childhood experiences" in the lives of our children. This type of home environment that you/we/I may be creating could cause them to develop medical problems like infections, asthma, or hinder

their growth. For me, this distress may cause heart problems, cancer or other health problems linked to a compromised immune system that comes because of living in a stressful environment. I know you wish this had never happened and that you regret what you did, but now I suggest that you look at your attitude, personality style or character defects and come up with a self-care plan for you to implement when you're feeling stressed and you want to take it out on me and the kids. I'm not trying to be your therapist, but sometimes it seems like your outbursts are more directed at your mom who demanded you be perfect because that's not what I'm wanting or pressuring you to do.

12. **DISMISS me**, when I lapse into "hypervigilance mode," which is exhausting for me and you. I need you to understand that sometimes when I walk into a room and get triggered because I see you on your phone, I may ask to see it. Seeing you there sends waves of fear through my body that you could be deceiving me again. I'm trying to use my emotional flashback tools to overcome my hypervigilance, but when I see this it takes me back to the day I discovered who you were texting, and I feel unsafe. Don't make it about you and think I'm doubting your recovery, or about me and think I'm insecure; sometimes seeing is believing, so when I ask, don't get defensive and dismiss me.
13. **LECTURE me**, because when we're dysregulated, this is the worst possible time for us to try to "make or prove a point." My fear center in my brain is telling me that I need safety, to feel calm and to be reassured before the logical listening and problem-solving left hemisphere comes back online, which is a better time for us to talk and discuss things rationally. The best thing for us to do if we want constructive dialogue is to call a time-out for a mutually agreed upon period of time so we can calm down, look at our tools (like "The Imago Dialogue" or "The Effective use of Time Outs") then come back together to have a productive talk where we're both able to hear and honor what each other wants to say versus becoming activated, getting defensive, accusative, combative and dysregulating to each another. I know you hate this, and I do too.
14. **BLAME me**, control me nor regress me, because I've realized my body, mind, and spirit might also be reacting to the previous traumatization in my life. I'm not trying to regress but now I know that flashbacks cause emotions in me, like fear, loneliness, sadness, mistrust, anger or rage to unexpectedly flood my brain in the blink of an eye. When I'm like that I don't want you to avoid me, nor threaten me with hollow threats that you're going to leave and divorce me. Don't push me away like my parents did in my family of origin. Don't do that. Just know that certain looks, words or behaviors take me back to when I was desperate to have my Dad or Mom be there for me to protect and validate me, but they weren't. I'm working on this part of myself. But I need to tell you something...sometimes, I don't want you to...
15. **TOUCH me**, or to see me when I'm undressing or naked; not until I'm ready. I already have body image issues and now I feel humiliated beyond measure. In the past, my body was not my

own and now, when I look in the mirror, all I can see is how unattractive I am. Your comments about exercise and how I look have succeeded in making me feel horrible about myself. Sometimes my emotional flashbacks take me back to when I was sexually abused as a child, and as much as I want to feel good about my body, the Inner Critic makes me feel dirty, ashamed, devalued and unwanted. At times I feel so much rage and when I think about your actions of unfaithfulness, it's hard for me to separate my past feelings from your present actions. I need to show up and be there for me, then when I'm able, I'll let you know when I can be there for you. I don't need your comments about me, but I do need you to be patient, kind and accepting of me, especially when we talk about all things physical and sexual. When I'm ready I'll let you know, but until then, I need to do this to feel safe around you, so please, don't try to...

16. **DISTRACT me**, by wanting me to participate in compulsive drinking or using behaviors to self-medicate, escape or "enhance our pleasure." Equally, don't...
17. **INJURE me** or think you can berate, belittle or get away with threatening to harm me when you drink too much. You may not remember what you say or do because when you drink you blackout, but going forward, I won't tolerate that kind of verbal abuse and treatment from you. It's not right for me to let you think you can get away with this. Especially when your behavior frightens the kids; they want me to leave you. You've got to deal with your problem with alcohol and the anger problem that comes with it. This is a boundary that I can't bend on. So don't...
18. **FORCE me** or try to manipulate me into having sex with you when I don't want to. I never want to be guilted into being with you. There were times when we had sex and it wasn't sex at all. It wasn't love. You weren't there; I could feel it. I felt obligated, used and cheap because of your selfishness. That was wrong and I should have said no then, but I'm saying no now. Please don't try to trap me into doing something that I don't like and have regretted ever since. So don't...
19. **PRESSURE me**, because I want to see who you are. Don't say it, show it. Your actions are going to reveal to me who you are and if you really mean what you're saying and what you want me to believe. As much as I have tried to relax and enjoy sex with you, I'm not going to be put under any pressure to have it with you. You may think I'm being mean and vindictive, but I'm not. When you ask I might want to take flight, freeze or feign by thinking I need to say yes when you ask, when I really just need to say no. So take my no as no. Also, don't...
20. **DEVALUE me**, because shame takes me back to when I was mistreated and abused as a child. If I seem and appear "small" to you it's because I feel like I'm 8 (or 5, or 10, or 12) years old. Besides that, my Inner Critic does enough to remind me I'm worthless, stupid and unworthy of respect, and it wants me to abandon myself and see you as an External Critic, who only wants to torment and hurt me as well! I really need to hear messages about how worthy, intelligent, loveable and how valuable I am (from you and myself) because at a time like this I really need to rebuild and reclaim my worth and strength as a woman, mom and as a wife who is loved and cherished by

her husband. So I'm saying it once and for all, while we're trying to rebuild our marriage, I need you to know that one of the worst and last things you could do to harm me is to...

21. **MISLEAD me**, because my Inner Child needs and deserves safety, love, reassurance and my protection, and I won't abandon her. Going forward, I will protect this vital and precious part of me and will not allow her to be frightened by intimidation or manipulation, hurt by harsh behavior nor abused by being ignored, which are all behaviors that in the past have caused confusion and eventually devastated me. I didn't learn this lesson when I was growing up because my family never addressed "the elephant in the room," nor knew what a boundary was, but today the Adult me stands for truth, health, sanity, and my life. I need to be there for me and that means talking about things sooner than later, and bringing things out in the open, even when you're uncomfortable and don't want to discuss them. So I want you to know that you won't...
22. **DESTROY me**; that may not be your "goal," and I may even know it. I might see you doing the work to recover from your addictive behavior, but when triggered, the toxic shame connected to sex-addicted induced trauma screams and activates my "fight" (flight, freeze or fawn) responses, which propel me into survival mode. You might think I'm doing this to sabotage our relationship, but this is how complex posttraumatic stress manifests in anyone, and specifically me. Whereas others may see the progress I'm tempted to see and interpret danger. We both need to be aware of the 13 steps to manage Emotional Flashbacks, especially the one that helps me to remember I'm an Adult in an Adult body, and I can do something to calm myself down and act in a manner that is productive for me (and you). What I need is for you to remember this. Will you? One last thing, don't...
23. **ABANDON me** is the message the Little Girl in me feared would occur. For too long I thought I had to accept whatever behavior you dished out because I felt like I was damaged goods. My fear of being alone drove me to allow you to ignore me when we fought, followed by the silent treatment, and culminating in me begging you to not leave me as you stomped out the door. My therapist helped me to see that trauma from my past set me up to stay in relationships with unavailable, abusive and dangerous men because my Little Girl needed and settled for bits of love and acceptance no matter how toxic it was. But now, as an Adult, she helped me to determine what healthy love looks like, and that I had to be the responsible one to give it to myself. I had to be the one to give it to her. So I can't nor won't live in fear wondering if or when you might leave me. If you threaten to leave, or if you leave because you forfeit your right to be my husband by relapsing, you will never abandon me. As an Adult, I realize if the Adult in me loves my Inner Child and lives by the values and principles that define and demonstrate love, then I can never be abandoned, and I want you to know that since I love myself, I will never be abandoned.

Helpful Resources for your next steps

Thank you for reading this brief information about Betrayal Trauma and its's impact upon Partners/Survivors. As mentioned earlier, please take a look at the suggested resources below as you consider what steps you may wish to take to either help yourself or learn more about the effects of Betrayal Trauma, Complex Posttraumatic Stress, and Sex Addicted Induced Trauma.

Michelle Mays has a free, must-read e-book called *"When it all breaks bad: Ten things to do (and not do) after betrayal."* You can access her book by clicking [here](#). You'll also find [very helpful blog posts](#) on this same website called [PartnerHope](#). She really gets Betrayal Trauma and has so many practical insights to assist both of you (Partner and Offender) to further your understanding of the impact of Betrayal Trauma. This is truly a "first things first step." **One practical insight** Michelle offers is for you to show yourself some kindness by creating space to understand your feelings, especially feelings of grief connected to your trauma. She states, "You can be fine one minute and furious the next," but detaching from a caretaking role with your male partner's feelings to give yourself permission to caretake your own is a profound act of love where self-care, kindness, validation, and tenderness leads you to release and relief. Take a moment to read about [Trauma-Informed Care on Shirley Davis' blog post](#), located on the [CPTSD Foundation website](#). Here you'll also find well-researched articles to further understand CPTSD and her suggested treatment options for CPTSD. I highly recommend her [blog posts on this website](#) also. **Practically**, to combat [emotional flashbacks](#), Shirley encourages you to invoke "visions of safety and love before a trigger comes and to practice this ahead of time to bring up in your mind's eye the positive image and thought you wish to wish to follow." She states that the practice of this suggestion (and many others) creates new neural connections in your brain, as your new thoughts lead you to new decisions, and your new decisions to new actions and your new actions establishes new connections in your brain, which results in new outcomes for you, as you engage in this self-help process. As mentioned earlier, Pete Walker, in his book ["Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving"](#) provides insightful information that helps to understand CPTSD. Pete also authored the ["Thirteen steps to manage Emotional Flashbacks,"](#) which also is a free must-read download that you can access on his website. **Practically**, in one of the 13 steps, Pete encourages you to "remind yourself that you are in an Adult body with allies, skills, and resources to protect you,

that you never had as a Child.” He states that “feeling small and little” is a sure sign that you’re having a flashback, and he encourages you to speak reassuringly to your Inner Child, who needs to know that you love her/him unconditionally and that she/he can come to you for comfort and protection when she feels lost and scared.

Dr. Omar Minwalla, the founder of [The Institute for Sexual Health](#), also contributes a wealth of knowledge about Sex Addicted Induced Trauma (SAIT), and in his research, he explores “Thirteen dimensions of SAIT” on his website and in his treatment programs for men.

Practically, as Dr. Minwalla speaks about Dimension 6 (SAIT Hypervigilance and Re-Experiencing, he states any stimuli could cause a Partner to become triggered (billboards, cell phones, other women, cities, sexual positions, etc.), and he validates and reframes a Partner’s behavior as her engaging in “safety-seeking” as opposed to “snooper-ving, pain-shopping or playing the victim.” Dr. Minwalla offers Intensive Outpatient services (3 – 8-day treatment modules) for men and he provides helpful insights via his [podcasts](#) and [blog](#). I’ve found Jasmin Lee Cori’s *“Healing from Trauma: A survivor’s guide to understanding your symptoms and reclaiming your life,”* book very practical and readable that offers helpful and doable suggestions to help you to heal from trauma. **Practically**, when you’re distressed, Jasmin encourages you to “learn to self-soothe” yourself, by asking you to simply identify ways that you self-soothe. She asks you to consider what people, places, music textures, objects, activities, and settings could help you, and to equally to avoid activity that’s self-harming (i.e., substance abuse, spending/debting, overeating). Simple alternatives work the best, and she even references another book, *“The Woman’s Comfort Book: A Self-Nurturing Guide to Restoring Balance in Your Life”* by Jennifer Loudon, for additional suggestions and activities.

I’ve loved anything that Dr. Tian Dayton has written. For the longest time, I called three of her books the “trifecta.” Those books ([Trauma and Addiction](#), [Heartwounds](#), and [Emotional Sobriety: From Relationship Trauma to Resilience](#)) have helped me and others to understand how trauma, especially from one’s family of origin, causes a person to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms and threatens one’s ability to regain health and balance. **Practically**, Dr. Dayton encourages the use of [Psychodrama](#), which is a therapeutic tool used in group psychotherapy to help you to work through your traumatic experiences and memories, past and current, with the help of a trained psychotherapist and trusted group members. Working through old (or current) traumatization helps you to unlock and release trapped emotional energy in your body connected to your trauma, while also helping you to explore and possibly “rewrite” [schemas](#) and narratives that have hindered your overall development. Please visit her page to see and observe how Psychodrama could assist you.

There are great texts and treatment resources by Dr. Claudia Black ([Deceived, Intimate Treason](#) and her [Healing Intimate Treason workshop](#)), Dr. Patrick Carnes ([Out of the](#)

Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction, Facing the Shadow and Gentle Path Treatment) and Marnie Ferree's Bethesda Workshops (Healing workshops for Partners, Men, and Couples). I encourage you to not only visit these workshops because they provide help and treatment for the "specific treatment issues" that have been addressed and described in the entries above.

As mentioned above, one of the best things to be aware of then access when emotional flashbacks and emotional flooding occurs is to get to a place of safety. **Practically**, take a look at some of the suggestions from *Choosing Change #1: Safe People, Safe Place, and Safe Processes*, to create a safe place in your own psyche that you could access in the blink of your eye to access your "Inner Yoda," (or Leia, Luke or Obi-wan) who you'll meet with to experience calm, conversation, insight and guidance, and who will affirm and help you to realize that "you have everything that you need."

I've often been helped to view problems, especially when it comes to helping yourself, through the lens of the "7 Core Areas." These core areas, as derived from the Two Greatest Commandments (Luke 10:25 – 28), help me to conceptualize what I might need in the Spiritual, Cognitive, Emotional, Physical/Biological, Sexual, Social/Relational and Environmental domains of my life. **Practically**, here's what comes to mind as I consider the domains and the 7 Core Areas:

- Spiritual: What could I do to inspire, encourage or empower myself? Go for a bike ride, read inspirational literature, watch an entertaining and insightful movie, connect with a friend, talk with a Pastor, Priest or Rabbi?
- Cognitive: Think about which of my **schemas and schema modes** are activated, and how the A-C-T-I-V-E Model, LoveWorks principles or the River of Integration (Psychological and Theological) concepts could help me to "recalibrate" and overcome the harmful messages of my Inner Critic?
- Emotional: How could journaling my feelings or experience help me to understand my grief, validate, "verbally vent" and process my thoughts and feelings, and guide me to pay attention to my emotions so that I could compassionately give myself what I need?
- Physical/Biological: Is there prescription medicine, exercise/physical activity, sleep, a mental health day of rest that I need to access immediately to ensure that my body is given an opportunity to be regulated?
- Sexual: Where do I want and need to follow up so that at the end of the day, I convert unhealthy sexual behaviors and addiction into healthy sexuality and sexual experiences that are safe, affirm and provide pleasure to me and my partner?

- Social/Relational: What 12-Step communities (like [Infidelity Survivors Anonymous](#)) of support might I investigate and attend so that I have not only connected with people who identify with my issues but who also guide me to adopt and practice respectful principles in all my affairs?
- Environmental: [Ministering to yourself](#) and [to another](#) are ingredients of *Therapeuo* (Healing). As I begin to heal and grow from the inflicted experiences connected to Betrayal Trauma, who and how might I be of assistance to others as a Wounded Healer?

I've come to realize that one of the biggest things that Partners need immediately and Offenders will want to deliver is Empathy. Carol Juergensen Sheets and Allan Katz wrote an excellent (work)book called *"Help. Her. Heal: An Empathy workbook for Sex Addicts to Help Their Partners Heal."* **Practically**, among the many helpful insights that Carol writes about is the "A.V.R. Formula." A-V-R stands for Acknowledge, Validate and Reassure, which is to be applied in conversations between the Partner and her husband. In the dialogue, the husband will want to Acknowledge the issue being discussed, Validate the feelings of his Partner, and Reassure the Partner that you'll be there to help her heal.

In addition to Carol's workbook on developing and delivering the skill of Empathy, I wrote 7 posts on the subject which are on my blog, "Dr. Ken McGill's Blog." As time permits, read then apply the therapeutic principles discussed in each post, in your effort to grow in the knowledge of Empathy, and deliver this all too important balm that is needed for healing a relationship. The posts are:

- Empathy (An Introduction)
- Empathy #1: Visit the Gallery of the Heart
- Empathy #2: Your Heart Is Safe With Me
- Empathy #3: Help Me to Understand
- Empathy #4: Do You Care About Me?
- Empathy #5: The Ingredients of Empathy
- Empathy #6: Empathy Facilitates Honor

Thank you for taking the time to read this brief introduction about how betrayal trauma impacts a partner, her marriage and her family. Please take some time to think about, jot down then follow up on these questions:

1. *What stood out in the “Do” section that you need to follow up on and discuss?*
2. *What stood out in the “Do Not” section that you need to follow up on and discuss?*
3. *What do you need (Remember to ask for what you need and take the steps you need to create safety for yourself)*
4. *What do you need to learn?*
5. *What do you need to change?*
6. *What changes need to be made in your life and relationships?*
7. *What helps you?*
8. *What hinders you?*
9. *What do you need to integrate, because it will be helpful to you, as you go forward?*
10. *What do you need to eliminate, because some thoughts, processes, and behaviors are detrimental?*
11. *What needs to be a priority (among other questions) as you plan and plot your course going forward?*

Allow me to close with this oft-repeated principle: Hurt people will hurt people, but healed people will engage in processes of healing people. Remember the butterfly: Change, transform, grow and go forward.