

Relationship Advice: Top 6 Contributors to Infidelity



By Toni Coleman

We read celebrity gossip about infidelity all the time. Sometimes, as in the cases of Debra Messing or Claire Danes, it's a part of their dating behavior. But what compels a partner to cheat? And why are the perimeters of commitment such a mystery to them? In this article, relationship expert Toni Coleman, LCSW, gives [relationship advice](#) and explores the hidden meanings behind infidelity and what we can do to secure our relationships and love.

Relationship Advice On Infidelity

When infidelity occurs, it often leads to a lot of blaming that focuses on the violation of trust and a realization that one's partner isn't the person who they believed them to be. There's a clear distinction made between victim and perpetrator. While this is certainly true to a point, it ignores the dynamics that left the relationship vulnerable in the first place. And it leads to a simplistic and erroneous conclusion that nothing could have prevented the infidelity except for the wronged spouse to have picked someone else to marry. Remaining stuck in this thinking is a sure way to end up in divorce court. My relationship advice to healing is that both people need to take an honest look at the state of their marriage prior to the cheating, what each contributed to their problems, and how they could work together on building an infidelity proof union. Identifying which of the following issues played a role in their marital breakdown is the first and most important step. Below are the top 6 contributors to infidelity.

1. A breakdown in communication. A "problem with communication" is the number one reason couples give for seeking relationship help. It has a broad interpretation but essentially boils down to having difficulty connecting through daily conversation, misunderstandings and hurt feelings due to an inability to express feelings and needs clearly, conflict when discussing sensitive topics or issues they disagree on, and/or withholding through silence. Any of these can contribute to increasing distance, which leaves a void that one partner might attempt to fill by going outside the relationship. This is of course a poor choice, and one that can bring the couple to a place there is no coming back from.

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2. A decrease in emotional and physical intimacy. There is a lot of emphasis placed on a couple's problematic sexual relationship as the cause of marital unhappiness. However, this is only one facet of what they share and though it is important, addressing it alone will not offer a complete solution for repairing their broken bond. Emotional intimacy provides fuel and is foreplay in a relationship—and unless two people share a strong friendship and good intellectual chemistry, their physical relationship can become another chore that is best avoided or handled quickly and without wasting any of the little emotional energy that their relationship has left them with. One partner might make the poor decision to reach out to someone who they can laugh with, who listens to them and seems to really get them, and who challenges them and inspires them in a way their spouse no longer seems to have any interest in doing.

3. Unaddressed stressors related to family and job. Couples encounter many challenges on the long road through commitment, marriage and family life. Sickness, loss of a job, an ill or handicapped child, unexpected financial problems, and the day-to-day struggle to find balance in a too-crowded life all lead to stress. For many people, this is something they try to ignore or just push through, thinking that in time, things will get better on their own. Then, one day, they realize they are completely overwhelmed and experiencing physical and emotional symptoms that contribute to an “every man for himself” mindset. When this happens, the marriage is often put on the back burner and the individuals hunker down, focused on getting through another day, unable or unwilling to add to their own burden, even for the well-being of their partner.

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4. A negative or hostile home environment. When a couple stops communicating, puts their focus on their own needs, and withdraws due to overload—the environment often becomes

charged with negative energy and feelings of resentment and anger. The tension is often palatable as one or both seek a way to escape through watching TV, going online, spending time alone in different rooms and parts of the house—and seeking companionship and dialogue with others outside of the relationship/family. Essentially the negative energy pushes them further and further apart until home is not a comfortable or happy place to be, so they look elsewhere for that lost comfort.

5. Stressors related to physical or mental illness. This is the “in sickness and health” part that is contained in the marriage vows. For many couples, naiveté contributes to that feeling of invulnerability that many start out their marriage with. Sickness happens to other people, but won’t happen to them. Then when something bad strikes, it feels completely unexpected and can have a sudden destabilizing impact on a relationship. Even if the couple can quickly put resources and supports in place to deal with the crisis, it can be a game changer, depending on the type, severity, and chronicity of the illness. Physical and emotional exhaustion, draining or depleted resources, lack of down time and fun, and the potential for a large shift in how the couple interacts and relates—can push one or both people over the edge. If one individual ends up in a caregiver role for their partner, it shifts the dynamics in a way that can leave them unable to get their own needs met—and they may feel resentment and a desire to escape this new life they had not planned on. Even if the illness is not chronic and can be eventually resolved, the stress can alter how two people relate and lead to emotional and physical distance that leaves a void of unmet needs.

6. Financial problems. Money problems are often said to be the root cause of marital conflict and discord. Difficulty managing joint finances, agreeing on a budget, keeping secrets about purchases and debt, and conflicting values regarding saving and spending are some of the common issues that arise.

If these are not addressed quickly, they can lead to a loss of trust, and respect, and an unwillingness to be open and candid regarding important financial decisions that could have a long-term impact on their family's security and well-being. When this happens, some people are vulnerable to thinking about what it would be like to be with someone else, to have a partner that offers financial security and someone who wants what they want for their future.

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No wonder the marriage vows include the phrase “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...” Marriages are tested by all of these, and if a couple doesn't work together, they will slip apart—and the space that is left is what a third person moves in to fill.

Toni Coleman is a licensed psychotherapist, certified relationship coach and internationally recognized dating and relationship expert and founder of consum-mate relationship coaching. She is frequently quoted in many local and national publications and top ranked dating and relationship websites and has been a guest on a number of radio and TV programs seeking to provide their listeners with her cutting edge expertise. She is a regular contributor to Hope After Divorce and HealthyLiving.care.

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