

Recovering from Betrayal

Objective

To identify ways to recover from betrayal in a romantic relationship.

What to Know

Betrayal is a violation of trust or confidence. In a romantic relationship, one partner fails to commit to what they have promised. The betrayed partner may suffer from reduced self-esteem, damaged self-worth, confusion, shock, and even begin to doubt everything the betrayer says and does.

Betrayal often involves infidelity but it can take other forms as well, such as neglecting the relationship, breaking promises, emotional distance, financial infidelity, lying or withholding information, and disclosing personal information. If your partner has betrayed you, you might be wondering how to recover. Your partner's betrayal might make it difficult for you to trust others, preventing you from forming meaningful relationships.

You can recover from the pain of betrayal and learn to trust others again, and this worksheet outlines fifteen steps to do so.

What to Do

Read each step and answer the questions that follow.

1. Acknowledge the betrayal. No matter if your partner intentionally hurt you or not, your trust has been violated. Acknowledging it is the first step to heal from the betrayal trauma. Write down what happened, in as much detail as possible.

2. Name your emotions. How do you feel about the betrayal? Angry? Shocked? Sad? Disgusted? Ashamed? You might experience many emotions. Instead of trying to deny or suppress them, name them.

3. Avoid blaming yourself. Perhaps you are blaming yourself for your partner's actions. Do you blame yourself? If so, describe your experience. Why do you blame yourself? Be specific.

4. Spend time apart. Let your partner know that you need time alone to process and find clarity. This does not mean you are going to break up, separate, or divorce. You may not know whether you want to leave the relationship or attempt to repair the damage. Is it possible for you to take some time for yourself? Why or why not?

5. Grieve the loss of trust. Betrayal is the loss of trust, and it is normal to experience grief. You may actually experience the stages of grief while recovering from the betrayal. Allow yourself to grieve. Are you experiencing the stages of grief? What is this like for you?

6. Avoid the temptation to retaliate. It is normal to feel the urge to seek revenge, and while there are healthy ways to recover from betrayal, retaliation is not one of them. Write down some of your thoughts about retaliation – and what you can do instead.

7. Talk to someone you trust. Seeking emotional support from your loved ones or a mental health professional is an essential factor in the recovery process. Choose someone who can remain neutral and offer you support. Who can you talk to? What will you say to them?

8. Develop a plan. After you have had time to process the incident, create a plan. You may still feel betrayed, shocked, or devastated, but you cannot heal if you focus on how you have been wronged or constantly relive painful memories. Decide how you want to move forward. Do you want to forgive your partner and rebuild the relationship? Do you want to end the relationship? What will help you develop a plan?

9. Take time to reflect. Spend some time engaging in introspection. Reflect on your relationship, how things were before the betrayal, and how things need to change if you want repair the relationship. Both you and your partner must identify ways to address any problems

if you want to continue the relationship – and your partner needs to take responsibility for their actions and show genuine remorse. Write down your thoughts here.

10. Have a conversation with your partner. Communicate with your partner and let them know how their actions made you feel. Give them a chance to tell their side of the story. Notice if they try to justify their actions – or if they feel genuinely sorry. Remember to use “I” statements and remain calm. When will you have this conversation? Where will it take place? What will you say? Be very specific.

11. Practice forgiveness. Forgiving does not mean overlooking, accepting, or excusing betrayal. Even if your partner shows no remorse and you decide to end the relationship, forgive them for your own sake. To heal from a betrayal, forgive and let go – even if they do not deserve your forgiveness. Are you willing to forgive? Why or why not?

12. Make a decision. Was this the first time your partner betrayed you? Do they recognize the pain they have caused? Have they accepted responsibility? Are they a repeat offender, or was this an unintentional and isolated incident? You may consider ending the relationship if there is a history of repeated betrayals. If you choose to stay in a relationship with someone who repeatedly breaks promises and hurts you, you are enabling them – and they may continue to betray you. What will you do? If you are having a difficult time deciding, who can help you?

13. Trust again. You do not have to trust people blindly. Start with small, calculated risks. If you have decided to give your partner a chance to regain your trust, what can you do to rebuild it?

14. Learn to trust yourself again. Trusting yourself is an essential step. To trust others, you must trust your ability to make sound judgments. Do you trust yourself? Why or why not? If not, what can you do to begin to trust yourself again?

15. Practice self-care. Make yourself a priority and take small steps to practice self-care and regain your confidence. What self-care activities can you do?

Even if you do not believe it now, the pain of betrayal will eventually fade. It is possible to rebuild trust in yourself, in others, and in your partner. Did this exercise help you recover from betrayal? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
