

A FREE GUIDE FOR COUPLES

Rebuilding Trust After a Lie

A step-by-step path to repair,
understand, and rebuild after
trust has been broken.



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A Step-by-Step Guide for Couples Who Want to Heal

If you are reading this, something has happened. Maybe you told a lie, and you are sitting with that sick feeling, wondering if you have ruined something you cannot get back. Maybe you are the one who was lied to, and you keep replaying it, asking how you are supposed to trust this person again. Either way, you are here because the trust between you and someone you love has been broken, and you want to know if it can be repaired.

It can! I have sat with many couples in exactly this place, and I want to walk you through what I have seen actually work.

But let me be up front, because you deserve honesty here of all places. Trust breaks the moment a lie is told. At that moment, the assurance that your partner is reliable and can be counted on takes a hit, and that creates an awful feeling for both people. You cannot un-tell the lie. What you can do is rebuild, and rebuilding is a process with real steps. It is not as simple as deciding to move on and never thinking about it again. It takes intention from both of you.

I think about that process in three phases. This guide walks you through each one.

Phase 1: Repair

Mostly for the one who lied

If you are the person who lied, this phase is yours. Before anything gets rebuilt, there has to be a genuine act of repentance and real remorse. Not a fast apology to make the tension go away. Real repair.

Here is what that means in practice.

Stop the behavior first. This seems obvious, but I see it constantly. A spouse apologizes for the original lie, then keeps lying about other things, often small ones, to avoid conflict or to keep from setting their partner off again. But you cannot rebuild on top of ongoing dishonesty. The lying has to stop, fully, before anything else you do will count.

Also, it's important to know what your partner believes dishonesty is. If there are other things you are doing that seem or are dishonest to your spouse, those need to stop as well. Trust is built on fully perceived transparency.

5 Ways to Stop Lying & Build Honesty

- 1 Understand How You Feel**
Fear, anxiety, hurt, frustration. What do you feel? Knowing what you feel matters, because it drives your thoughts and behavior.
- 2 Stop and Think**
Pause before you say or do anything. Think through why you feel this way and how a lie would affect you now and later.
- 3 Give Yourself Consequences**
If you notice the urge to lie, give yourself a consequence so you remember it. It helps reinforce that lying is not okay.
- 4 Think About Their Feelings**
Remember your partner and what they feel. Think about how much you care about them and how you do not want to hurt them.
- 5 Set a Rule for Yourself**
Rules keep us out of harm's way. Write down your rule against lying, tell God and others, and remind yourself why it matters.

Face the pain you caused. This is the part most people want to skip. Shame and messing up don't feel good to look at. Take time to really look at the hurt your dishonesty created. You may not even understand yet how badly it hurts or why your partner is in so much pain, but the pain is there. It is your job to find out how deep it goes and to understand it. *This is not the moment to explain why you lied or to bring up what your partner did.* That comes later, in a different phase. Right now, your job is patience and ownership.

Make up for the damage. Sometimes we call this making amends. Think about what happens when someone causes real harm in the world. If you damage someone's car, someone has to cover the cost. The same is true here. You need to **make up for** the hurt that came out of your dishonesty. That means laying down your pride, your need to be right, and your urge to defend yourself. Instead, show through your actions that you understand what you did and you are **committed** to making it right.

What a real apology sounds like. A real apology owns the lie without a single "but" attached to it. The moment you add "but you also..." you have stopped apologizing and started defending. Name what you did. Acknowledge the specific hurt it caused. Say what you are going to do differently or how you intend to change. Then let your partner have whatever reaction they have.

Phase 2: Understand

For both of you

Once the bleeding has stopped and a real apology has been made, the next phase is understanding why the lie happened in the first place. This phase is for both spouses, and it matters for different reasons depending on which one you are.

If you were lied to, you have probably been asking some version of “Why would they do this to me?” Along with that question comes the thoughts that quietly do the most damage: *If they loved me, they would not lie. If they cared about me, they would tell me the truth.* Those thoughts feel completely true when you are the one hurting. But they are not always accurate, and holding onto them as if they are will keep you stuck.

Here is something I have seen over and over in my office. People who deeply love and care about their spouses still sometimes tell lies. Not because the love is fake, but because in the moment, they convinced themselves the lie would lead to a better outcome and possibly keep the relationship intact. A lie is still a choice, and I am not excusing it. But understanding the reason behind the choice helps dispel the inaccurate story that your partner's dishonesty proves they do not love you. That thought process is usually the single biggest thing delaying forgiveness and the rebuilding of trust.

One more thing, if you struggle to believe what your partner tells you about the reason they were dishonest, that's okay! You get to choose what you do moving forward. Assess their genuineness and take your time. My encouragement still is not to act irrationally, but give it time and watch how they move forward.

If you are the one who lied, this is where you do the harder internal work of figuring out your true reasons. Why did you believe, in that moment, that lying was the better option? What were you protecting? What were you afraid of? You cannot change a pattern you do not understand. Sometimes telling the truth is scary because the fact is that you might lose something you love or don't want to lose. Yet sometimes the only way to keep it is complete transparency and honesty.

One more thing, if your partner doesn't believe you, that is one of the pitfalls of dishonesty. It may be hard for them to accept or believe what you tell them. Remember, it is only your job to tell the truth and change for the better, no less.

Talk about it when things are calm, not tense. When you are ready to have this conversation together, have it in a calm moment, not in the middle of an argument. You may feel like lashing out, yelling, or worse, but those reactions will not get you anywhere. Understanding why the lie

happened helps both of you figure out the next steps, and it is a real part of the path toward forgiveness.

If you want help digging into your own reasons, my [Why I Lie workbook](#) walks you through the patterns and triggers behind dishonesty, so you can understand what's driving it and start to change it.

Phase 3: Rebuild

For both of you

This is the phase where you actually put the relationship back together, stronger than it was. Do not assume things will just “go back to normal” on their own. They will not. Rebuilding takes new tools.

Set real boundaries. Healthy boundaries are not about controlling your partner. There is a difference, and it matters. Trust lets you feel free and relaxed. Control comes out of fear and worry, and it slowly erodes a relationship like cancer. The goal is not to monitor your spouse into trustworthiness. The goal is to agree together on boundaries that create safety, and then to let changed behavior over time rebuild the confidence that was lost.

Look for genuine change, not just words. If you were lied to, you need to see that your spouse is truly sorry and willing to change. It helps enormously when they take charge of the healing process rather than waiting for you to drag them through it. Watch for real effort: stopping the old behavior, building new behavior, staying engaged in the work. That effort is what makes trust feel possible again. If you do not see it, trust will be hard to rebuild, and that is worth paying attention to.

Understand that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. This is one of the most freeing things I teach couples. You do not have to feel like forgiving to forgive. Forgiveness is the decision to stop holding onto the hurt and to stop requiring justice for the wrong done to you. You can choose it even when your feelings have not caught up yet. There are plenty of things we do without feeling like it because they are the right and healthy choice. Forgiveness is one of them. Choosing it frees you from the bitterness and resentment that otherwise take root. It's for you, not your partner.

When you are ready, here is a simple way to release it:

“I forgive _____ for _____. I release them to judgment that is not mine to carry, and I choose to live free from the burden of bitterness.”

You may have to do it more than once. That is normal. Every time you release someone from your need to see justice served, you get a little freer to heal. And forgiving does not mean there are no

boundaries or accountability. You can forgive fully and still hold the line on the boundaries you set together.

Relearn each other. John Gottman talks about attunement as a way to rebuild a relationship after a betrayal, and the same idea applies after a lie. You will need to learn each other again, more deeply and more honestly than before. Retooled communication, a plan for handling conflict and emotions, and the willingness to be vulnerable again. Done well, you end up feeling safer with each other than you did before any of this happened. That is the part most people do not believe until they live it.

You do not have to do this alone

If you have read this far, you are taking this seriously, and that tells me something good about you and about your marriage. These three phases are the path. But a path is easier to walk with someone who has helped other couples walk it before.

Healing after a lie is hard to do on your own, especially when the hurt is deep or the lying has gone on for a long time. If you would like help working through these phases together, this is exactly the kind of work I do with couples.

If you are local to Georgia, I offer marriage counseling through Legacy Marriage Resources, LLC (<https://legacymarriageresources.com>), and would be glad to walk with you.

If you are anywhere else or would rather have coaching than counseling, I offer coaching for couples and individuals who want this kind of guided support, no matter where they live.

You can reach out through <https://brandoncoussenslmft.com>. Do not wait for things to get worse before you take the next step.

Blessings to you as you rebuild.

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Brandon Coussens is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with over 16 years of experience and the owner of Legacy Marriage Resources, LLC in Augusta, Georgia. He specializes in marriage counseling and helping couples rebuild after broken trust.