

## Rebuilding Trust after a Betrayal

Trust is an essential component of a strong relationship, but it doesn't happen quickly. And once it's broken, it's hard to rebuild.

When you think about circumstances that could lead you to lose trust in your partner, infidelity may come to mind right away. But cheating isn't the only way to break trust in a relationship.

Other possibilities include:

- a pattern of going back on your word or breaking promises
- not being there for your partner in a time of need
- withholding, or keeping something back
- lying or manipulation
- a pattern of not sharing feelings openly

### **What does trust really mean?**

Before going over how to rebuild trust, it's important to understand what trust is, exactly.

To start, it might be helpful to think of trust as a choice that someone has to make. You can't make someone trust you. You might not choose to trust someone until they show that they're worthy of it.

### **Signs of trust in a relationship**

Trust can mean different things to different people. In a romantic relationship, trust might mean:

- You feel committed to the relationship and to your partner.
- You feel safe with your partner and know they'll respect physical and emotional [boundaries](#).
- You know your partner listens when you communicate your needs and feelings.
- You don't feel the need to hide things from your partner.
- You and your partner respect each other.
- You can be [vulnerable](#) together.
- You support each other.

It's also important to understand what trust *isn't*.

In a relationship, for example, trust doesn't necessarily mean you tell your partner every single thing that crosses your mind. It's totally normal to have personal thoughts you keep to yourself.

Trust also doesn't mean giving each other access to:

- bank accounts (unless it's a shared one)

- personal computers
- cell phones
- social media accounts

You may not mind sharing this information, especially in case of an emergency. But the presence of trust in a relationship generally means you don't need to check up on your partner. You have faith in them and feel able to talk about any concerns you might have.

### **Rebuilding trust when you've been betrayed**

Having someone break your trust can leave you feeling hurt, shocked, and even physically sick. It might prompt you to consider your relationship — and your partner — in a different way.

If you want to attempt to rebuild trust, here are some good starting points.

### **Consider the reason behind the lie or betrayal**

When you've been lied to, you might not care much about the reasons behind it.

But people do sometimes lie when they simply don't know what else to do. This doesn't make their choice right, but it can help to consider how you might have reacted in their position.

Sure, your partner may have betrayed you to protect themselves, but they may have had a different motive. Were they trying to protect you from bad news? Make the best of a bad money situation? Help a family member?

Maybe the betrayal of trust resulted from a miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Whatever happened, it's important to make it clear that what they did wasn't OK. But knowing the reasons behind their actions may help you decide whether you're able to begin rebuilding the trust you once shared.

### **Communicate, communicate, communicate**

It might be painful or uncomfortable, but one of the biggest aspects of rebuilding trust after betrayal is talking to your partner about the situation.

Set aside some time to clearly tell them:

- how you feel about the situation
- why the betrayal of trust hurt you
- what you need from them to start rebuilding trust

Give them a chance to talk, but pay attention to their sincerity. Do they apologize and seem truly regretful? Or are they defensive and unwilling to own up to their betrayal?

You may feel emotional or upset during this conversation. These feelings are completely valid. If you feel yourself getting too upset to continue communicating in a productive way, take a break and come back to the topic later.

Talking about what happened is just the beginning. It's perfectly fine, and entirely normal, if you can't work through everything in just a night or two.

### **Practice forgiveness**

If you want to repair a relationship after a betrayal, forgiveness is key. Not only will you need to forgive your partner, but you also may need to forgive yourself.

Blaming yourself in some way for what happened can keep you stuck in self-doubt. That can hurt the chances of your relationship's recovery.

Depending on the betrayal, it might be hard to forgive your partner and move forward. But try to remember that forgiving your partner isn't saying that what they did was OK.

Rather, you're empowering yourself to come to terms with what happened and leave it in the past. You're also giving your partner a chance to learn and grow from their mistakes.

### **Avoid dwelling on the past**

Once you've fully discussed the betrayal, it's generally best to put the issue to bed. This means you don't want to bring it up in future arguments.

You'll also want to go easy on constantly checking in on your partner to make sure they aren't lying to you again.

This isn't always easy, especially at first. You might have a hard time letting go of the betrayal and find it difficult to start trusting your partner, especially if you're worried about another betrayal.

But when you decide to give the relationship a second chance, you're also deciding to trust your partner again. Maybe you can't completely trust them right away, but you're implying you'll give trust a chance to regrow.

If you can't keep thinking about what happened or have misgivings about your partner's future honesty or faithfulness, couples counseling can help. But these signs could also indicate you may not be ready to work

### **Rebuilding trust when you've hurt someone**

You messed up. Maybe you lied and hurt your partner or withheld information you thought would hurt them.

No matter your reasons, you know you caused them pain, and you feel terrible. You may feel like you'd do anything to show them they can trust you again.

First, it's important to understand that the broken trust may be beyond repair. But if you both want to work on repairing the relationship, there are a few helpful steps you can take.

### **Consider why you did it**

Before you embark on the process of rebuilding trust, you'll first want to check in with yourself to understand why you did it.

Is it possible that you wanted to end the relationship but didn't know how to? Or were there specific needs that weren't being met by your partner? Or was it just a dumb mistake?

Understanding the motives behind your behavior can be difficult, but it's a crucial part of rebuilding trust.

### **Apologize sincerely**

If you lied, cheated, or otherwise damaged your partner's faith in you, a genuine apology is a good way to start making amends. It's important to acknowledge you made a mistake.

Just remember that your apology isn't the time to justify your actions or explain the situation. If some factors did influence your actions, you can always share these with your partner *after* apologizing and owning your part in the situation.

### **Be specific**

When you apologize, be specific to show you know what you did was wrong. Use "I" statements. Avoid putting blame on your partner.

For example, instead of "I'm sorry I hurt you," try:

"I'm sorry I lied to you about where I was going. I know I should've told you the truth, and I regret causing you pain. I want you to know I'll never do it again."

Make sure to follow up by telling them how you intend to avoid making the same mistake again. If you aren't sure what they need from you to work on the relationship, you can ask. Just make sure you're ready and willing to actively listen to their answer.

### **Give your partner time**

Even if you're ready to apologize, talk about what happened, and begin working through things, your partner may not feel ready yet. It can take time to come to terms with a betrayal or broken trust.

People process things in different ways, too. Your partner might want to talk right away. But they also might need days or weeks before they can address the issue with you.

It's important to avoid pressuring them to have a discussion before they're ready. Apologize and let your partner know you're ready when they are. If you're struggling in the meantime, consider talking to a counselor who can offer unbiased and supportive guidance.

### **Let their needs guide you**

Your partner may need space and time before they can discuss what happened. And often, this might involve physical space.

This might be difficult to face, but respecting your partner's boundaries and needs can go a long way toward showing them they can depend on you again.

Your partner may want more transparency and communication from you in the future. This is common after a betrayal of trust. You may even willingly share your phone and computer with your partner to prove your honesty.

But if you've made some progress in repairing your relationship and your partner continues to monitor your activities and communications with others, talking to a couples counselor can help.

### **Commit to clear communication**

In the immediate aftermath of broken trust, you'll want to honestly answer your partner's questions and commit to being completely open with them in the future.

To do this, you have to make sure you're clear on the level of communication they need.

Let's say you broke their trust by withholding some information you didn't think was really important, and you didn't understand why they felt so betrayed. This can indicate there's a deeper issue with communication in your relationship.

If you want to repair your relationship and avoid hurting your partner again in the future, you need to reach a mutual understanding of what good communication looks like.

Miscommunications or misunderstandings can sometimes cause as much pain as intentional dishonesty.

### **How long will it take?**

Being in a relationship with broken trust can be extremely uncomfortable. Both sides might be eager to get the whole rebuilding process over with as fast as possible. But realistically, this takes time.

How much time, exactly? It depends on a lot of factors, particularly the event that broke the trust.

Long-standing patterns of dishonesty will take longer to resolve. A single lie grounded in a misunderstanding or desire to protect may be easier to address, especially when the partner who lied shows sincere regret and a renewed commitment to communication.

Have patience with yourself. Don't let your partner rush you. A partner who truly regrets hurting you may be hurting, too, but if they truly care for you and want to fix things, they should also understand it isn't helpful to rush right back into the way things were.

### **Is it worth it?**

Rebuilding trust isn't an easy task. It's normal to question if it's even worth it before you decide to commit to working on your relationship.

If your partner makes a mistake or two over the course of a long relationship and owns up to it, working on trust issues may be the right move.

*As long as there's still love and commitment between the two of you, working on trust issues will only make your relationship stronger.*

### **You don't have to do it alone**

Every relationship goes through a rough patch. There's no shame in reaching out for help.

Couples counseling can be a great resource when dealing with trust issues, particularly those involving infidelity. A counselor can offer an unbiased view of your relationship and help both partners work through underlying issues.

Having tough conversations about betrayal and trust can also bring up painful emotions on both sides. Having a trusted counselor can also help you navigate the difficult feelings as they arise.

**The bottom line**

It's possible to rebuild a relationship after a breach of trust. Whether it's worth it depends on your relationship needs and whether you feel it's possible to trust your partner again.

If you do decide to try repairing things, be prepared for things to take some time. If both sides are committed to the process of rebuilding trust, you might find that you both come out stronger than before — both as a couple and on your own.