

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Is it an Emotional Affair?

What constitutes an emotional affair? Is there really such a thing? What if you feel this person helps “fill the holes” for a spouse who isn’t meeting your emotional needs? Does that make it “ok”? When does an opposite sex friendship cross the line? Who gets to determine which relationships get the “emotional affair” label? Is it an emotional affair if your spouse feels it is? What about spouses who are overly suspicious and jealous? Is it fair to have to give up a relationship just because it makes your spouse feel insecure?

Rather than answer the above questions to define an emotional affair, I have compiled a list of questions for you to evaluate the degree to which you have wandered into the murky waters of an inappropriate relationship with someone outside your marriage.

Sometimes involved persons are so emotionally elated or so deep in their rationalizations, that they lack sufficient objectivity to determine just how far down the road of emotional infidelity they’ve progressed.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help you recognize the degree to which you may have entered the “danger zone” of a relationship that is a threat to your marriage. The more questions that fit, the more likely you’ve crossed the line from innocent friendship or healthy collegial relationship into emotional affair territory.

Keep in mind that an affair of the heart is more of a threat to your marriage, on your side of the equation, than a careless one-night stand or other impersonal sexual involvement.

These questions are in no particular order. Do your best to be truthful with yourself as you read and check this list against your own feelings and behaviors.

DO YOU...

- ☐ Feel high anticipation about your next contact with the other person?
- ☐ Go out of your way to be alone with this person of interest? Do you find yourself lingering after work or arriving early in order to get some exclusive time together?
- ☐ Find yourself enjoying the company of the other person more than your spouse?
- ☐ Find yourself feeling increasingly disdainful toward your spouse and feeling more and more positive toward the other person?
- ☐ Find yourself mentally preoccupied with the other person? Are you constantly pondering and analyzing the meaning of past conversations?
- ☐ Confide in each other regarding personal struggles in your respective marriages?
- ☐ Feel sorry for the other person because he/she is in a hurtful or neglectful marriage/relationship?
- ☐ Feel a special “chemistry” with this person?

- ☐ Find yourself fantasizing about what it would be like to be romantic with this person?
- ☐ Wish your spouse was more like this other person?
- ☐ Find yourself wishing you were married to this person rather than your spouse?
- ☐ Act slippery and evasive when questioned about the relationship?
- ☐ Feel sheepish when caught accepting phone calls from the other person?
- ☐ Have secret contacts with the other person that your spouse does not know about?
- ☐ Talk to others about the person of interest in glowing terms?
- ☐ Have either of you “accidentally” brushed the other person’s arm or leg and felt electricity between you?
- ☐ Occasionally “only” hug, touch a knee, hold hands, or kiss the other person on the cheek? As a result, do you feel a “charge” or romantic tug?
- ☐ Engage in secretive behaviors? [such as: hiding when accepting phone calls, staying up late or getting up early so you can text or email this person, keeping secret e-mail accounts, making excuses to do errands so you can call or be with the other person, quickly exit the computer screen if your spouse or kids walk into room while you are emailing or instant messaging the other person, etc.]
- ☐ Fail to pass the **“well-lit-room” test**? Ask yourself: *How would you feel if your spouse or children listened in on your conversations? Or, had a secret camera to see what you are doing or talking about with the other person? How would you feel if your spouse unexpectedly “caught” you alone with your person of interest?* [If the answer is “guilty” “nervous” “defensive” or “self-conscious,” you do not pass the test].
- ☐ Subscribe to the belief that the nature of the relationship is no one else’s business, including your spouse?
- ☐ Find yourself trying to manipulate your spouse into thinking your contact with the other person is completely innocent, when you know/suspect it isn’t?
- ☐ Catch yourself lying about your contact with the other person(s)?
- ☐ Get the sense that others have that “Uh, oh” feeling that something inappropriate is going on between the two of you, even if they can’t put their fingers on it?
- ☐ Find yourself overly concerned about your appearance, such as: exercising more, losing weight, wearing more provocative clothing, or trying to look younger?
- ☐ Force others to ask *very specific* questions about the relationship before giving them anything that resembles a straight answer?

- ☐ Refuse to listen to others' cautions, discomfort, suspicion or objections, about the relationship? Especially those from your spouse?
- ☐ Find yourself avoiding or putting up walls with your closest friends and family?
- ☐ Dig your heels in when confronted about the nature of the relationship?
- ☐ Insist others show how much they know first before you admit anything?
- ☐ Delude yourself into thinking you won't get caught?
- ☐ Find yourself developing paranoid habits, like checking up on who is checking up on you?
- ☐ Use the "divide and conquer" technique of trying to make sure none of the questioning parties (spouse, friends, relatives, coworkers) have all of the information so they remain in the dark, unable to piece incriminating pieces of the puzzle together?
- ☐ Spy on others to find out what they know or are saying to others about you and your new relationship (by putting spyware on the computer, examining phone records, etc.)?
- ☐ Parse words and terms to mislead your partner into thinking it is "only" a special friendship or a one-way "crush," in order to deflect from how much mutual romantic interaction is actually going on?

(Think: Clinton – he swore he did not have "sexual relations" with Ms. Lewinsky because he narrowly defined "sex" as genital intercourse. Guilty people tend to hide behind technicalities in order to avoid admitting an improper romantic or sexual relationship.)

Score: _____

1 – 3 checks = The relationship is already inappropriate. You need to back off of the relationship if you want to avoid further entanglement. Consider telling your spouse at this early stage. This kind of honesty can prevent much heartache down the road and build trust and accountability between you.

4 – 6 checks = You are in over your head and your marriage is in danger. You need outside help and the courage to tell your spouse and your best friend, so you can begin to establish enough boundaries to halt the progression of the relationship into a full-blown physical affair or divorce.

7 + checks = You are already engaged in a raging emotional affair and/or some stage of a physical affair. Your marriage is in crisis, whether your spouse knows it or not. Your spouse needs to be told the whole truth, without the usual rationalizations, in order to help break the "spell" of this emotional connection and you need professional and/or pastoral help *immediately*.

Hopefully you have answered these questions honestly and have gained clarity about the true nature of your (or your spouse's) outside relationship.