

# Family and Friends

## UNDERSTANDING BETRAYAL TRAUMA

While it may be hard for you to understand, even the most upstanding Christian man or woman has the capability of leading a secret life outside of public view. This happens when the person chooses to act outside of his/her professed values. For every married person who decides to engage in secret problematic sexual behavior, there is a spouse at home that has just experienced sexual betrayal.

Here is what you should know about someone who is experiencing sexual betrayal.

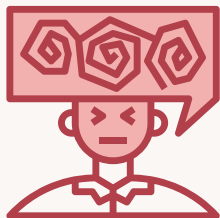


**Betrayal** is a breach of trust and is the act of going against what a person promised. You are only betrayed by those closest to you, whom you trust. “To forsake all others,” is said in the marriage ceremony. This means to keep all sexual energy within the marriage.



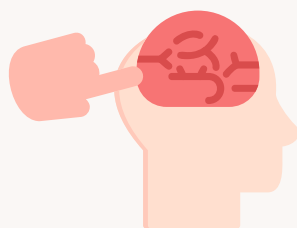
**Post-traumatic stress** type symptoms are experienced by nearly 70% of women when they realize their husbands have betrayed them sexually (whether through pornography and masturbation, acting out at sexual venues, affairs, etc.). A betrayed wife’s brain does not know the difference between the death of trust and the death of a real person. Therefore, she acts accordingly. This type of Post-traumatic stress is also called sexual betrayal trauma, or just betrayal trauma, BT. If appropriate support isn’t sought or available, BT can morph into post-traumatic stress disorder.

\*Steffens, B. A., & Rennie, R. L. (2006). The Traumatic Nature of Disclosure for Wives of Sexual Addicts. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 13(2-3), 247-267.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160600870802>



**Complex PTSD** can occur if she has had numerous discoveries of his problematic sexual behavior or numerous confessions (without an attempt to maintain sobriety). This can affect her physical health and her emotional state. Many wives in this situation have autoimmune disorders, heart conditions, migraines, adrenal fatigue, short term memory problems, brain fog, and stress related illnesses, among other things.

\*Astill Wright L, Roberts NP, Lewis C, Simon N, Hyland P, Ho GWK, McElroy E, Bisson JI. High prevalence of somatisation in ICD-11 complex PTSD: A cross sectional cohort study. *J Psychosom Res.* 2021 Sep;148:110574. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychores.2021.110574. Epub 2021 Jul 16. PMID: 34298467; PMCID: PMC8359920.



**Triggers** are another symptom of betrayal trauma. Triggers are *involuntary*. They occur when a reminder of a past event occurs and it puts the body in a state of fight/flight/freeze as if it is happening in the present. Triggers create high blood pressure, rapid heart rate, and intense emotional responses. Betrayed wives and betrayed husbands often experience trauma triggers.

# Family and Friends

## UNDERSTANDING BETRAYAL TRAUMA

Here are additional areas of wounding that a betrayed partner experiences. Most do not realize or intuitively understand these issues unless they have experienced betrayal themselves.



**Trust** is up to the person who has sexually betrayed to rebuild. The betrayed partner does not automatically give trust back to the betrayer. He/She re-earns it. His/Her trust building happens through trustworthy behaviors that are consistently shown over time (think in terms of months and years).



**Sustainable forgiveness** is the goal and it takes quite a while to achieve. Even if the betrayed forgives the betrayer, it does not mean the betrayed automatically reconciles or trusts the betrayer. The betrayer has to prove through consistent actions over time that he/she is trustworthy and is now behaving in a predictably kind and caring way. And remember, those outside the marriage have, typically, only seen the betrayer's public persona. The betrayed, typically, is the only one who sees behind the mask. Therefore, the betrayed gets to decide if the betrayer's behaviors now align with his/her professed values.



**“There are no flaws large enough [in the betrayed spouse] to have contributed to his/her sexual compulsions,” Carol Sheets, CSAT, APSATS-ccps.** Problematic sexual behavior (PSB) has nothing to do with the marriage and is not a comment on the betrayed spouse. PSB is an emotional intimacy disorder due to family of origin dysfunction and comes into the marriage with the betrayer. PSB is a person problem, not a marriage problem.



**Healing can take 3-5 years.** If a betrayed spouse decides to stay in the marriage and the betrayer with PSB commits to 100% sexual integrity and grows in emotional maturity through recovery, it typically will take 3-5 years (sometimes more) to fully recover from the trauma and rupture of the marriage relationship.  
(APSATS.org)