

Anna: Picking up the pieces after infidelity. This is Stay Happily Married, episode number 250.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Anna: I'm Anna Riley, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Is it really possible to truly forgive and forget when it comes to infidelity? Every human has needs. When it comes right down to it, greed can be one of those needs. More often than it should happen, in life people look at what's out there, and suddenly, what they have isn't enough.

As our guest today, Dr. Scott Haltzman says, "We live in a culture that says you can have what you want when you want it." This means that there can be a lot left to the wayside when the greed impulses take over, often leaving broken marriages and relationships in its wake. When mistakes are made and hearts are broken, is there every a way to repair the damage, move on, and grow?

Our guest today says that it is possible to recover from an affair, and he's detailed exactly how this can be done in his latest book released just this month, "The Secrets of Surviving Infidelity." Certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Dr. Scott Haltzman is also a distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. A graduate of Brown, Scott complemented his psychiatric training in Chief Residency at Yale University before love for his alma mater took him back to Rhode Island to service on the Brown University faculty. Welcome to the show, Scott. I'm so glad you could join me today.

Dr. Haltzman: Thanks for having me, Anna.

Anna: Of course. So let's start, in general, about infidelity. What is it that leads people down this road to infidelity and cheating in the first place?

Dr. Haltzman: One answer to that question could just be human nature. A lot of people are already, "Well, it's just not natural to be in one relationship over an entire lifetime." Human nature drives us to do a lot of things, but the fact of the matter is that when we take a vow and we make a promise and we are acting in our best human instincts, not animal instincts, we have an obligation to meet that and to stay with one partner.

There are a lot of things that will fall into place in order for an affair to take place. I like to call it, "The NOD." It's an acronym for three things, the need, opportunity, and dis-inhibition, or the inability to suppress your impulses. Some people may have an emotional need or a need for sex. Other people may have a need to feel powerful or in control, or just to have somebody take care of them and pamper them. That, in combination with an opportunity, and the inability to say, "No," or the inability to say, "Wait a minute, this is not right." You put those things together, and it very frequently will lead to an affair.

Anna: I see that, for sure. Do you find that the infidelity is more often discovered, so to speak, by the other spouse, or is it something that's usually confessed?

Dr. Haltzman: People don't typically want to confess their affairs. One of the things that drives people and actually makes affairs more exciting is the secrecy behind them, on top of which is a lot of shame associated with having had an affair. You're breaking a big promise to, arguably, the most important person in your life. Typically, I don't see people that will come forth and describe to their spouse that they had an affair, unless it's something that happened a long time ago, and their guilt is just eating them alive. More typically, the spouse sees a few hints about it. They're looking at cell phone records. They're wondering why their partner is not coming home at the time they used to come home. Then the questions start to go back and forth, and that's ultimately when the infidelity will get revealed.

Anna: I'm sure that's not a very good situation, at that point in time.

Dr. Haltzman: You don't want to be there when that moment happens. The emotions that people experience when a partner finds out about an affair, the level of betrayal is just earth-shattering.

Anna: That's a good word, earth-shattering. That's one of the best ways to describe it, I suppose. You're talking about the range of emotions that they have to go through. Is there a typical range of emotions that have to be cycled through by each party before any healing can begin, or is it different on one end versus the other?

Dr. Haltzman: What I tell people is that there are no normal feelings after an affair. If you're experiencing something beyond, or that it is one of hundreds of possible normal emotions from rage to despair. Some people experience relief, "Gee, I've been suspecting this for months. I'm glad I finally know." Quite a few people experience quite a bit of shame about the whole thing, not just the partner who feels ashamed about having gone off and had an affair, but the person who's a victim of infidelity might, also, feel ashamed about the fact that he or she is a victim of infidelity.

I do agree with you when you ask about whether these emotions have to be cycled through. I think you have to explore your emotions. You have to understand them. One of the most important things for the person who committed the affair, is to acknowledge the emotions that the spouse feels, "I can understand why," instead of saying, "Oh well, it was." I had somebody that said, "Well, you know we just did this. Why are you so upset?"

Anna: Wrong.

Dr. Haltzman: I think the person has the right to be upset, and the partner has to acknowledge that and accept that.

Anna: That's something we've talked about on some of our other episodes, too, is recognizing that and being able to not just push those feelings or emotions away that person, but really accepting and dealing with those, and knowing exactly what they did, taking responsibility for that, and not just making it a small deal but a big deal, like it really is.

Dr. Haltzman: Right. We teach couples to do that even if they're talking about a problem they had at work that day. If your spouse says, "Oh, my boss is so mean," you want to say, "Well,

that's too bad. Tell me more about it." Even in normal conversations, we want to validate our spouse's feelings. Here, the spouse is having those feelings because of what you did.

Anna: You certainly can't just brush them away.

Dr. Haltzman: Exactly.

Anna: What is it that, initially, made you a believer in the power of relationships over infidelity and inspired you to write the book that's going to be coming out, "The Secrets of Surviving Infidelity?"

Dr. Haltzman: Remember, the book is already out on Amazon, although it may not be in the bookstores. I like the way you phrase that, "a believer in the power of relationships," because, too easily, people step away from marriage and step away from relationships whenever there's difficulties or problems. If you talk to people that have been married 25, 30, 50 years, they don't even remember the difficulties they had. People will often leave marriage during crisis times, and then turn around later on to say, "Gee, I wish I had stuck it out." I've seen so many couples that really have grown as individuals and as partners, because of marriage. On top of which, what a great lesson to teach your children, which is that your marriage is going to have difficulties, but we have to validate our promises to people, follow them through, and work hard to keep marriages together.

Anna: I totally agree with you that marriage is something you have to fight for. It's something you made a commitment to it, so you can't just walk away when it gets rough. In the case of infidelity, what would you say to those skeptics who believe it happened one time, it will happen again, or this could be an ongoing thing, or it might never change. What do you say to those skeptics?

Dr. Haltzman: I say to skeptics, "You're absolutely right, it could never change, and it might keep going on, particularly if you don't do anything to help yourselves resolve the infidelity. If you don't take the steps necessary to rebuild, if you don't have a realistic view on marriage, it may happen again." What I would say in converse is, for many people, the infidelity has opened up conversations, has opened up new ways of communicating and relating. If you can employ certain fundamental rules of engagement, and that includes be open, honest, and transparent, no more secret cell phones hidden away, no more hidden passwords, or deleting your email accounts; when you have that level of transparency and honesty, sometimes, people feel like their risks of affair are even lower than when they first got married.

Anna: I see that. That brings me to my next question. We were talking about who might recover and who might not recover. Is there a typical kind of relationship that could recover? You're saying, basically, it does take some effort beyond that point and some work after infidelity to get past it?

Dr. Haltzman: That raises the question about whether we know enough about the statistics of infidelity to predict which couples will do well. It's probably not unlike the statistics about marriage, in general, which is that higher educated individuals, individuals that get married after

they're in their 20s, people that have strong family backgrounds who have not been victims of divorced parents themselves, all of those things will help predict couples that can withstand infidelity. If you are married, that does help, because committed couples may be "committed," but if you're that "committed," how come you never married?

Anna: How do you motivate people to keep working on their relationship, rather than just giving up when it all feels like too much?

Dr. Haltzman: That's tough. What I do, is I tell people . . . I try to paint a picture of them for what the costs are of ending your marriage. If someone's out there, and they've had affair, after affair, I am going to have a heck of a hard time convincing you to stick with that person. I'd be a fool, and you'd be a fool, also. Often, people want to run away after somebody, I almost want to say, "Slid into an affair." They made a bunch of dumb choices that has now led them sleeping with another person, or having an emotional affair with another person. I really want to paint for the victim of that, "Look, what are you going to bargain for if you got a divorce?"

I try to convince them that marriages can become stronger, and that their marriage is worth fighting for, particularly if they have children. The impact of separation, divorce of this legacy of marriages being ripped apart is very, very strong for the kids. There's a whole bunch of statistics that show people that stay married are healthier, and they're happier. I'll just pull out all stops. Unless somebody's the victim of domestic violence or serial infidelities, or their partner is abusing substances, I think a lot of couples can stay together that don't know that they can. My job is to let them know that they can.

Anna: What are some common mistakes that you see people make when infidelity has been revealed?

Dr. Haltzman: Part of the efforts I make in writing "The Secrets of Surviving Infidelity," is to let people know that there are things that you need to do. It's one thing for therapists to say, "Well, I can't judge, and everybody has to do things their own way." No, in my mind there really are some things that have to be done. One of the things is the idea of being entirely honest about the events of the affair once you're caught. One of the most common mistakes that people try to make is that the partner who has had the affair tries to withhold information from their spouse.

For example, let's say my client has slept with his affair mate half a dozen times. That would just be too painful for my client's wife to know, so my client says, "Well, I only slept with her once," because they're trying to ease the pain of their partner. They're also trying to ease their own shame. This happens time and time, again. Of course, then somebody finds out the truth, and then they turn around and say, "Look at that, you lied at me when you slept with her, and you lied to me afterwards."

Anna: I see. We went over this a little bit, but are there other particular rules or guidelines that you feel that people should follow to help ensure their success with the whole recovery process of getting over the infidelity?

Dr. Haltzman: Absolutely. That's what I said, there are rules. What are the rules? A) You stop the affair. B) You maintain total transparency. C) You break off all connections with the person you had an affair with. It's not enough to say that you're no longer going to sleep with your next door neighbor. .You can't go to your next door neighbor's dinner parties, either. You have to break off those connections, as much as possible. The last part we spoke about was this idea of, "Do ask, do tell." In order to rebuild trust, everything you're doing is going toward rebuilding the trust, being totally honest, totally open, making sure all of your energies are going into your marriage, not the idea that you just keep that person in the background. Maybe you'll have an affair with her a few years later, or him a few years later once the marriage doesn't work. No, you have to be committed entirely to the marriage. Then once that happens, you start moving toward apology and forgiveness.

Anna: Is there anything else that we should know?

Dr. Haltzman: Yes, of course.

Anna: Yes, of course. We could talk all day about this, I know.

Dr. Haltzman: There are 300 pages worth of stuff you should know. What's interesting about this book is when I presented it to my publisher - the last couple chapters, one is called, "What to Expect When you're Expecting a Happy Marriage," and the next chapter is called, "Should We Rebuild," and the last chapter is about how to rebuild a marriage. One of the editors said to me, "Well, do we want to have that much information in the book about building marriage and understanding marriage? Isn't this a book about infidelity? Shouldn't we have a chapter in there about divorce?"

My answer to that was, "Yeah, but this is - once the infidelity is taken care of, you have to work on rebuilding the marriage and making the marriage stronger and learning the rules for a happy marriage." What I try to emphasize in this book is not just how to deal with the pain in the recovery from an affair, but then how to use the knowledge that we've gained over decades of research to build a happy, fulfilling marriage that will be a resource for you, a pillar of the community, and something your children can look at and say, "Wow, it's really cool to see my parents are still together."

Anna: All right. For sure. It's not only about recovering, it's about strengthening, as well.

Dr. Haltzman: Exactly.

Anna: Well, Scott, thank you so much for talking with me and being on the show today. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Haltzman: It's been a great pleasure, and I thank you.

Anna: To find out more about Scott and his latest book, "The Secrets of Surviving Infidelity," visit his website at www.drscott.com, or you can check him out on Facebook, as well, at www.facebook.com/scotthaltzman. I'll spell that for you, H-A-L-T-Z-M-A-N. Also, you guys, be

sure to check out the book on Amazon. Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and future episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Anna Riley, until next time, stay happily married.

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