

Managing the Crisis of Infidelity: How to Lead Your Clients from Raw Pain to Constructive Action



Dr. Ellyn Bader

*The Couples Institute &
The Developmental Model of Couples Therapy*

Our Mission: **Prevent Premature and Unnecessary Divorces** **Train Core of Committed Couples Therapists** **Worldwide**



***Create Loving, Thriving, Growing
Relationships***

Challenges Described by Therapists Working with Infidelity



Not being pulled into over-identifying with hurt partner
Feeling stifled by rage of betrayed partner
How to challenge the lying client without shaming them
Not being in too big a rush to smooth things over
Hard not to take the side of the “victim” spouse

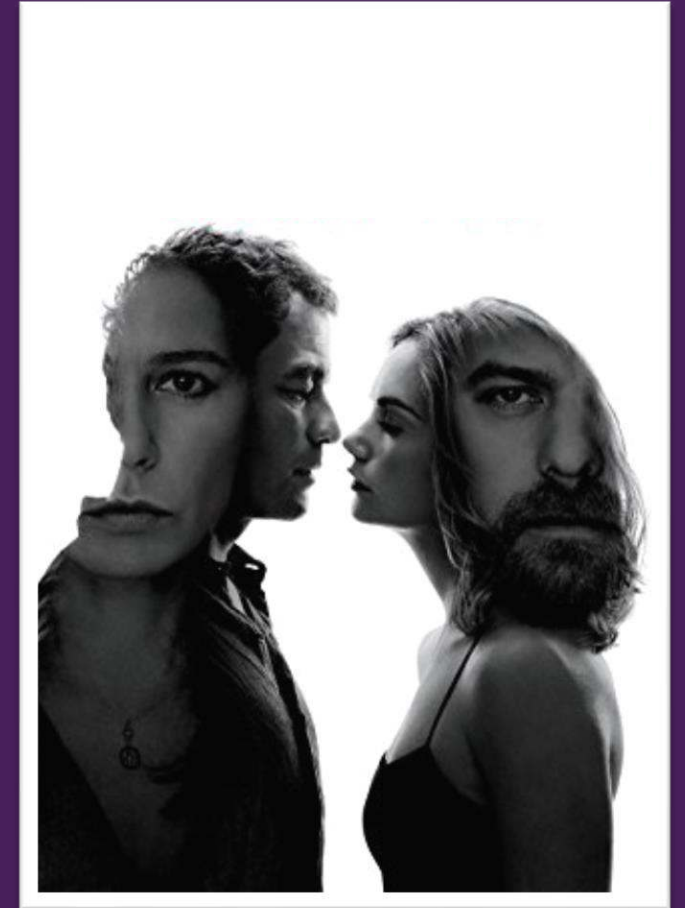
Affairs are not primarily about sex

In our culture, marriage carries an assumption of sexual exclusivity unless consensual nonmonogamy

- In a monogamous relationship an affair where the spouse does not know first means inevitable dishonesty and deception

- Usually they also involve self deception

- Willingness to betray a promise/commitment:
Breaking a good faith agreement while appearing to be loyal



Affairs and Infidelity

What is an Affair?

An amorous relationship or episode between two people who are not married to each other

What is Infidelity?

Betrayal of trust or loyalty when there is reason to expect some kind of loyalty or trust



Significant Issues in first few minutes - Dom



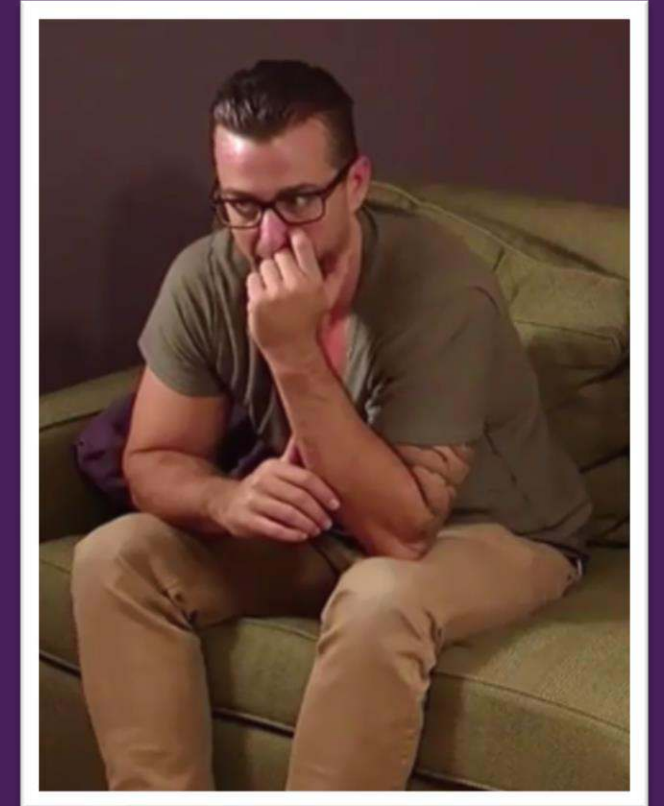
"A few infidelities"



Low on "other differentiation"



Hard to remember what matters to her



Significant Issues in first few minutes - Arielle



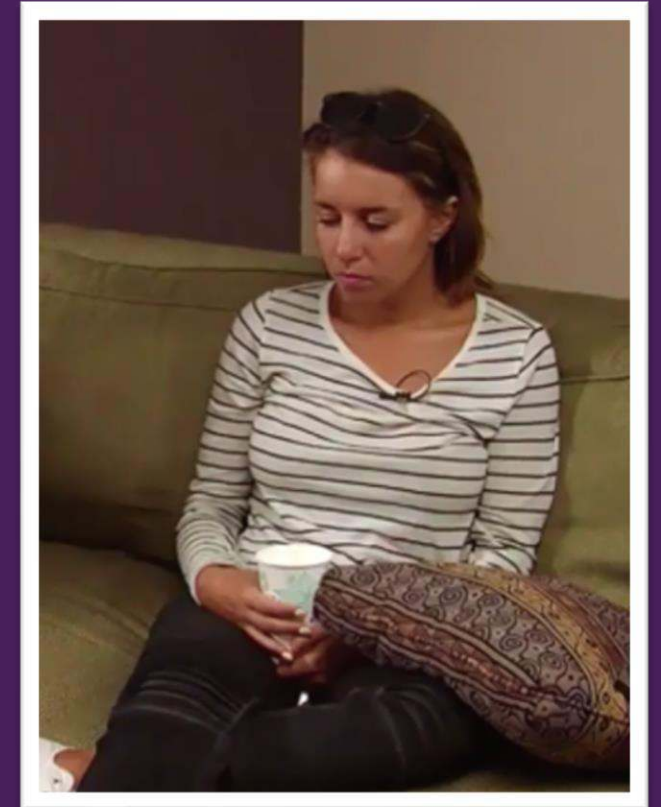
He's not in
love with her



They are not
supposed to
be together



Both theories
create
unnecessary
pain and add
to her grief



What I Think About and Look For

STAGE 1



- Slow process down and outline the individual dilemma for each partner
- Confront the need to make impulsive premature decisions
- Clarify immediate threats
 - What is going to happen now?
 - Stop affair?
 - Live together or apart?
- Work to define individual issues of each partner that contributed to the affair and decide about couples therapy-Is there a commitment to the work?

What I Look For and Do

STAGE 1



- Do not get caught in the blame cycle
- Strongly and actively control communication and do not allow it to escalate
- Clarify the relationship between infidelity and dishonesty
- Explain safety needed for therapy to progress

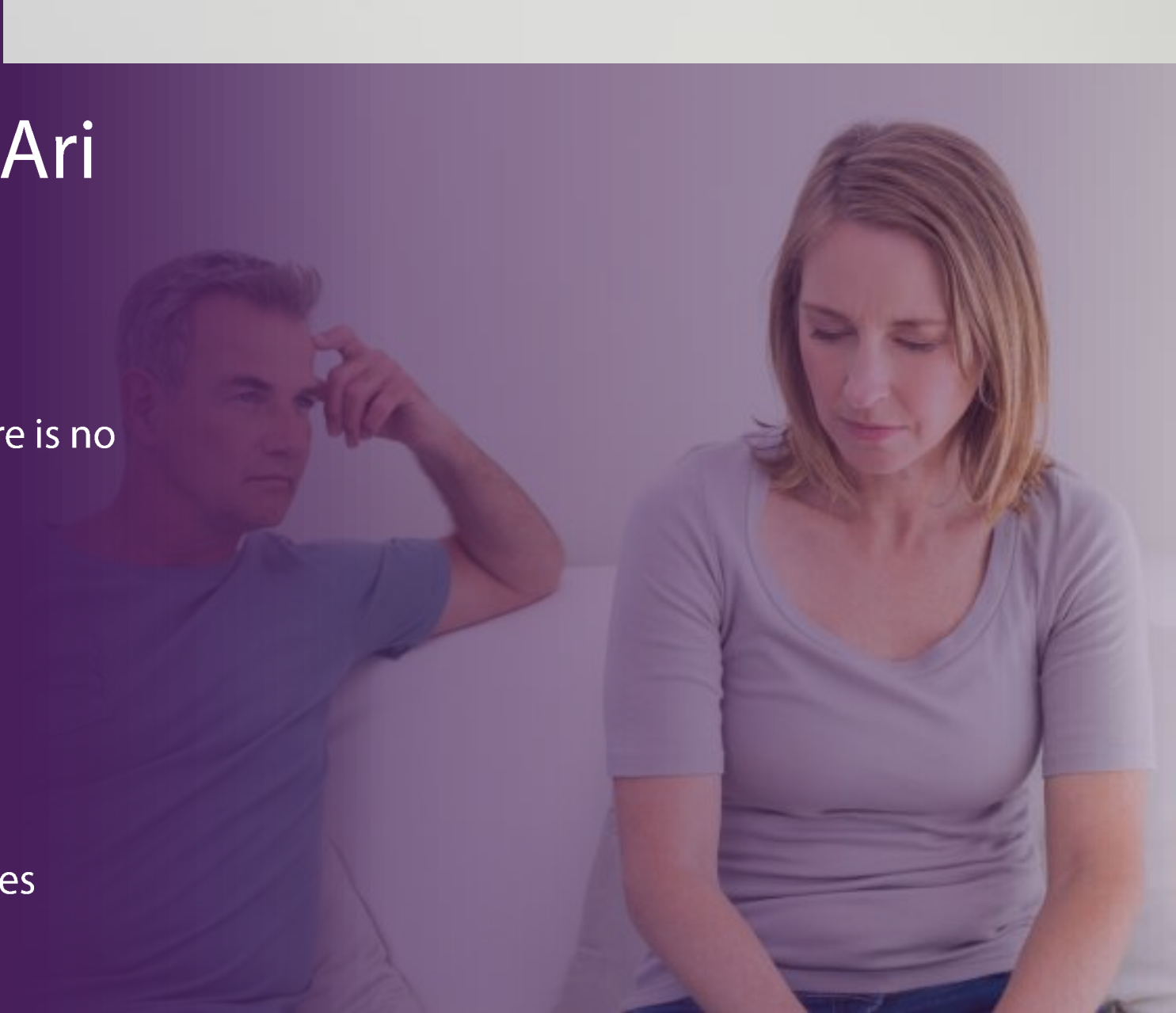
Arielle's Problem

What We Learn from Ari

What was once secure or seemed secure is no longer safe/secure

She's given herself and her self-esteem up

His feelings dominate
How do you outline each partner's issues



Assessing Infidelity: What do we know

To evaluate the meaning of an affair and how to handle it therapeutically, take the following areas into account:

- Historical evolution of the relationship

- Developmental stage of the relationship

- Attachment styles of each partner

- Individual dynamics of each partner

Assessing Infidelity



Timing of affair



Number of affairs



Type of affair



Type of betrayal



Length of affair



Type of deceit

Infidelity calls into question the nature of the primary attachment

- | What was once secure or seemed secure is no longer safe/secure
- | It involves a unilateral choice to end an equilateral decision
- | Then the nature of reality and all future decisions are now called into question. Will it happen again?

When Infidelity is Revealed

Each partner is confronted with a significant interpersonal and intrapsychic challenge



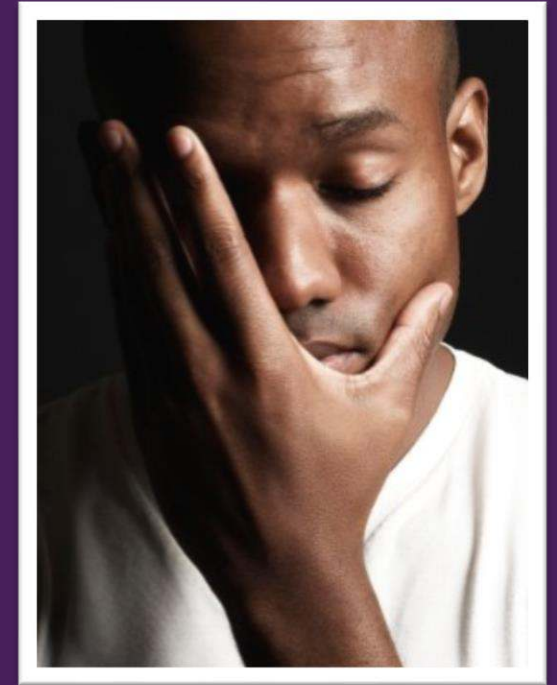
What does the affair mean?

Should I leave/or should I stay? Do I feel trapped?

What does the betrayal of honesty mean?

Human vulnerability and character are revealed

Media uproar caters to a very superficial understanding of affairs



Dominic's History

Dom's Father



Gave up on
his marriage

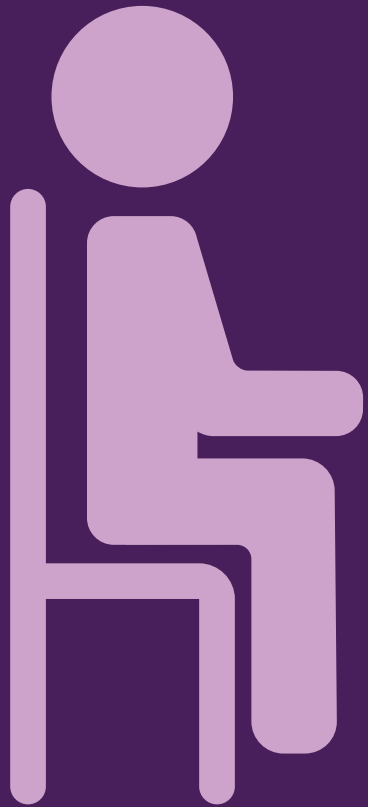


Gave up on
his son



Gave up on
his life

Using Gestalt 2-Chair Work: Identify Internal Split



He wants to be different

His aspirational goal is to be a better man than his father

He aspires to more than his
emotional brain allows him to live
out



Dom has numbed himself from

His Pain

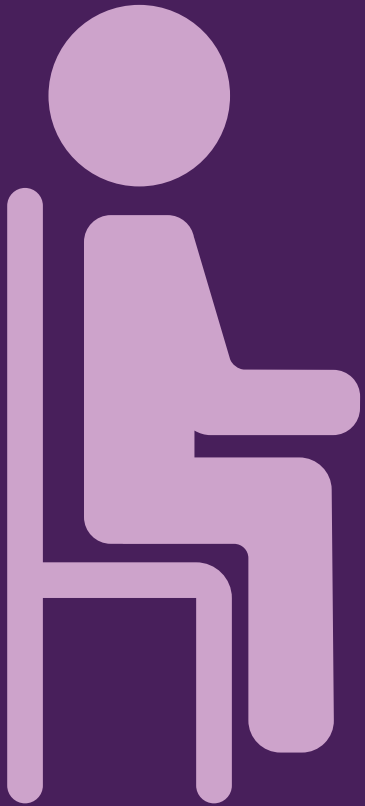


The Pain He Causes





Gestalt 2-Chair Work



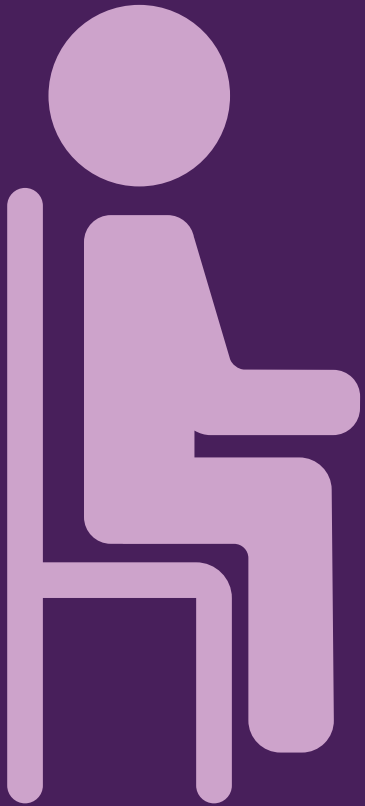
Uncover resistance so it becomes clear to both partners

Uncover the aspirational goal which is terrifying to him.

The conflict is internal and the self-sabotaging part is exposed



Advantages of Gestalt 2-Chair Work



The conflict becomes clear to both partners

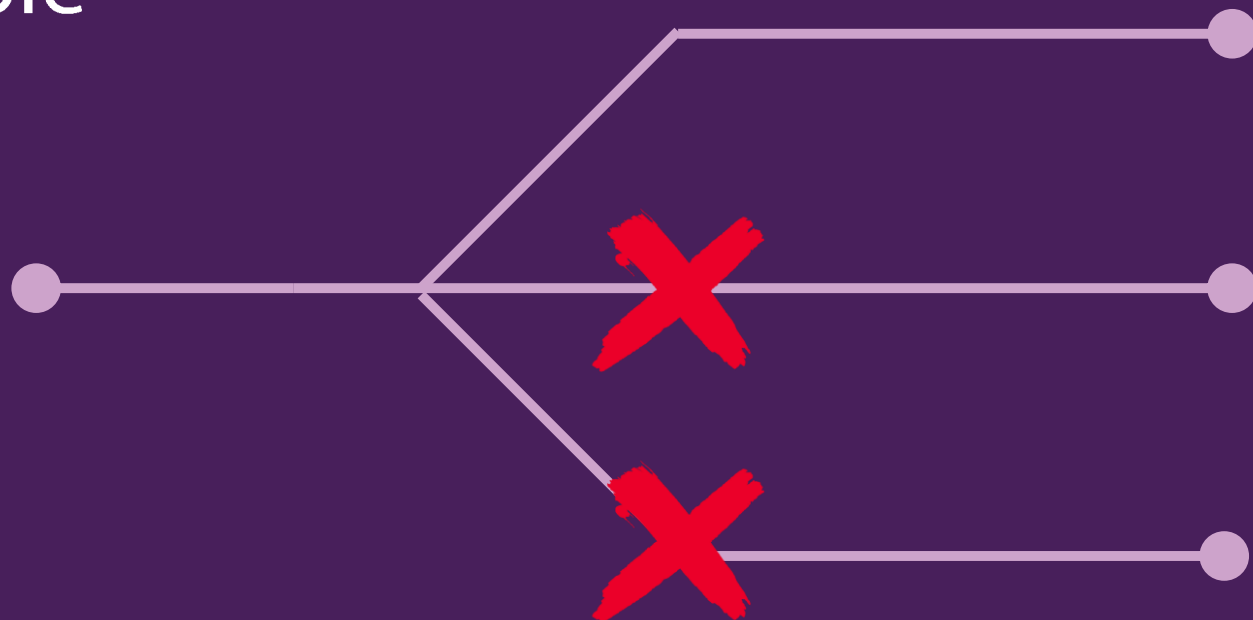
Your work is easier and more effective

Client takes more ownership of their own conflict and spouse can stop personalizing it



What is the Anxiety Behind Commitment? The Developmental Leap from being Single to Married is Emotionally Vulnerable

Giving up having more choices



Ellyn asks Dom to switch
back to his seat on the couch.

Shifting from It's Personal to It's Not Personal

When it is experienced personally, choices are very limited.
The complexity is viewed through a very narrow lens.

Both cognitive and emotional
flexibility are very narrow.



Shifting from It's Personal to It's Not Personal

When it is not seen as personal, the partner can shift to curiosity about “Why are you doing this” rather than “Why are you doing this to me?”

Partner can shift from lonely, hopeless waiting to a place of self-empowerment and focus on what they actually want.



Treatment Issues

STAGE 2



- Individuals focus on their own issues and own decisions
- Partners develop an increasing capacity for tolerating ambiguity and anxiety
- Unanswered questions are addressed
- Partners learn to manage their own differentiation and their own emotional reactivity

Treatment Issues

STAGE 2



Accountability

Why did I decide to deceive you?

- Is this in or out of character?
- There are relationship consequences
- Partner works through anger and betrayal and acknowledges own contributions as well
- Initiation of discussion and repair attempts from both partners

Partner who lied



Account for decision to deceive

Describe the significant events that impacted their decision to have the affair

Is it a 1-time occurrence or a personality trait

What was level of differentiation prior to the affair and how are they stepping forward since the affair

Address partner's feelings of reduced trust, and how the quality of the attachment has changed



Wrapping Up the Session

1

No impulsive
decisions

2

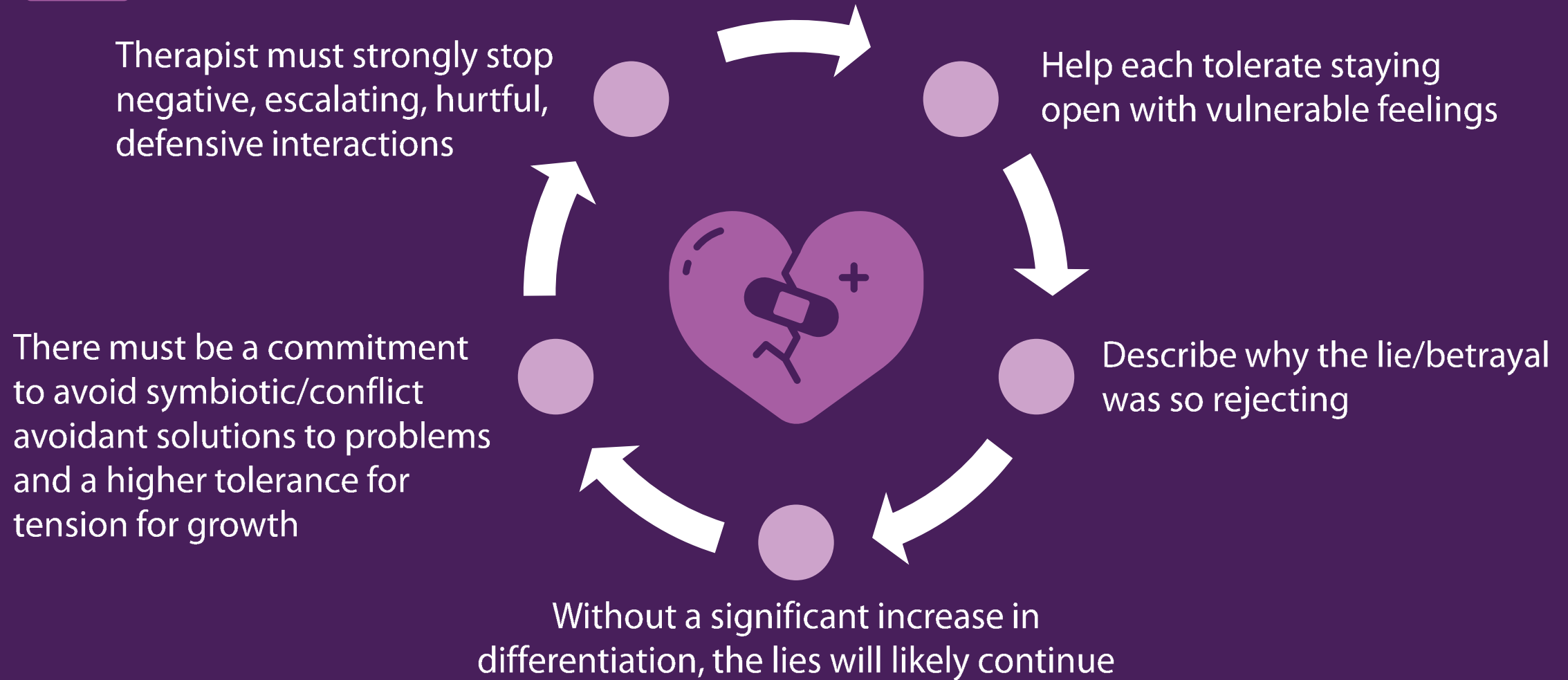
Make a decision for
each to focus on
what was exposed

3

Strong desire to
end the pain

Mixture of Individual and Couples Work

The Repair Cycle



Repairing After Infidelity



Has the partner who lied developed enough not to hide in the future



Is the spouse who was lied to able to support honest communication or are they a “lie invitee”

Without these two factors the relationship is a train wreck waiting to happen

Treatment Issues

STAGE 3

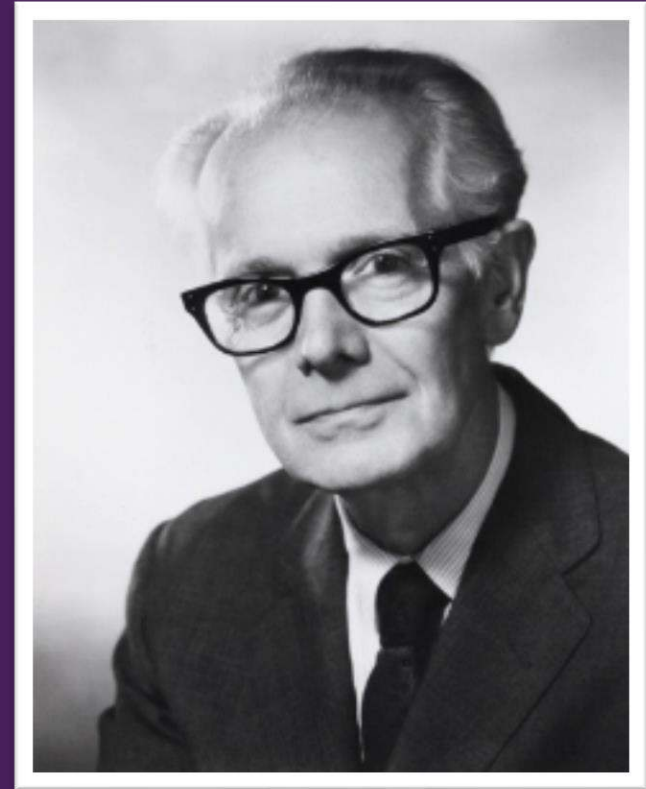


A decision is made about whether to stay together or separate

- If staying together-A boundary is re-established around the “two of us” as a couple”
- Agreements are re-established
 - Honesty and/or monogamy
 - How to return to therapy if needed

The mark of a great marriage is when only one partner goes crazy at a time.

Heinz Kohut



Sign Up by Sunday at Midnight

You Can Start the Program Immediately

- Get Access to the First Lesson
- Get Acquainted with the Community
- Introduce Yourself
- Submit a Case for Review
- Use some of the Handouts with Clients This Week



The Investment

How much will this training cost in terms of time, energy, and money?

The time will be...



**about 5 to 6 hours
per month**

The cost...



Just \$4.90/ day

Developmental Model Training Program

- Live Training Sessions with Dr. Ellyn Bader
- 8 Live Bonus Training Calls with Guest Experts
- 7 Videos of Real Client Sessions by Dr. Ellyn Bader & Dr. Pete Pearson
- 100 Archived Training Calls with Dr. Ellyn Bader
- 65 Archived Bonus Calls with Guest Experts
- 25 Client Handouts to Support Your In-Session Work
- Supportive Therapist Community
- Submit Cases for Review
- Get your questions answered very fast

\$147/month

Special Bonuses:

2 free months of training

Mastering Your Sessions Mystery Box

A small group welcome session with me tomorrow

A personal VIP onboarding session with our program concierge, Ruth





Sign up now!

<https://www.couplesinstitute.com/developmentalmodel>



The Developmental Model Training Program
with Dr. Ellyn Bader