

Formal Therapeutic Disclosure

WHAT DOES “DEEP BETRAYAL” LOOK LIKE?

We consider “deep betrayal” to be any act committed by a partner or spouse that severs the lines of trust in the couple relationship and strongly injures the emotional attachment of the couple. Examples include, but not limited to:

Emotional Affairs | Physical Affairs | Chronic Sexual Infidelity | Financial Infidelity

THE PURPOSES OF A DISCLOSURE:

In a nutshell, a disclosure session is a process designed to aid in providing the betrayed partner/spouse peace of mind. Damaging secrets have a way of surfacing in relationships; thus, it is our belief that it is imperative that the offending party **reveal these secrets in a controlled setting so that they can move forward in recovery with minimal worry that more secrets may surface in the future.**

Thus, if you are doubting your partner’s honesty, then a full therapeutic disclosure (FTD) may be what you and your relationship needs in order to move forward. Additionally, the offending spouse may also experience a sense of relief and freedom as keeping secrets is often very burdensome which can hinder recovery.

Another purpose of this event is that it serves as a **ritual for transition**. There are a lot of moving parts when it comes to this type of betrayal. But, one thing that most certainly has to happen for couple healing and reconciliation, is that the couple must say goodbye to the old and tattered and start transitioning toward the new and unknown. The **disclosure session serves the couple by giving them a strong shove forward**, leaving behind a relationship poisoned by secrecy and deception, and welcoming a new relationship built on honesty, transparency, and integrity.

STAGGERED OR LEAKING DISCLOSURE:

Sadly, most partners of acting-out partners experience what is commonly referred to as “staggered disclosure” or “leaking disclosure.”

Staggered disclosure is when an acting out partner gives a **partial disclosure due to his or her shame or due to a well-intended effort to protect the partner from more pain**. Almost always, the partner discovers new information about the acting-out partner’s infidelity or other breach of trust either by accident, investigation, or by the acting-out partner’s own admission.

Staggered disclosure is also counter-productive for the acting-out partner because, as long as secrets exist, **he/she remains trapped in shame** which may be a driving force in the original acting-out behavior.

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Staggered disclosure is extremely painful and traumatic for partners. It causes the couple to start the recovery all over from the beginning which is extremely discouraging.

To make matters worse, after acting-out partners disclose incomplete or even misleading information, they again tell their partner, "I've told you everything" but is not believed. Prior to formal therapeutic disclosure, the statement "I've told you everything," is almost always a further deception on the part of the acting-out partner.

For this reason, I encourage both the acting-out partner and her/his partner to refrain from having detailed conversations about the addict's behaviors prior to formal disclosure.

BETRAYED PARTNER REACTIONS:

As a betrayed partner, your initial response to being told that you cannot ask questions about the acting-out partner's behavior may spark outrage. After all, you've been intentionally and repeatedly deceived and lied to, possibly for years. Why should you have to wait even longer for the truth? You may also wonder how you're supposed to protect yourself if you don't have information. Your questions are completely reasonable and understandable.

The truth is that unless there is an imminent risk of harm to you, your reputation (due to a public disclosure of the acting-out partner's behavior), or to your children, **it is more harmful than helpful for you and the acting-out partner to have unmediated and unfacilitated conversations about his/her history of infidelity prior to formal therapeutic disclosure.**

However, you do need to protect yourself sexually and emotionally during this time. Boundary work at this stage is crucial. If you're concerned that the acting-out partner may have exposed you to a sexually transmitted infection, for example, you need to get tested and refrain from sexual contact with the addict until after formal therapeutic disclosure (and polygraph, if applicable).

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT A THERAPEUTIC FULL DISCLOSURE?

So, why would anyone want to go through a full disclosure? As a way of gathering the risks and benefits of disclosure, a research study was done by Schneider, Corley and Irons to see how couples felt about the process before and after the disclosure event. The sexually betraying parties and their partners were asked two simple questions:

"Initially, how did you feel at the time about the disclosure?"

"Looking back now at the disclosure, how do you feel about it now?"

What they found was striking:

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- Betraying Party: 58% of them said the therapeutic disclosure was the right course of action before the event, and 96% said they felt it was the right thing to do after.
- Betrayed partners, 81% said they believed the disclosure was the right thing to do before the event; and 93% felt it was the right course of action after the disclosure.
- Both the betraying parties (96%) and their significant other (93%) felt it was in their best interest to go through a disclosure process. That's surprising and encouraging research.

FORMAL THERAPEUTIC DISCLOSURE:

Formal therapeutic disclosure ("FTD") is a mutual, planned, and professionally facilitated event where the acting-out partner reads a document prepared in advance describing his/her history of sexual infidelity.

FTD provides a foundation to begin the process of repairing the damage done to the relationship and to rebuild trust.

TIMING OF FTD:

FTD typically happens in one of two ways:

- after the acting-out partner has worked with an individual therapist for 2 to 6 sessions over a period (weeks to months) to prepare the disclosure document; or
- in an intensive format where all the discussions are condensed into a period of 3-4 days.

While it can be frustrating for partners to wait for a disclosure, the reality is that the disclosure process helps acting-out partners emerge from denial, gain a better understanding of their behaviors, and become more forthcoming and honest.

If a disclosure process is rushed, the potential for omissions, and attempts at further deception is higher.

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS COUPLES THERAPIST TO HELP WITH DEVELOPMENT OF AN FTD

My general recommendation is for the acting-out partner to select a qualified individual therapist to help you prepare the FTD and then present the FTD to the betrayed partner in the presence of a qualified couples therapist.

The benefits of using a separate individual therapist for FTD preparation are:

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- The **acting-out partner can be completely honest** with the individual therapist about everything, even details the betrayed partner may not need to know. The acting-out party does not have to worry about the information leaking back to the betrayed partner through the couples therapist. The individual therapist can guide the partner on what is truly important to include in the disclosure.
- The **acting-out partner can feel fully supported by the individual therapist** whereas the couples therapist is often splitting support between both partners. For example, when the couples therapist validates the anger of the betrayed partner, the acting-out partner can feel like the betrayed partner and couples therapist are ganging up on him/her.
- Extra-time must be spent with just the acting-out partner to develop the FTD. If this is done by the couples therapist, it can unbalance the couples work. If done by the individual therapist, the **couples work remains balanced**.
- When the FTD is presented to the betrayed partner, it is easier for the couples therapist to **remain neutral** as he/she has not been involved in the FTD development.

The benefits of using your couples therapist to develop the FTD are:

- The couples therapist gets a **deeper understanding of the background** of the betrayed partner. This may help in the couples work.
- This approach can **save money**, at least in the short term, as there is one less person to get up to speed on the background.
- it may not be possible to have the couples therapist do the individual prep work due to scheduling limitations.

The couple should weigh the factors above and agree on which course is best for you. Moreover, In some cases even though the couple may ask for the couples therapist to do the prep, I reserve the right to decline doing individual FTD prep work if I strongly believe it would be disruptive to the couples process.

CONDITIONS FOR AN FTD TO BE HELPFUL:

The following conditions are necessary to set the framework for an FTD:

- Both partners agree to participate in the formal disclosure process. **No one feels forced.**

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- Both partners (with the agreement of their therapist(s)) agree about the timing of the disclosure session
- **Neither partner has initiated legal divorce** proceedings or has recently stated that they plan to initiate divorce
- Partner is given an opportunity both before and after the reading of the FTD to **ask questions** of the acting-out partner
- The acting-out partner has worked with a therapist trained in facilitating disclosures to prepare the written document that will be read to the partner during the FTD
- Therapeutic and/or peer **support is available** to the partner both during and immediately after FTD
- In addition, depending on the history of betrayal and the level of deception inherent in acting-out partner, a **polygraph with an experienced polygraph examiner familiar with FTD may be considered as an option**. Polygraph is typically done immediately following disclosure — usually on the same day — and should be completed as soon as possible following an FTD.

COMPONENTS IN AN FTD:

Generally speaking, FTD should include the following information:

- A good intro will speak directly to the here and now moment, about what your partner may be feeling as you are about to read the letter
- Types of acting out behaviors
- Approximate time frames of behaviors
- Approximately frequency of behaviors
- Approximate number of sexual partners if sexual acting out
- The date of last contact with any affair partner(s) and/or the last date partner engaged in behaviors
- Approximate amount of money spent on behaviors or activities related to behaviors, including source and location of funds
- Names of acting out partners known by partner of acting-out partner
- Health issues (sexually transmitted infections, etc.)
- Legal issues (e.g., arrests, lawsuits, and any children fathered by acting-out partner with affair partner)
- Incidents that may have directly or indirectly impacted the couples' children (including exposure to pornography, affair partners, or the sharing of photos, etc. with affair partners or online)
- Brief sexual autobiography (optional, but may be particularly helpful in understanding the roots of addiction and its progression)

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- The items above should be placed on a timeline, preferably with age ranges 0-5, 6-10,...
- A conclusion that is similar to intro, express empathy, commitment to reconciliation, activities in recovery

The following information should NOT be included in an FTD:

- Graphic details of sexual behaviors
- Names of affair partners not known by partner
- Locations of acting out (other than the couple's home or other property owned by couple)
- Thoughts or feelings of acting-out partner about third parties
- Fantasies, unless they directly impacted partner (e.g., acting-out partner's chronic use of fantasy during sex with partner or acting-out partner's chronic inability to remain present in daily activities such as work, couples' relationship, or parenting due to fantasy)

In the same session that an FTD occurs, the acting-out partner should present his/her plan or "inner circle" if the partner doesn't already know it. The acting-out partner should also commit to telling his partner of any "slips" (engaging in any bottom line or inner circle behaviors) within a specific timeframe — typically 24-72 hours.

The combination of the FTD, polygraph (if applicable), sharing of recovery plan, and commitment to disclose future acting out behaviors, provides the foundation for the repair of the relationship and the beginnings of rebuilding trust.

IS A POLYGRAPH NECESSARY?

When it comes to sorting out whether or not you'd like to utilize a Therapeutic Full Disclosure with a fidelity polygraph attached to it, Dr. Milton Magness's book *Stop Sex Addiction* is a great read. Dr. Magness commits three full chapters in his book to disclosures and polygraphs. When discussing polygraphs at a Restoring Sexuality conference, Dr. Magness stated:

"Because of the core belief of sex addicts that people will not love me as I am, I believe it is virtually impossible to get a complete disclosure without a polygraph exam to verify that the disclosure is not just a sanitized version of events the sex addict hopes his partner will forgive. Unless the whole truth is told, the sex addict does not have the opportunity to get free from his behaviors. And unless the addict can get honest with his partner, they do not have the opportunity of ever restoring trust in the relationship.

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RIGHT TO REQUEST OR REFUSE AN FTD

As a partner, you have a right to request an FTD. You also have a right not to receive a disclosure if you don't want one.

If you've been wanting a disclosure for some time and the acting-out partner has been unwilling or has repeatedly stalled in following through, it is completely reasonable for you to request to join him at his next individual session with his therapist to discuss your requests and ask any questions you may have.

SUMMARY OF BENEFITS AND RISKS:

BENEFITS

- Restored truth
- Confrontation of deception
- Hope for a future relationship
- Betraying spouse is able to get free from their secrets and shame
- Betrayed spouse is empowered to make informed choices about the future

RISKS

- Increased shame and guilt
- Temporary separations or divorce
- Financial, legal, or professional consequences
- Changes in family functions, including limited access to children
- Loss of trust; the relationship may get worse before it gets better

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A DISCLOSURE TO RELATIONSHIP PARTNERS: (from Jerry Goodman, CSAT)

1. Start with the text of the First Step of a 12 step process if available. Only do disclosure after completing the First Step. Reason: the First Step is a presentation to the addict's peer group for the purpose of receiving empathy and support, whereas the disclosure is presented to the offended party for the purpose of the partner being validated and informed. Thus, disclosure is an evolving process: starting with an admission to oneself, then perhaps to a therapist, then a sponsor, then one's peer group, and then to the primary offended party.

2. Only include acting out behavior that has occurred since addict and coaddict have been in relationship (including serious dating period). Reason: if both the behavior that has violated the relationship partner and acting out behavior prior to the relationship are

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presented, the partner may be distracted away from feelings about behavior that had a direct affect, by focusing on behaviors that did not. Sharing the addict's pre relationship acting out history can be a separate process at a different time.

3. Change any use of the conditional tense to the past tense. Example: NOT I would leave work in the afternoons to go to topless bars. BUT I left work in the afternoons to go to topless bars. Saying, "I would do" such-and-such can be a means of distancing oneself slightly and is less direct than saying, "I did" it.

4. Include time frames by making some reference to when each acting out incident happened or by identifying a period of time during which the same kind of activity was repeated, and by telling how often it occurred. Example: In June of 2000, while on a business trip to San Francisco, I went to a back room behind a bar and had inter- course with a prostitute. OR Between early 1998 and late 2001, when I went on regular business trips to New York and Philadelphia, I watched pay-per-view pornographic movies on the TV in my hotel room almost every night and masturbated once to three times each night. I estimate I watched pay-per-view programs a total of 65 times, or 150 hours and masturbated an estimated total of 220 times.

5. References to the partner are in the second person. NOT Many times I manipulated my wife to have sex with me. BUT Many times I manipulated you to have sex with me.

6. Use clinical or anatomically correct terms and avoid slang or sexual jargon. Example: oral sex, not blowjob, pornography rather than porn, prostitute instead of massage therapist or model or "lady," topless bar in place of strip club or gentleman's club, breasts rather than the slang terms often used, and "I was masturbated," rather than "I got a hand job." Slang terms can trivialize the act or objectify women and can be an attempt to dignify the addict's behavior, and serves to further insult the relationship partner. 7. Use "I" statements and focus on the addict's actions and behaviors rather than those of the acting out partner. (This puts the responsibility on the addict rather than on the acting out partner.) Example: NOT I picked up a prostitute and went to a motel and she gave me oral sex. BUT I picked up a prostitute, took her to a motel and received oral sex from her. NOT The woman I was seeing called me and invited me to get together, so we met and had dinner at a restaurant. Afterward she invited me to her apartment and we had sex. BUT I received a call from the woman I was having an affair with and I agreed to meet and had dinner with her at a restaurant. Afterward I went to her apartment and had intercourse with her.

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8. Regarding use of names of acting out partners— a name is used only if the partner knows the person (such as a friend or family member of the partner, a neighbor, or someone the addict has a work relationship with). If, however, the acting out partner is not known to the relationship partner and they have never met, then the person is referred to by the person's gender. Example: During a sales conference in 1997 I talked a lot with a woman I met in a workshop. I ate several meals with her and one night I invited her to my room and had intercourse with her.

9. Including the addict's thoughts and feelings or narrative-like details to describe what happened, or explanations of the addict's behavior are omitted. The facts are stated simply and directly, with only enough detail for the relationship partner to follow the sequence of events and to convey what happened honestly and completely. And if, while acting out, the addict was accompanied by someone else who also acted out, only the actions of the person disclosing are mentioned. Example: NOT I went to a topless bar with my buddy, Fred. He talked me into it. After we got there I was nervous because I had never been to a place like that before. I had intended just to watch but one or two of the dancers sat down and struck up a conversation with us and we bought them several drinks. Fred and one of the dancers left and the girl sitting next to me told me there was a special room where we could do things we couldn't do in the bar. I felt guilty because I didn't want to violate my marriage, but I thought I would just check it out and see what went on there. When we got there she began to feel me up. I got excited and because I was a little tipsy, I let her give me a hand job. She asked if I'd like to have sex, but by now I was really scared and so I said no. I couldn't find Fred, so I left. BUT I agreed with a male friend [name given if known to relationship partner] to go to a topless bar. While there I watched the topless dancers, talked to some of the prostitutes and bought them several drinks. I also had about four drinks. I accepted one prostitute's offer to go to a room where men receive sexual services and I was masturbated by her there. As illustrated here, any drinking or drug use in connection with the acting out is included and quantified (but not used as a justification for the acting out).

10. Add details of what happened if the reference is vague, incomplete or unclear. Sufficient detail is used so the relationship partner doesn't have to wonder what happened, without becoming so specific that it is lurid or unnecessarily hurtful. Example:

NOT I called up an escort service and they sent someone over and we had sex. BUT I called an escort service and had a prostitute sent to my hotel room. I received oral sex and had intercourse with her.

11. If the acting out involved spending money, that needs to be included, along with the amount. Example: I called an escort service and had a prostitute sent to my hotel room. I

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received oral sex and had intercourse with her. I spent a total of \$350. At the end of the disclosure or at the end of a section about a certain behavior, an estimate is given of the total number of times the addict engaged in the behavior and the total amount that was spent. Example: For a period of about 7 years, between 1987 and 1994, I estimate that I had 120 sexual massages and spent a total of approximately \$30,000. It is also important to include any additional information pertinent to the amounts that were spent on the addiction. Example: While I was secretly paying for sexual massages, I was aware that there often wasn't enough money to pay all our bills. And once I remember we didn't have the money to send our son to camp. But the addict does not include how he felt about it then or how sorry he is now or other things that soften the impact of the disclosure.

12. If the acting out involved lying to the relationship partner or taking advantage of opportunities provided by the partner's routine or in other ways indirectly involved the partner in some way, that needs to be included. Example: Many times I lied to you that I was working late when I really was going to sexual bookstores before I came home. [Then would follow details of what was done at the bookstores.] OR Often I went to topless bars when you were out of town. Once I dropped you off at the airport for you to fly to a conference and another time I took you to the airport to visit your mom, and both times I drove straight from the airport to a topless bar. [Then what happen-ed at the topless bar.]

13. It is important to remember sexual betrayal behaviors that did not involve a physical sex act per se, like sexual fantasy, looking sexually at people in public places, and frequent sexual humor in conversations. Example: Practically any time I was out in public I looked sexually at females I found attractive. This included times when I was with you, such as shopping together, eating together at a restaurant or going to a movie together. At restaurants I sometimes talked with you while looking repeatedly over your shoulder at a woman at another table.

14. After covering all the sexual acting out incidents and behaviors, thought needs to be given to non sexual behaviors that were destructive or abusive to the relationship, the partner and the family. These may include physical violence, emotional and verbal abuse, hiding spending on non sexual purchases, abusive child discipline, constant berating of the partner's family or friends, etc. This part does not have to be as detailed as the sexual portion is, but if these additional issues have been present, they need to be addressed as part of the addictive process. And if there are any tie-ins to the sexual acting out, those need to be mentioned as well. Example: Besides my sexual acting out, I have been abusive physically and verbally to you and the children. I have often yelled at you and on at least three occasions I shoved you and once threw some dishes and broke them in your presence. I have often yelled at the children and said shaming things to them. Once I hit our

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son with a belt after having said I didn't believe in physical discipline. I know now that many of these times I was projecting my guilt onto you and the children, and often the guilt and shame was because I had acted out sexually.