

Full Disclosure



Faithful & True

If you are a couple who has experienced sexual and/or emotional betrayal, full disclosure is an integral part of your healing journey. Learn the necessary preparation and process from the leading experts in the field of sexual addiction.

by

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Full Disclosure

Trust is an integral part of growing close to a spouse. When there have been secrets or lying about behaviors, trust will be broken. In rebuilding trust, we believe it is important to create a new foundation of truth-telling. Full disclosure is a process to help couples heal from the pain of betrayal and move forward in truth.

Full Disclosure



We, Mark and Debbie Laaser, have been counseling couples together for many years, and have developed a process of 'Full Disclosure' for couples who have faced sexual and/or emotional betrayal. We have continued to fine-tune a procedure that includes preparation for both spouses so as to produce the most effective outcome for both.

At Faithful & True, we support couples who desire to heal and grow after emotional and/or sexual betrayal. Sexual betrayal is considered to include any use of pornography, masturbation, strip clubs, prostitution, phone sex, posting of profiles online, sexual affairs, voyeurism, or exhibitionism. Emotional betrayal would include any sharing of information that violates the expectation of exclusivity of the relationship commitment.

When a spouse has been betrayed by emotional and/or sexual betrayal, we consider full disclosure to be an integral part of a couple's healing journey. We encourage couples to use professional help when there has been an agreement to disclose the truth, so as to come prepared and to be safe throughout the process.

As Christians, we believe that we are led to pursue truth in all our ways. Numerous scriptures remind us of that pursuit:

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts...Create in me a pure heart, O God.
Psalm 51:6 &10

Speak the truth to each other...love truth & peace.
Zechariah 8:16 &19

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
1 Corinthians 13:6

Current clinical research also supports the positive effects of full disclosure between partners when there has been betrayal. In a research study by clinicians Dr. Jennifer Schneider and Deborah Corey, it was found that 95% of those who have disclosed the truth of sexual acting out experience healing and restoration in their relationship.¹ Debbie Laaser's research project with over 200 betrayed women found that over 75% listed full disclosure as one of the two most important resources for their healing journey.²

The purpose of full disclosure is to reveal the whole truth about a sexual and emotional betrayal so that a new foundation of truth-telling can be established for the relationship. Truth-telling is an integral part of building trust, and trust lies at the core of emotional and spiritual intimacy in a relationship. Trust-building occurs when information that has been hidden or distorted is voluntarily *offered* to the betrayed spouse. Typically, a betrayed spouse finds out about lying or deception by 'detective work', asking questions, or accidentally uncovering information. Betrayed spouses keep seeking information and asking questions to fill in some of the 'puzzle pieces' of reality, but it does not contribute to trust-building. When information is acquired this way, a betrayed spouse will always wonder if there is more uncovered deception or if she asked the right questions to ascertain the whole truth.

It is our belief that the greatest damage to another human being is the distortion of their reality. We all have intuitive powers, 'gut feelings', or spirit-filled hunches about many things in our lives. This *internal* reality is constantly being validated by others who share our life experiences. When what we are told or see in our *external* world does not match up with our internal world, there is a sense of going crazy. Lying, keeping secrets, and manipulating the truth about behaviors undermine the sanity of those trying to make sense of their world. Telling the truth may *hurt* another person, but there is much greater *harm* done by distorting their reality. Building trust demands that we tell the truth to each other.

We all desire to be chosen by another special person. One of the core beliefs of all people struggling with sexual addiction is, "If you really knew me, you would hate me and leave." Withholding truth about one's life prevents the betrayer from ever knowing if they would be chosen for who they really are. Disclosing the truth about behaviors is vulnerable and risky. It is true that a betrayed spouse may choose to leave because the pain is too great. If, however, a spouse stays and works on healing herself and the

¹ Jennifer Schneider and Deborah Corley, *Surviving Disclosure: A Partner's Guide for Healing the Betrayal of Intimate Trust* (Charleston, SC: Create space, 2012)

²Debbie Laaser, Heather Putney, Matthew Bundick, David Delmonico and Elizabeth Griffin, "Posttraumatic Growth in Relationally Betrayed Women," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 2017 43(3).

relationship, a partner can truly feel chosen—for all the strengths *and* struggles of their life.

In review, it is important to consider the motivation for telling the truth:

Unhealthy reasons:

- To blame the spouse for acting out
- To manipulate the spouse's forgiveness
- To avoid consequences
- To hurt the spouse out of anger
- To manage the spouse's reactions
- To be finished talking about the past
- To gather information to be used in a divorce process

Healthy reasons:

- To follow Christ's teachings
- To take full responsibility for one's secret life by offering information
- To be free of secrets and manipulation
- To rebuild trust that has been broken
- To develop understanding and empathy
- To allow the betrayed spouse to make fully informed decisions
- To create true intimacy based on honesty

Are You Ready for Full Disclosure?

We have found that full disclosure is not always the first step for a couple to heal from betrayal. There is a readiness that contributes to the success of the process. A husband who has betrayed his spouse will be more effective if he *owns* his own problem and behaviors, in other words, he is no longer blaming his spouse or others for what he has done. He has a willingness to live 'in the light' and to no longer keep secrets or tell lies to his spouse, regardless of her response. He is surrendered to be fully known. Ideally, he will have at least 30 days of sobriety and is committed to the process of working on his relationship with his spouse.

A wife who has agreed to full disclosure will ideally have support for herself. That may consist of her own counselor, a support or counseling group of women, and/or several other women who know her story completely. We suggest that she commit to a process of

healing with her spouse for a period of time—6 months or a year, perhaps. If she has no intentions of working on the marriage, we suggest that her husband know of her intent. He may choose not to disclose any more information that might hinder divorce/custody proceedings. We do not believe it is necessary to offer a guarantee to stay in the marriage as information acquired may influence a life-time commitment to the marriage. However, it is important for both partners to know the *intent* of each other's hearts before beginning this process.

Preparation for Full Disclosure

(To simplify language, we will assume that the sexual addict is a man/husband and his wife is the betrayed spouse.)

For the addict:

With the help of a counselor, we recommend that the addict create a time-line of his sexual history from birth to the present, divided into various increments of time.

Information gathered will include sexual awakening, sex education, experimentation, sexual abuse experiences, introduction to pornography and/or masturbation, and all sexual/emotional relationships. While nothing excuses the choices the adult addict has made, it can be very helpful to understand the context of his sexual development. An addiction develops over time, and the 'seeds' of that development are often very evident when the story is heard as a whole. We seek to build empathy and acceptance by telling our stories. The time-line will be written out with a copy made for the counselor.

This information will include:

- The nature of the acting out (pornography, including the nature of what has been viewed, masturbation, emotional and/or sexual affairs, strip clubs, prostitution, voyeurism, exhibitionism, profiles posted on the internet, etc.).
- How much and how long the acting out has been going on.
- When the acting out occurred (when spouse was sleeping or away, during business travel, during work hours, etc.).
- Where acting out occurred (at home, at work, in motels/hotels, at others' residences, in public places such as restaurants, parks, etc.).

- Excuses that were used to find time/space for acting out.
- Information about whether their children were inappropriately touched/abused.
- How much money was spent on acting out or affair partners.
- Names of any people involved in acting out that the spouse may know.
- Consequences of acting out that the spouse may not know about (such as pregnancy, arrest, employment consequences, loss of money, etc.).
- Any unprotected sex that may have endangered the spouse's health.
- Any secret credit card accounts/email accounts/PO boxes/etc. acquired for acting out.
- How long he has been sober from all acting out behaviors.

A plan for self-care and support will be discussed with the addict.

For the spouse:

The spouse also needs direction in preparing for disclosure. There are three areas that we consider important to discuss:

1. **Questions/suspicions:** A spouse will first consider any hunches, 'red flags', or intuitive feelings that have led to obsessive thinking or ongoing worries about marital fidelity. A list will be made of those questions or suspicions. A wife may admit to sexual innocence or naiveté which may prevent her from knowing what to ask. In those circumstances, the counselor can suggest possibilities of questions she may want to ask. (See above list of topics included in the addict's time-line for possible questions.) Of course, all questions included on the list must truly be of concern to the spouse, not just the assisting counselor. We do not recommend asking questions about graphic details (descriptions of bodies, sexual acts, words exchanged through emails, texts, etc.) as they create images on the brain that will be difficult to override. The spouse will bring a journal or list of her questions to the disclosure.
2. **Preparation of an opening statement:** Agreeing to disclosure is an incredibly courageous and vulnerable decision for an addict. We ask the spouse to acknowledge that courage and any other 'truths' that she may have prior to

disclosure. We invite the spouse to think about what she might say to begin the session—words of truth to her partner. At the very least, she may thank him for the courage to walk through full disclosure. If it is true, she may share words of her love or concern, or words of her intentions to work through the pain regardless of what she hears. It is important that whatever she shares is honest. It is usually advised that this opening statement be written out.

3. Support and self-care: Lastly, we want to make sure that a spouse has enough support before entering into disclosure. She may ask other safe people and/or support group members to pray for her during her session. She may arrange to meet a friend after disclosure or to make a call to someone to process what she has heard. Even in a session where there may be no new information, it is very emotionally draining. We ask her to consider how she will take care of herself after the session—she may need time alone, she may need someone to meet, or she may need to drive herself so as to have space to process. Sometimes there are very raw emotions for one or both of the spouses. Considering what will provide safety is another important decision. Everyone is different, and it is important for all spouses to consider how to be proactive to prepare for the challenging task of disclosure.

The Disclosure Session

We recommend setting a 2-hour block of time for the disclosure session. We have the couple sit so that they are eye-to-eye (not side-by-side). We tell them that this is a conversation between the two of them, and we, as counselors, are serving as fair witnesses and coaches. They do not need to make efforts to make eye contact with us during their sharing. They are to focus on each other. Before beginning, we will talk briefly about the following:

1. Full disclosure is an opportunity to lay a new foundation for the marriage—a foundation built on truth-telling. Today's information will override any previous accounts or facts about acting out. Today is the new beginning.
2. This is a sacred time and we acknowledge that God is in it. If the couple desires, we will pray for their session.
3. We ask them both to state how they are feeling and to address any needs they may have.

4. We remind them that we can take breaks whenever they desire.
5. We review the agenda for the two hours: The addict will go first and talk through his time-line. We allow approximately one hour for his part. The spouse will withhold any questions or temptations to interrupt. She may jot down a few notes as a reminder of anything she wishes to address later. During the last half of the session, she will ask her questions.
6. Before we begin, we ask the spouse if she would be willing to share the statement of 'truths' that she has prepared before the disclosure session.
7. The sharing of the time-line begins. We find it helpful for the counselor to have a copy of the time-line so that he can follow along with the husband. We suggest that the husband not read his time-line, but refer to it to prompt him to share the information. Keeping eye contact with his wife is an important part of staying connected. The counselor may ask questions along the way for clarification or remind the husband about any information that he may have omitted. We ask that the spouse simply listen. If a spouse appears to be writing down the facts of the time-line as it is being spoken, we ask that she just listen and be present for her husband's sharing by keeping eye contact with him.
8. After the husband has shared, we ask him to state how long he has been sober from all acting out behaviors: masturbation, adultery (both emotional and sexual), and pornography. We encourage him to have a 'sobriety date' so that he can continue to work on long-term sobriety and be acknowledged for his commitment to a new life.
9. In the second hour, we first ask the wife if she has heard any new information and how it has been to listen to the disclosure. We then ask her to continue with her questions. If she wants to know a specific detail that the counselor does not feel would be helpful for her to know (i.e. the body type of another woman, sexual positions used, etc.), we recommend that the counselor ask her to process that question in counseling after disclosure to determine what the underlying need may be ("Am I an adequate woman?", "Am I sexually boring?", etc.). If she still wants to know the answer, we encourage her to get feedback from a support group or from other women that have worked through infidelity issues. If after feedback from

others she still desires to ask her question, we recommend that her husband answer the question.

10. As we finish, we will remind the husband that there may be more questions upon leaving. Depending upon how much new information was revealed, a spouse may be somewhat shut down. It is understandable that after processing such an intense session, more reasonable questions may arise. We ask the husband if he will be patient and receive these questions. If the wife's questions get excessive or she is repeatedly asking things that are not helpful, we will ask them to suspend any more of those conversations and instead, bring them into our next couple's session.
11. To close, we remind them that this has been a hard day and encourage them to take care of themselves. We ask them both if they feel safe in leaving. Some couples need space from each other. Some may choose to go someplace together to continue talking. Others need to return to something enjoyable and take a break from the emotional exhaustion of disclosure. We affirm both of them for the hard work they have done, and remind them of God's truths: they are good people and they have taken a courageous step to be brutally honest with one another.

If time permits, we may talk about next steps in their healing journey. We will remind them that the day of full disclosure is difficult. They may even believe they are in a worse place in their relationship than prior to coming. We talk about the need to trust the process, to allow natural feelings from the disclosure to be felt so they can move forward in living in truth with one another. And finally, we encourage them to get the support they each need as they leave.