How to Rebuild Trust
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Trust is something that has to be earned. As you began dating your spouse, there were tons of opportunities to either earn trust or break trust. You might have shared something very personal and they listened and validated you which showed that you could trust them. When they said they’d be there for you and they followed through, those feelings of trust continued to grow. As your emotional connection got stronger, there were most likely high levels of trust in your relationship and since you felt safe, you made the decision to do life together forever and got married.

Now lets fast forward to a few months, or years, into your marriage and your spouse let you down, which broke some of the trust you had in your relationship. When you’ve been let down, reconstructing trust can be challenging. This isn’t always about infidelity by the way, but many small matters like broken promises, frustrated hopes, bad intentions and selfish decisions. You have to trust in marriage, even though you have no guarantee you won’t be let down again. And the most difficult thing to wrap your mind around is that you know you will be let down again because your spouse isn’t prefect.

So how does rebuilding trust work exactly?

We define trust as a choice to be vulnerably dependent on your spouse. Trusting your spouse who will let you down is extremely vulnerable and scary and amazing all at the same time. Trust is one of those foundational elements that can either make or break your marriage and couples need to be intentional about earning back trust when it’s been broken. Trusting your spouse after they’ve let you down might take a couple of days, weeks or even months to repair (depending on how big the mistake was) and the spouse who broke the trust needs to make effort if they truly are sorry and want to heal the marriage.
Here’s where things get tricky. Rebuilding trust takes two willing people. Trust is not one-sided and cannot be given out freely if it hasn’t been earned. So what we’re saying is that your marriage will thrive if both of you admit your mistakes, apologize, and begin the process of rebuilding trust by trying to change and make effort. Remember that it’s about progress, not perfection. Where couples get into trouble is when one spouse continues to extend trust while the other spouse continues to break trust over and over again, never really wanting to change. In these situations, boundaries need to be implemented and the spouse who broke the trust needs to decide whether or not they want to stay married.

Use these connecting questions as a guide to rebuild trust in your relationship. Take some uninterrupted time to work through these answers by really listening to each other, even when it’s uncomfortable, and discover a whole new way to connect!

**Connecting Questions**

1. Can you remember a story growing up where trust was broken and it made a big impact on you?

2. When we were dating, what is something I did that made you feel like you could trust me?

3. In your opinion, what does trust look like in relationships?

4. What characteristics make someone reliable in your opinion? Do you feel like people can rely on you? Why or why not?
Is there anything I have promised in the past and didn’t follow through? If so, how did that make you feel?

What specific areas in our relationship do you feel like we are lacking trust?

Is there something I need to apologize for that chipped away at our trust?

Overall, do you think we both assume the positive of each other? Why or why not?

Do you struggle with choosing comfort over courage in our marriage? Explain.

Is there anyone in our life that gossips often? Can we both agree that we should be very careful with what we share about our personal lives to this person?

Do you feel like you can share your thoughts and feelings with me and that I will keep them safe?

For parents: How can we teach our children to admit their mistakes and work on earning back trust with their friends and siblings when they’ve let someone down?
Repairing trust is a process that takes time. Don’t kid yourself into thinking that you can repair broken trust with a quick statement of forgiveness and a warm embrace. If you are the one who broke trust, be patient, make effort and show up each day and do the work to earn back trust. If you are the one who was hurt by your spouse’s mistake, start choosing to forgive so you can be free of the pain and resentment you’ve been holding onto. Remember that you can’t build trust if you don’t forgive.

In order to rebuild trust in your marriage, you have to assume the positive. Write down a list of 5 positive qualities about your spouse and keep them handy when trust in the relationship is tested. The moment that your thoughts start going negative, look at the list and spend time really being grateful for the good in your spouse.

We all want to be dependable for our spouse in the good and bad times, yet often our schedule is jam-packed. In order to be reliable, you have to have space to show up and be present for your spouse. If you’ve been over committed, we challenge you to say no to two things/people this week. Explain to them that if you had more time you would help out but that you’re spending more time with your family. Healthy people will understand and not judge your decision to set up healthy boundaries.

When rebuilding trust, there will be moments when you feel like giving up or that the work is too overwhelming. Keep reminding yourself that trust is built in small drops and take advantage of the daily opportunities to earn back that trust. A few simple ways to gain trust:

Text your spouse while they’re at work letting them know you love them
Show up when you say you’re going to
Initiate a date night
Listen with empathy when your spouse shares something
Work on becoming more self-aware
Give a warm bear hug when you get home from work
If you see a chore that needs to get done, step in and do it without having to be asked
Being honest and transparent is going to help your marriage heal and repair. Having secrets will destroy any efforts you have made with rebuilding trust and makes you look guilty. What often underlies secrecy is fear of judgement. If you have anything that you’ve been keeping from your spouse, even if you’re worried of making things worse, you need to come clean immediately. If you’re wanting to move forward in your marriage, it will require 100% transparency.

If you know you need to apologize for something, spend some time this week and go through the 4 steps of apologizing.

- I’m sorry for __________.
- I was wrong!
- How can I make this better?
- Will you forgive me?

If trust has been continuously broken in your marriage, it’s time to start getting curious as to why the same things keep happening in your marriage. Start by asking yourself these questions:

Were there high levels of trust before we got married?
Has my spouse always had the qualities of a trustworthy person?
Have I communicated my hurt in a healthy way?
Does my spouse know how to change and rebuild trust?
We teach people how to treat us, so have I been too soft by not setting healthy boundaries in our marriage?