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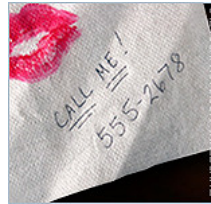
The Art of Relationships

with Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD

There is an art to maintaining the intimate relationships in our lives. Read on to explore our experts' perspectives, and learn new techniques to improve your own relationship skills.

Wednesday, February 2, 2011
In an Affair?... Now What?

It started innocently enough. You connected on Facebook with an [old boyfriend or girlfriend](#) (isn't technology wonderful?) — or started meeting regularly for lunch or drinks with a colleague from the office. You felt the chemistry, but you weren't going to act on it. And since "nothing" was going on, you didn't need to tell your spouse. But now you can't deny it any longer. Whether your relationship has become physical or remains [technically just a friendship](#), you know that you are in deep. You don't want to hurt your spouse, but you are sure that ending [your affair](#) would break your heart.



At times like these, it can help to know something about human nature. When people feel intense emotions, the parts of their brains that process emotions become more active. Meanwhile, the logical parts of their brains remain relatively inactive. The result? People find ways to make sense of, and support, their emotional state; and it's incredibly difficult to challenge this emotionally driven thinking.

When someone is having an affair, this kind of thinking intensifies the passion of their new love while also magnifying the inadequacies of their spouse, or their current "real" life. They can try to argue with themselves about how they shouldn't feel as they do and how pursuing the affair is not a good idea, but that approach usually leaves them feeling a stronger "need" to pursue it. Still, the guilt about doing this can also be overwhelming.

So, if you are caught in this dilemma, what can you do? The first step is to fully acknowledge it. Trying to pretend that a budding love doesn't exist, or isn't that strong, will only send your awareness of it underground; where it will influence you without your even realizing it. You will likely find yourself the victim of a surprise attack; I was avoiding her and was okay with that, but then she needed my help with something, and, well... The next thing you know, you are thinking this must be fate. If, instead, you admit to your feelings and look squarely at the problem, you can begin to address it.

Addressing it means, in part, admitting that your thinking is clouded by strong emotions. With this acknowledgment, you are choosing to lead with your head and not your heart. You can consider your values and at least try to correct for the bias of your emotionally driven thinking. This doesn't mean ignoring your emotions, but rather considering them with the perspective of what's best for you in the long run. Remember, after all is said and done, after your heart's fluttering has subsided, you will need to be able to wake up every morning with the results of your actions — so consider them carefully.

Think about your marriage vows and how important they are to you. Think about the effects of continuing an affair on your thoughts and feelings about yourself, as well as on your spouse, children, new love, and anyone else involved.

Many people want to savor their new love, but still have strong incentives to work on their marriage. They want to strive to be happy again with their spouse, not disrupt their lives (for themselves and their children), and do the right thing. But they also ultimately want to be assured of having romantic love in their lives if their efforts at reviving their marriage fail. The dilemma is understandable. However, holding onto both relationships simply does not work. It can't. **Honestly working on a relationship means giving yourself wholeheartedly to it.**

If you would like to join a general discussion about this topic on the Relationships and Coping Community, [click here](#).

Posted by: **Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD** at 8:21 am

[Link to this post](#)

**Leslie Becker-Phelps,
PhD****EXPERT**

Dr. Becker-Phelps is a well-respected psychologist who treats individuals and couples in her private practice in Basking Ridge, N.J. She is dedicated to helping individuals understand themselves and what they need to do to become emotionally and psychologically healthy.

Is also an expert in the following:

- [WebMD Relationships and Coping Community](#)

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