



**ZAR Wellness Counselling**  
Empowering Minds, Inspiring Change

# **Relationships And Trust**

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## What is Trust:

Trust is the act of placing confidence in someone or something else.

Trust is a fundamental human experience.

Trust is necessary for society to function.

Trust can play a large role in happiness.

Without trust, fear rules.

Trust can be impacted by a person's individual life experiences.

Trust is like air: we only see it when it is polluted.

*When our partner has let us down (or worse) and we feel that our trust in them has diminished or gone, we need to make a decision.*

*a) Stay in the relationship and put effort into working it out*

*b) Leave the relationship*

## Where Do Trust Issues Come From?

Everyone has uncertainty about whom to trust and how much. People make choices about whom and how much to trust every day. We are more willing to trust at some times than others. A total lack of mistrust would be a serious problem.

Trust issues often come from early life experiences and interactions. These experiences often take place in childhood. Some people do not get enough care and acceptance as children. Others are abused, violated, or mistreated. These things may lead to difficulty in trusting as an adult.

Social rejection in one's teens may shape their ability to trust. Some teens are bullied or treated as outcasts by peers. This can influence later relationships. Being betrayed or belittled by others impacts self-esteem. Self-esteem also plays a large role in a person's capacity to trust. People with low self-esteem may be less likely to trust others. Those with higher self-esteem may be more self-assured.

## The 8 Pillars of Trust:

Trust is the cornerstone of any healthy and enduring relationship. Whether in personal or professional settings, trust fosters a sense of security, facilitates open communication, and strengthens bonds. To build and maintain trust, it is essential to understand its key components.

### 1. Clarity

**Definition:** Clarity involves being clear and transparent in your communication, intentions, and actions. It eliminates confusion and ensures that all parties have a mutual understanding of expectations and goals.

- **People tend to trust things that are clear and distrust things that are ambiguous.**

**Example:** In a relationship, clarity means openly discussing your needs, boundaries, and expectations. For instance, if you are planning a future together, discussing your financial goals, career aspirations, and family planning openly helps both partners understand and align their expectations.

### 2. Compassion

**Definition:** Compassion involves showing genuine care and concern for others. It means being empathetic, supportive, and considerate, especially during challenging times.

- **People put faith in others when they see that they don't just care about themselves.**

**Example:** When your partner is going through a difficult period, showing compassion means actively listening, offering support, and providing comfort. This could be as simple as offering a shoulder to cry on or helping with daily tasks to alleviate their stress.

### 3. Character

**Definition:** Character refers to integrity and ethical behaviour. It means consistently doing the right thing, even when it's difficult, and being honest and reliable.

- **When living in alignment with your core values, people notice it.**

**Example:** If you make a mistake, owning up to it and apologising sincerely reflects strong character. For example, if you forgot an important date, admitting your mistake and making amends shows integrity and builds trust.

### 4. Competency

**Definition:** Competency is about having the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil your responsibilities. It means being capable and reliable in what you do.

- **People are more likely to trust confident and capable people.**

**Example:** In a professional setting, demonstrating competency might involve completing tasks efficiently and effectively. In a personal relationship, it could mean being a reliable partner who can manage household responsibilities or provide emotional support when needed.

## 5. Commitment

**Definition:** Commitment involves being dedicated and loyal to your relationships and responsibilities. It means following through on your promises and being dependable.

- **It's not easy to trust someone who is not committed to the relationship.**

**Example:** Consistently showing up for your partner, whether it's for small daily tasks or significant life events, demonstrates commitment. For example, being present at family gatherings, supporting each other's careers, and working through conflict together show dedication.

## 6. Connection

**Definition:** Connection is about building strong, meaningful relationships. It involves being present, engaging, and creating emotional bonds with each other.

- **Trust grows as you build connections through conversation and shared experiences.**

**Example:** Spending quality time together, having meaningful conversations, and participating in shared activities foster a deeper connection. For instance, setting aside time for regular date nights or engaging in hobbies you both enjoy strengthens your bond.

## 7. Contribution

**Definition:** Contribution involves actively adding value to the relationship. It means being proactive in helping, supporting, and improving the lives of those around you.

- **Words are nothing without action. When you fulfil your promises, trust grows.**

**Example:** Contributing to a relationship could mean taking on additional responsibilities during a partner's busy period, planning special surprises to show appreciation, or simply being there to offer help without being asked.

## 8. Consistency

**Definition:** Consistency is about being reliable and predictable in your actions and behaviour. It means being steady and dependable over time.

- **When people are inconsistent or unreliable, it's difficult to depend on them.**

**Example:** Consistency can be shown by maintaining regular communication, following through on commitments, and behaving in a trustworthy manner consistently. For example, if you promise to call every evening, doing so regularly reinforces reliability and trust.

The 8 Pillars of Trust are essential components of any trusting relationship. By understanding and applying these pillars, individuals can build stronger, more resilient bonds based on mutual respect and trust.

## Attachment:

Attachment refers to the ability to form emotional bonds and empathetic, enjoyable relationships with other people, especially close family members.

John Bowlby originally described the concept of attachment as focusing on the bond between mother and infant. According to Bowlby, attachment is not a one-time event, but a process that begins with birth and extends into the early years of life. A child's relationship with the primary caregiver, who is often the mother, can affect the child's attachment style throughout life, and insecure attachments can often interfere with future romantic relationships.

Children generally develop healthy, secure attachments to mothers who competently and regularly respond to the child's needs by, for example, feeding the child when the child cries.

## Attachment Types:

- **Secure Attachment:** the child will interact with others in the presence of the mother and will become upset when she leaves and avoid contact with strangers. This demonstrates a healthy attachment.
- **Anxious / Resistant Insecure Attachment:** the child will become anxious at the presence of strangers and will not interact with them. When the mother leaves, the child will become very upset and will be unreceptive to her attempts to interact when she returns. This may demonstrate that the parent does not consistently meet the child's needs.
- **Anxious / Avoidant Insecure Attachment:** The child shows ambivalence toward the mother and toward strangers, does not want to be held, and shows no preference toward caregivers. This attachment style typically means that a child has learned that efforts to have needs met will be ignored.
- **Disorganised / Disoriented Attachment:** Though a child with this attachment issue may become upset when the mother leaves and appear relieved when she returns, the child may refuse to be held, hit or rock repeatedly, and show anger toward the mother. Mothers of children with a disorganised or disoriented attachment were shown to have experienced trauma-induced depression shortly before giving birth.

## Understanding Attachment Issues:

The attachment bond, or infant's first bond with the primary caregiver, generally the mother, is essential to later attachment. A weak attachment bond can result in both social and emotional developmental disruptions. Attachment issues typically result from an early separation from parents, lengthy hospitalisation, incidents of trauma, instances of neglect, or an otherwise troubled childhood. These issues may have an affect on a child's ability to form healthy, secure attachments later in life. Attachment is related to trust and empathy, and when attachments are not developed early in life, a child may not learn to trust and may develop a conscience.

## Trauma and Trust Issues:

Traumatic life events may also cause issues with trust and safety for adults. These life events could include:

- Accident
- Illness
- Theft or damage to personal property
- Loss of loved one
- Being cheated on or left for another person

Being physically violated or attacked can also impact a person's trust in others. This happens in many cases of rape or assault. Veterans of military combat may also have difficulty with trust. This is often due to stresses of wartime violence.

Post-traumatic stress (PTSD) comes from exposure to severe or perceived danger. It can lead people to experience great difficulty with trust. People may experience and re-experience the trauma in their minds. Anxiety often accompanies this trauma.

## What are Trust Issues Associated With?

Under the medical model, trust issues can be linked with:

- Depression
- Adjustment Disorders (adjusting to change, life transitions)
- Anxiety
- Fear of Abandonment
- Attachment Issues
- Post-traumatic Stress
- Schizophrenia

## Do I have Trust Issues:

Signs a person may be mistrustful include:

- Lack of intimacy or friendships
- Mistrust that interferes with a relationship
- Dramatic and stormy relationships
- Suspicion or anxiety about friends and family
- Terror during physical intimacy
- Belief that others are deceptive or malevolent without evidence

Sometimes mistrust plays a dominant role in a person's life. Past disappointment or betrayal may be at the root of the issue. Mistrust is a valid response to feeling betrayed or abandoned. Pervasive feelings of mistrust can negatively impact a person's life which can result in anxiety, anger, or self-doubt. Fortunately, people can relearn trust.

## Insecurity:

Insecurity, or a tendency to lack confidence or certainty in oneself, may be experienced by most people regarding some aspect of their lives. For many, feelings of insecurity can be resolved before they have a lasting, harmful impact. Insecurity is lined to mental health conditions such as narcissism, anxiety, paranoia, and addictive or dependent personalities.

A person with high levels of insecurity may often experience lack of confidence regarding many aspects of life. It may be difficult for that person to form lasting relationships or attend to daily tasks, due to a self-perception of helplessness or inadequacy. Insecurity often causes negative thoughts about one's ability to fit in with peers, reach goals, or find acceptance and support.

## What Causes Insecurity?

There is no one cause of insecurity; many factors can lead to this condition. Insecurity may stem from a traumatic event, crisis such as divorce or bankruptcy, or a loss. It can also result from one's environment, as unpredictability or upset in daily life can cause anxiety and insecurity about ordinary, routine events. People who have recurring insecurities may also have low self-esteem, experience body issues, lack of direction in life, or feel overlooked by others.

The attachment bond, or a child's first love relationship, formed with the primary caregiver (mother/father, etc.) also plays a large role in the development of insecurities. An *insecure attachment* may result when the primary caregiver does not respond to the infant's needs adequately. An infant may develop an insecure attachment from abuse, but also from simple isolation or loneliness.

Children with a parent who is inconsistent or self-absorbed may grow up unable to form lasting emotional connections and be anxious and fearful, not knowing what to expect from life just as they did not know what to expect from their parent. Studies have also found people who commit violence against their partners are more likely to have experienced an insecure attachment as a child.

Intimate relationships can be another source of insecurity for many individuals. People who experience insecurity in their relationship may also be affected by attachment insecurity. Individuals with insecure attachment have been found to be more likely to interpret their partner's behaviour as hostile or negative. This tendency can lead people to react defensively to their partners, which can escalate relationship conflict or even create conflict from a neutral interaction.



## Effects of Insecurity:

Insecure individuals, in addition to struggling with the formation of healthy relationships, may also find it difficult to share emotions or be forthright about important aspects of daily life, such as those pertaining to work or school.

An individual who is too anxious or insecure to speak up about their abilities and accomplishments may never receive a promotion, which in turn may facilitate further insecurity due to a perceived lack of ability.

Those who have difficulty forming relationships or meeting others because of chronic insecurity may become too shy or anxious to face anyone at all, which can lead to distancing from people in general. This distance can lead to isolation, which is associated with mental health issues such as depression, social anxiety, as well as lower self-esteem.

## Infidelity:

Infidelity is one of the most painful and challenging issues a relationship can face. It involves a breach of the commitment and trust that partners have established, often resulting in significant emotional distress. Understanding the various facets of infidelity is essential for addressing its root causes, managing its impact, and working towards healing.

Infidelity is unfaithfulness in a marriage or relationship. It can severely strain a relationship and the people involved. An affair can leave the other person feeling devastated, alone, betrayed, and confused. Sometimes, an affair ends a relationship and other times, couples can repair the relationship.

## What is Infidelity?

Infidelity, also known as cheating or adultery, typically involves one partner engaging in a romantic or sexual relationship outside their committed partnership. Infidelity can take many forms:

1. **Physical Infidelity:** Engaging in physical sexual activities with someone other than one's partner.
2. **Emotional Infidelity:** Forming a deep emotional connection with someone outside the relationship, often involving intimate conversations and emotional support.
3. **Online Infidelity:** Engaging in sexual or romantic interactions over the internet, including sexting, explicit chats, or developing a close online relationship.
4. **Micro-Cheating:** Smaller acts that might not constitute a full-blown affair but can still be considered breaches of trust, such as flirting, secretive texting, or developing a crush outside the relationship.

What one person considers infidelity, someone else may not. Example: one person may not see their partner's viewing of pornography as cheating, whilst another person might see it as cheating.

Some view infidelity as sex outside the relationship and may not see emotional affairs as cheating. But emotional affairs can also harm a relationship, they may do even more harm than a physical affair. An emotional affair could mean the unfaithful partner is no longer invested in the relationship.

## What causes Infidelity?

Infidelity can occur for various reasons, often reflecting deeper issues within the relationship or individual psychological factors. Some common causes include:

1. **Lack of Emotional Fulfillment:** When partners feel emotionally neglected or disconnected, they might seek intimacy and validation elsewhere.
2. **Sexual Dissatisfaction:** A lack of sexual satisfaction or mismatched sexual desires can drive one partner to look outside the relationship to fulfill their needs.
3. **Desire for Novelty:** The excitement and novelty of a new relationship can be alluring, especially if the existing relationship has become routine or monotonous.
4. **Opportunity and Temptation:** Situations where partners are frequently away from each other or encounter tempting circumstances can lead to infidelity.
5. **Low Self-Esteem:** Individuals with low self-esteem may cheat to feel more desirable or validated.
6. **Revenge or Retaliation:** Infidelity can sometimes be an act of revenge in the response to perceived neglect, betrayal, or past infidelity by the partner.
7. **Personal Growth and Change:** Sometimes, people change over time and seek new experiences or connections that their current relationship doesn't provide.

## Impact of Infidelity?

The impact of infidelity on a relationship can be devastating and multifaceted:

- **Loss of Trust:** Trust is often the first casualty of infidelity, and it can be incredibly difficult to rebuild.
- **Emotional Pain:** Both partners typically experience intense emotional pain, including feelings of betrayal, guilt, anger, and sadness.
- **Damage to Self-Esteem:** The betrayed partner may suffer from diminished self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy.
- **Relationship Breakdown:** Infidelity can lead to the end of the relationship, particularly if both parties are unwilling or unable to work through the aftermath.
- **Impact on Mental Health:** Both partners may experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as a result of the infidelity.
- **Family Dynamics:** Infidelity can also affect children and extended family members, leading to strained relationships and emotional turmoil.

## Healing After Infidelity?

While infidelity can cause profound damage, it is possible for couples to heal and rebuild their relationship. Here are some steps that can help aid this process:

1. **Open Communication:** Honest and open communication is crucial. Both partners need to express their feelings, concerns, and needs without fear of judgment.
2. **Seek Professional Help:** Therapy, whether individual or couples counselling, can provide a structured environment to address the underlying issues and facilitate healing.
3. **Establish Boundaries:** Clear boundaries need to be set regarding acceptable behaviour and interactions outside the relationship.
4. **Rebuild Trust:** Rebuilding trust requires time, consistency, and transparency. The unfaithful partner must demonstrate reliability and honesty.
5. **Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is a critical component of healing. This doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the behaviour, but rather letting go of the hold it has on you.
6. **Focus on Self-Healing:** Both partners need to take care of their own emotional and mental health. Engaging in self-care activities and seeking support from friends and family can be beneficial.
7. **Work on the Relationship:** Couples should actively work on improving their relationship by spending quality time together, engaging in shared activities, and addressing any issues that led to the infidelity.

Infidelity is a complex and painful issue that can deeply affect both partners and the relationship as a whole. Understanding its causes and impacts is the first step towards addressing it. While the road to healing is challenging, with commitment, open communication, and professional guidance, it is possible to rebuild trust and emerge stronger. Each relationship is unique, and the journey to recovery will be different for every couple, but with patience and effort, healing can be achieved.

## Dishonesty:

Dishonesty in relationships is a significant issue that can erode trust and intimacy. It can manifest in various forms, from lying about small details to concealing major aspects of one's life. Understanding the root causes of dishonesty is crucial in addressing it and working towards rebuilding trust.

### Forms of Dishonesty:

1. **White Lies:** These are minor lies told to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to sidestep trivial conflicts. While often seem as harmless, they can accumulate and lead to distrust.
2. **Omissions:** Failing to disclose important information is a form of dishonesty. Omissions can be just as damaging as outright lies because they involve intentionally hiding the truth.
3. **Deception:** This involves deliberate attempts to mislead or create false impressions. It can include lies about significant aspects of life, such as finances, past relationships, or current activities.
4. **Exaggerations:** Stretching the truth or embellishing facts can also be considered dishonest, especially if done habitually.

### Causes of Dishonesty:

1. **Fear of Conflict:** Many people lie to avoid arguments or confrontations. They might believe that honesty will lead to negative reactions, so they choose to hide the truth to maintain peace.
2. **Fear of Rejection or Judgment:** Individuals may lie because they fear that revealing the truth will lead to rejection or harsh judgment from their partner. They worry about not being accepted for who they truly are.
3. **Low Self-Esteem:** People with low self-esteem may lie to present themselves in a better light. They might believe that the truth will make them look inadequate or unworthy of love.
4. **Desire to Protect:** Some lies are told with the intention of protecting the other person from hurtful truths. However, this form of dishonesty can backfire when the truth eventually comes to light.
5. **Previous Trauma:** Past experiences of betrayal or abuse can lead individuals to develop dishonest habits as a defence mechanism. They may have learned to lie as a way to protect themselves from further harm.
6. **Cultural and Social Pressures:** Societal norms and cultural expectations can also play a role. For example, someone might lie about their income, job status, or personal achievements to meet social standards or family expectations.
7. **Power Dynamics:** In relationships where there is an imbalance of power, the less powerful partner might lie to avoid repercussions or to maintain some control of their situation.

## Sexuality:

Sexuality refers to habits and preferences in terms of sexual behaviour.

People express this in many ways – sometimes people feel confusion or distress about their sexuality or sexual identity.

## Understanding Human Sexuality:

Human sexuality is complex and personal. It entails more than just sexual activity. A person's own definitions of sexuality may include:

- Feelings of attraction towards others
- Intimacy with others
- Feelings related to body image
- Personal values

People express and experience sexuality in many ways. Some ways people express their sexuality include:

- Thoughts
- Fantasies
- Behaviours
- Roles
- Through a relationship

Gender, orientation, and identity can influence sexuality, but these are distinct concepts.

- Sex refers to the sex determined at birth. Physical anatomy determines sex at birth.
- Gender refers to someone's knowledge of being male, female, non-binary, or other gender.
  - o Genderqueer: individuals who do not feel they are male or female but somewhere in between
  - o Transgender: individuals whose gender identity is the opposite of their assigned sex
  - o Gender Diverse: individuals who identify with a gender/s outside of male or female
  - o Non-Binary/Gender Binary: individuals who do not fall into category of male or female
- Sexuality is also different from sexual orientation.
- Orientation refers to the type of sexual attraction a person feels. Orientation categories include:
  - o Homosexuality: attraction to members of the same sex
  - o Heterosexuality: attraction to members of the opposite sex
  - o Bisexuality: attraction to members of both sexes
  - o Asexuality: a lack of sexual interest in others
  - o Pansexual: attraction to persons of all sexes and gender identities

## What Causes Sexual Issues:

Sexual intimacy can be satisfying and fulfilling, but for some, sex does not bring pleasure. Sexual issues can come from negative feelings or trauma. These can prevent someone from taking part in sexual intimacy. Sex Therapist Jill Denton explains, “each of us possesses a unique model of sexuality, formed at least in part by incoming family messages, childhood abuse or neglect, culture, the media, and, of course, religious influences.” These messages may disrupt healthy intimacy.

Sexual problems can also surface due to mental health issues and physical concerns can also cause sexual problems.

## Rebuilding Trust in Yourself and in your Relationship:

Rebuilding trust in your relationship can be difficult after it has been broken or compromised. Depending on the nature of the offense, convincing your partner that you can be trusted again may even feel impossible. Trust can be rebuilt if both partners are willing to put in the time and effort.

A healthy relationship is built on the foundation of mutual trust. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the breach of trust, the steps for reparation may vary.

Trust is rebuilt in small steps. Gradually, a little at a time. In a relationship, you will both need to decide together if you want to save the relationship and have space for this process in your life., as patience from both parties is vital.

There is no place for anger or resentment – remember that you have chosen to work on the relationship. Also, if you want certainty that your partner will never betray your trust again, the only way you can truly achieve this is by leaving the relationship.

There are 2 parties involved in the trust issue (victim and culprit) and both need to acknowledge that there is a lot of work required by both parties to regain trust – it is without doubt a two-way street. For example: the victim needs to decide if they wish to do the rebuilding, which takes time, patience and may involve painful emotions.

Here are some practical steps and exercises that can help couples regain trust and strengthen their relationship:

### Open and Honest Communication

Example:

Schedule regular “check-in” sessions where both partners can openly discuss their feelings, concerns, and progress. These sessions should be a safe space for honesty without fear of judgment or retaliation.

How to do it:

- Set a regular time each week for these conversations
- Use “I” statements to express feelings without blaming (e.g., I feel hurt when you ...”)
- Listen actively and empathetically to each other

### Sincere Apologies and Accountability

Example:

The partner who broke the trust should offer a sincere, heartfelt apology, acknowledging the hurt caused and taking full responsibility for their actions.

How to do it:

- Be specific about what you are apologising for
- Show genuine remorse and understanding of the impact of your actions
- Avoid making excuses or shifting blame

### Consistency and Reliability

Example:

Make and keep small promises to demonstrate reliability. If you say you’ll be home by 6PM, make sure you are.

How to do it:

- Start with small, manageable commitments
- Be consistent in your actions and follow through on what you say
- Communicate promptly if you cannot fulfill a promise

### Transparency

Example: Share aspects of your daily life with your partner, such as giving access to your social media accounts or being open about your schedule.

How to do it:

- Share passwords if both partners are comfortable with it
- Be open about your whereabouts and activities
- Encourage transparency from both sides to avoid a one-sided effort

## Rebuilding Intimacy

Example: Engage in activities that foster closeness and connection, such as date nights or shared hobbies.

How to do it:

- Plan regular date nights where you can focus on each other without distractions
- Take up a new hobby or activity together to create positive, shared experiences
- Spend quality time together, whether it's cooking, hiking, or just talking

## Forgiveness Exercises

Example: Write letters to each other expressing your feelings and your commitment to moving forward, then read them aloud.

How to do it:

- Write a letter that details your feelings, what you're willing to forgive, and your hopes for the future
- Set aside a special time to read these letters to each other in a calm and intimate setting
- Discuss the content and reaffirm your commitment to rebuilding trust

## Trust-Building Activities

Example: Participate in trust-building exercises, such as the "blindfold walk" where one partner is blindfolded and guided by the other.

How to do it:

- Choose an activity that requires mutual cooperation and trust
- The "blindfold walk" involves one partner being blindfolded while the other gives verbal instructions to navigate a path safely.
- Reflect on the experience afterward to discuss feelings of trust and reliance.

## Journaling and Sharing

Example: Both partners keep a journal where they write down their thoughts and feelings about the relationship, then share excerpts with each other.

How to do it:

- Set aside time each day or week to write in your journal
- Share entries with each other during your regular check-ins
- Use the insights gained to understand each other better and address any concerns

## Re-establishing Boundaries

Example: Define and agree on new boundaries that help both partners feel secure and respected in the relationship.

How to do it:

- Discuss and agree on what behaviours are acceptable and what are not
- Write down these boundaries and review them regularly to ensure both partners are comfortable and feel respected
- Be open to renegotiating boundaries as your relationship evolves



Trust is built in very small moments of ‘turning toward’ (John Gottman).

Turning toward means you are ATTUNEd to the other person:

A = Awareness of the other person’s emotions

T = we Turn Toward the other person

T = we have Tolerance for the other person’s opinion

U = we have Understanding of the other person

N = we use Non-defensive responding

E = we have Empathy when we respond

“The work of trust building occurs as you move through life together. This is not to say that the trust you have now isn’t real. It’s an acknowledgement that the trust you do have is not yet as strong as it will be one day. There simply is no substitute for mastering the tenets of attunement.” John Gottman.

Infidelity is a betrayal of trust and intimacy, but having a relationship based on zero-tolerance is an ineffective strategy as it is difficult to establish trust on a conditional basis.

One of the hardest things about trusting someone is learning to have confidence in your own judgment. Trust is about much more than finding signs that your partner has been unfaithful. It’s about believing that they have your best interests at heart.

Your partner is not solely responsible for creating mistrustful feelings. You must take equal responsibility for creating an atmosphere of safety and security in your relationship. Ask yourself:

Does my fear of loss / abandonment cloud my perspective and cause me to overact?

- Is my mistrust coming from something that is actually happening in the present or is it related to my past?
- Do I bring my best self to my interactions with my partner?
- Do I feel comfortable allowing myself to be vulnerable in this relationship?

## Gottman's 7 Ways to proactively build trust in your relationship

1. Acknowledge your feels and practice being vulnerable in small steps.  
Build confidence in being more open with your partner. Discussing minor issues (schedules or meals) is a great place to start before tackling bigger matters like kids or finances
2. Be honest and communicate about key issues in your relationship  
Be sure to be forthcoming about finances, your past, and concerns with a family member, co-workers, or children. Don't sweep important issues under the rug because this can lead to resentment.
3. Challenge mistrustful thoughts  
Ask yourself: is my lack of trust due to my partner's actions, my own insecurities, or both?  
Be aware of unresolved issues from your past relationships that may be triggering mistrust in the present.
4. Trust your intuition and instincts  
Have confidence in your own perceptions and pay attention to red flags. Be vulnerable and ask for reassurance if you feel mistrustful.
5. Assume your partner has good intentions  
If he or she lets you down, it may just be a failure in competence – sometimes people simply make a mistake
6. Listen to your partner's side of the story  
Believe that there are honest people in the world. Unless you have a strong reason to mistrust him/her, have faith in your partner.
7. Practice having a recovery conversation after an argument  
Take a short break if you feel overwhelmed or flooded and set a time to process what happened. This will give you both time to calm down and collect your thoughts so you can have a more meaningful dialogue with your partner.

In *The Science of Trust*, John Gottman explains that practicing emotional attunement while relaxing together can help you stay connected in spite of your differences. This means turning toward one another by showing empathy, responding appropriately to bids for connection, and not being defensive.

Asking your partner open-ended questions is a great way to increase emotional closeness and build trust. If you ask questions that require a yes or no answer, you're closing the door to dialogue.

## How to rebuild trust when it's been broken:

For a relationship to succeed in the long run, you must be able to trust each other. Building trust with a partner is really about the small moments of connection that allow you to feel safe and truly believe that your partner will show up for you.

John and Julie Gottman suggest that if you break any agreements about trust with your partner, there are steps to fix what's been broken. These steps include setting time to talk, naming the feelings you experienced due to the breach of trust without blame or criticism, listening to your partner without judgment, and each partner describing their perspectives and discussing any feelings that were triggered by the incident.

To rebuild trust it is important for both partners to assess how they contributed to the incident and holding themselves accountable, each person apologizing and accepting an apology, and developing a plan to prevent further breaches of trust from occurring. You have the power to break free from the hold that mistrust has on your relationship and create the kind of intimacy you seek.

How can you know you're in a happy relationship that's both good for your health and everyone around you? You can take a free quiz and find out how well you know your partner by clicking on the link below.

### RELATIONSHIP QUIZ

[https://gottmanconnect.com/site/quiz?utm\\_source=tgi-blog&utm\\_medium=quiz-red-btn&utm\\_campaign=conflict&\\_hstc=138906604.397e530ce6b976383e33e846d19b70d7.1705372360057.1705372360057.1705372360057.1&\\_hssc=138906604.2.1705372360057&\\_hsfp=3330727882](https://gottmanconnect.com/site/quiz?utm_source=tgi-blog&utm_medium=quiz-red-btn&utm_campaign=conflict&_hstc=138906604.397e530ce6b976383e33e846d19b70d7.1705372360057.1705372360057.1705372360057.1&_hssc=138906604.2.1705372360057&_hsfp=3330727882)

Communication plays a fundamental role in building trust within a relationship. Effective communication also involves non-verbal cues, such as body language and eye contact. Partners need to be aware of these non-verbal signs to better understand communication and connection.

## Rebuilding your Relationship After Infidelity;

As you are rebuilding your relationship, remember the following:

1. **Avoid assuming things will be like they once were.** Your relationship will not look the same after infidelity, but it is possible to build something new. Focus on building the new relationship together. This takes time, open communication, honesty with yourself and with your partner, and the ability to tolerate your uncomfortable feelings while acknowledging your partner's feelings.
2. **Stay in the present.** One of the most difficult things about rebuilding trust after infidelity is staying in the present moment and building toward the future, rather than living in or worrying about the past. If you and your partner cannot let go of the painful feelings from the past and work toward a more positive, trusting future, it might be a sign the relationship is over.
3. **Trust yourself.** You might be questioning your own instincts, but learning to trust yourself, your feelings, and your ability to move forward is key to rebuilding your relationship.
4. **Each partner has the right to privacy.** What you share with each other is a decision for each of you to make, but it is not appropriate to constantly check your partner's cell phone or social media.
5. **Take responsibility.** Own up to your behaviours and choices and understand how they have impacted your partner.
6. **Keep promises.** Follow through and do what you say you are going to do.
7. **Give your relationship time to heal.** You and your partner have the right to feel and express difficult emotions throughout the rebuilding process. At times it might seem like you are taking one step forward and two steps back, but recognise this process takes time. A relationship damaged by infidelity cannot be rebuilt overnight.
8. **Communicate openly.** Really listen to your partner. Be honest with your partner about what you need and work to understand what they need.
9. **Spend time together.** Do fun activities together – attend a concert, plan a picnic in the park, take a walk along the beach.
10. **Change your routine.** Start doing something completely new, such as taking up a new hobby or activity together.
11. **Address long-standing problems.** If there are underlying, previously-avoided issues such as new addiction, financial problems, or other issues that strain the relationship – address them now!

## Reflection Question:

- Do you want to rebuild your relationship: Yes No
- What is the biggest hurdle to mending your relationship? Be specific
- What are some ways you can take responsibility for your part in the relationship breakdown?
- What are some ways you can be emotionally vulnerable with your partner?
- Do you feel comfortable asking your partner for what you need and want in the relationship? Explain.
- In what ways can you give your partner space if he/she needs it? Explain
- Do you treat your partner with respect and kindness? What are some ways you can be more respectful and kind?
- What are some way you can better communicate with your partner?
- Are there any long-standing problems or issues that should be addressed? Describe
- What are some ways you can spend time with your partner to strengthen your bond?
- What else can you do in the next week to help repair your relationship? List your own ideas

## Rebuilding Trust Exercises:

### 1. Cuddle for 15 Minutes

Any type of body contact releases a hormone called 'oxytocin' – also known as the bonding hormone and helps you to feel bonded with that person.

*Most of us don't have time to sit and cuddle our partners for more than 5 minutes, but it's a great way to bond. Find 15 minutes where you won't be interrupted, turn off your phones and cuddle up to your partner. Try to be in the moment and think about your other sensations, how their touch makes you feel, and how much the cuddling time makes you feel more connected and safe with them.*

### 2. Eye Gazing

Eye contact is said to trigger something in our brain called the Limbic Mirror System. When triggered, it gives us a better understanding of other people's emotions.

- *Sit down facing your partner, making sure your knees are close*
- *Decide on a time and set a timer (five minutes is great to start with). Close your eyes and take some deep breaths.*
- *Now open your eyes and look straight into your partner's eyes, without talking. It may feel a little awkward at the beginning but you'll get used to it.*
- *As you look into their eyes say something nice about them. Then allow them time to say the same to you.*
- *When the time beeps share how you both feel. Did it help you feel a deeper connection, was it tough?*

### 3. Say What you Feel and Ask for What you Want

Effective communication is key to building trust and understanding in any relationship. The “Say What You Feel and Ask for What you Want” exercise is designed to help partners express their emotions and needs clearly and constructively. This exercise helps partners understand each other better, reduce conflicts, and strengthen their emotional connection.

When clarifying your needs, focus on how you FEEL rather than what the other person DOES. This ensures that the other person does not feel attacked.

#### - **Identify feelings**

Each partner takes turns expressing what they feel. Use “I” statements to take ownership of your emotions.

*Example: I feel hurt when you cancel our plans at the last minute.*

#### - **Ask for what you want**

After expressing a feeling, clearly state what you need or want from your partner to address that feeling

*Example: I would appreciate it if you could let me know in advance if you need to change our plans.*

#### - **Practice Active Listening**

The listening partner should repeat back what they heard to confirm their understanding.

*Example: I hear you saying that you feel hurt when I cancel plans last minute, and you would appreciate more notice if plans need to change. Is that correct?*

#### - **Respond Constructively**

The listening partner responds with empathy and a willingness to meet the expressed need if possible.

*Example: I understand how that could be frustrating, and I’ll make an effort to inform you earlier if I need to change our plans.*

#### - **Switch Roles**

Repeat the process with the other partner expressing their feelings and needs

#### - **Reflect Together**

After both partners have had a turn, discuss how this exercise felt

Reflect on what was learned about each other’s feelings and needs

Consider how this exercise can improve future communication

By providing a structured way to express feelings and needs, this exercise helps partners understand each other better, reduce conflicts, and strengthen their emotional connection. Practicing this exercise regularly can lead to a healthier, more supportive relationship where both partners feel heard and valued.

#### 4. Create a Vision Board Together

Clarity is fundamental to establishing trust. This activity encourages open communication, alignment of goals, and mutual understanding, all of which are crucial for building and maintaining trust.

A vision board is a visual representation of your goals, dreams, and aspirations. It typically involves a collage of items, words, and affirmations that reflect what you want to achieve in various aspects of your life. When created together as a couple, a vision board can serve as a shared roadmap for your future, helping you both to clarify and align your intentions and goals.

Create a vision of your life together in the next one to five years. Search online for ‘couples goals, inspirational images, and words that exemplify your bond’. Find places where compromise may need to be made and discuss how both parties can meet their needs.

#### 5. Clear the Air with Genuine Apologies

Apologies are essential in repairing relationships and rebuilding trust after misunderstandings or conflict. However, not all apologies are created equal. Genuine apologies can heal wounds and restore trust, while fake or manipulative apologies can further damage relationships.

##### ***“Never ruin an apology with an excuse”, Benjamin Franklin***

By making excuses for something said or done, it detracts from the apology.

Fake/Manipulative Apologies	Genuine Apologies
“I’m sorry, but....” [A “but” cancels out the apology because it introduces an excuse or criticism]	“I’m sorry that I did X, and I will do Y to ensure this doesn’t happen again.”
“I’ve already said I’m sorry 10 times. Can we get over it already?” [Trying to silence the other person or force forgiveness too soon]	“I’m sorry. I can see this is still bothering you. Let’s talk about what I can do to make it better.”
“Sorry, you did X, and it made me do Y.” or “I’m sorry you felt hurt by what I said at the party last night.” [Focused on the other person’s response rather than your actions]	“I’m sorry I said something that hurt your feelings. It was insensitive and uncalled for. I should not be making mean jokes like that.”
“I’m sorry. It hurts me that you are so upset.” [Trying to overshadow the hurt party with your remorse or pain]	“I am so sorry I hurt you.”
“I’m sorry, it takes two to make a fight.” or “Sorry, but you started it.” [Deflecting blame]	“I’m sorry for my part in this fight. I should not have escalated things by saying, X.”
“Sorry, I promise I will X.” [No action]	Apology + real behavior change
“You’re overreacting.” [Gaslighting and discrediting the other person’s emotional experience]	“I was wrong when I....”
“I’ll apologize if you....” [Blaming the other person for their reaction to your behavior]	“I take accountability for what I did wrong, and I understand why you feel this way.”

## 6. Share Vulnerabilities

Sharing vulnerabilities involves opening up about your fears, insecurities, or past experiences with another person. By exposing your own vulnerabilities, you demonstrate trust in the other person's ability to empathise and support you. This exercise allows both individuals to connect on a deeper level, as it fosters a safe and non-judgmental space for sharing personal struggles and concerns.

## 7. Try a New Hobby

New experiences push you out of your comfort zone and foster experiential intimacy, which furthers trust between a couple. The hobby should be new to both of you, something that neither of you have done. . Both of you should be interested in doing it. Take turns on deciding on new activities for you to try.

## 8. Trust Fall

The trust fall exercise is a classic relationship-strengthening activity designed to enhance trust and foster a deeper sense of connection between participants. This exercise involves one person falling backward, trusting that their partner will catch them. It symbolises reliance and support, making it a powerful tool for building trust in relationships.

1. The “truster” starts in a rigid standing position with arms crossed over the chest. They can stand on the ground or on a raised platform.
2. The trust team or partner(s) stand behind them with their arms out to catch them. Some teams interlace their hands to create a “bed” for them to fall on. If one partner is significantly larger in size, then it's important to verify that they can physically support the other person's body weight.
3. For everyone's safety, **clearly communicate which way they will fall**. Do not allow the “truster” to fall forward or sideways. Set up pillows or other buffers to prevent any injuries.
4. Optionally, the “truster” can close their eyes and count to three.
5. As they let go and fall backward, their team or partner catches them and safely places their feet on the ground.

The trust fall exercise is a powerful and symbolic activity that can significantly enhance trust and strengthen bonds in both personal and professional relationships. By relying on each other in a controlled, safe environment, participants can confront and overcome fears related to trust and vulnerability. This exercise not only builds trust but also fosters open communication, mutual support, and deeper connections, making it a valuable tool for anyone looking to improve their relationships.