

Boyfriend is 'unfaithful' Oakland Literacy Council honors volunteer as its Tutor of the Year



RELATIONSHIP REALITIES
KAREN WIATER

Q. My boyfriend has been "sort of" unfaithful to me in our seven years of dating. He says he has never slept with any of the girls he has been with but has admitted to kissing and doing some heavy petting. I know we were only 17 when we first started seeing each other, and that it's normal to be curious about being with other people, but we are truly in love. I don't want to end this relationship, and he says he has changed, but I can't seem to quit worrying it will happen again. How can I put this behind me?

A. Being unfaithful, or infidelity, is one of the biggest hurdles any relationship has to face. Some can recover from it, while others crash and burn, ending up broken and irreparable. How can we learn to trust again?

When we first meet someone, trust is a given. We have not hurt them, and they have not hurt us. We approach each other openly and lovingly and enjoy all the wonderful things being in love has to offer. You believe them when they say they will be at a certain place at a certain time, believe them when they tell you about their feelings, believe them when they say they love only you. It's a great feeling.

Then we find out about the

"incident." Trust is broken. We cannot believe this person whom we so love has betrayed us. We hate the "other" person for being what our partner so obviously wanted instead of us. We plot ways to hurt our partner. We think of ways to get revenge. We feel superior. We are hurt. We cry.

A decision must be made. To stay and try again, or to leave and find another with whom trust will be a given. We choose to stay. Against all odds, against our better judgment, against advice from friends and family, we decide to stay. Now comes the reconstruction and revamping of the relationship. Expect it to change, but it can be salvaged if both partners are committed to the process.

With the couples I have worked with, infidelity is typically a symptom of problems in the relationship, rather than the problem itself. Frequently, there are many issues that cause one partner to stray outside the relationship. More obvious issues are money problems, sexual incompatibility, parenting conflicts and time crunches. Couples are overburdened with chores and responsibilities and feel unsupported and unappreciated by their spouse. Anger and resentment set in and create great distance, which block intimacy, emotional as well as physical. Couples grow farther apart and look to someone else to meet their needs for companionship.

In your situation, starting out very young was a disadvantage. Curiosity about others is natural and so is pursuing it. The difficulty arises when both people

are not ready to date others, or the one who wants to "try it out" but not lose the closeness of the long-term relationship. Your partner's "sort of" unfaithfulness shows he had some hesitancy in engaging in the other situation. He says he has changed. To stay in the relationship will require changing on your part as well.

Forgiveness is the primary key. An ability to put the situation behind you and work to identify the problems existing in the relationship is paramount. Remember, infidelity is usually the symptom of a problem, not the problem itself. Focus on making new happy memories as a couple.

Talk often and share feelings, although beating a dead horse (the unfaithfulness issue) won't help. Avoid holding the incident over the other person's head. Undoubtedly, it's easy to feel superior when you look at the behavior itself but not so simple when looking at the behavior that led up to the infidelity.

I strongly suggest getting counseling to help you objectively focus on resolving the situation that led up to the unfaithfulness. Some say it's harder to walk away from a relationship. I'm not so sure.

Rochester Hills resident Karen Wiater is one of three therapists who alternate in writing this new relationship column. She is a psychotherapist in Bloomfield Hills, specializing in relationship conflicts.

Questions for her may be sent to: Karen Wiater, Suburban Life, The Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Bloomfield Hills teacher and resident Sherry Stewart, a volunteer tutor for more than 10 years and a tutor trainer for the last two years, has been recognized as the 1998 Tutor of the Year by the Oakland Literacy Council.

Stewart was surprised with the honor at the council's recent annual recognition dinner at the Bloomfield Township Public Library.

Enthusiastic about what she describes as "incredibly wonderful experiences tutoring," Stewart says literacy tutoring has been "very satisfying" for her personally. "It's so important for a person to learn to read," she says.

The full-time substitute teacher, married and the mother of two grown sons, started tutoring a basic literacy student, followed with an English-as-a-second-language student, then continued with successive students for more than 10 years.

Also honored were Nadine Jakobowski of Bloomfield Township, as Volunteer of the Year, and Irina Bogdanova of Southfield, a native of the Ukraine, an English-as-a-second-language Student of the Year. Miya Kuribayashi of Farmington Hills, a native of Japan and a literacy council student, received a special Student Volunteer of the Year award for her contributions to tutor workshops.

Honorees were presented plaques and Borders gift certificates by council director Cathryn Weiss of Clarkston.



Nadine Jakobowski



Sherry Stewart



Miya Kuribayashi (right) and her tutor Jean Villa



Irina Bogdanova (left) and her tutor Helen Rossi

The non-profit Oakland Literacy Council recruits and trains volunteers who meet weekly with adult learners to teach reading, writing, spelling and

conversational English at no cost to students. For information, contact the council office at (248) 338-8840.

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