

We're Just Friends: The Insidious Affair No One Just "Gets Over"

It starts innocently enough...

- You have a cup of coffee in the break room at work.
- You linger awhile after your shift at the dog shelter where you both volunteer.
- You share a story that gives insight into your private life...just the smallest view.

Gradually, an acquaintance becomes something more.

While you never lay a finger on each other, you'd never want to give it up either – at least not until your spouse finds out – and then, out comes the old line "It's not like that. We're just friends."

I've known people in my practice who actually believe that their closeness with another person doesn't constitute an affair. They assume that if there's no physical contact, they're safe. And their partner shouldn't be stressed about it. Yeah, try telling that to the person NOT in the room. The "just friends' line never passes the sniff test with the spouse.

They simply don't see it that way. In fact, for many, an emotional affair is worse than a physical affair. At least the physical affair may be just that – purely physical and somewhat easier to forget. After a one-night stand, you might hear things like "it didn't mean anything." And that could be true.

But it's a little trickier to extricate the real importance of an affair that starts with a friendship.

That's why the emotional affair must be cut down just as swiftly as a physical liaison. I've seen people even switch jobs to get away from her "friend" just to keep the peace and make the spouse happy.

No room for two

How do you know when you're veering dangerously close to an affair?

First of all, you know it in your heart. If you look forward to time with this person, you can't wait to see them and talk with them. Your happiness depends on being with them...trust me, it's an affair.

When basic rules of engagement are exceeded. For example, you're sharing things with your friend that you don't or won't share with your partner...that's also an affair.

You keep the person a secret. In fact, you wouldn't want your partner to know about this person, period. You don't even mention his or her name...affair. Hands down.

The thing to ask yourself in any of these situations is **why** this person means so much to you. Not: what are you NOT doing that justifies being allowed to carry on with them? The real truth always emerges with the "why?"

- **The affair satisfies an emotional void.** Maybe you can talk about a hobby or dream with this person that your spouse doesn't understand about you. The affair/friend is certainly fulfills a deep connection you crave but are not getting from your partner.
- **Friendship is missing from your lasting relationship.** Say your affair/friend make you feel special, heard, or seen. You're getting that rush of fondness from outside your marriage or partnership. (Can you see why this would make your partner upset?) Little

things like holding doors, asking questions, and smiling in response to something you said can make all the difference.

- **You fantasize about getting physical.** You're in deep if you've even begun sharing details about your spouse with this special someone outside it. If you're envisioning something more than an emotional affair, you're crossing the line of friendship. By this point, even outsiders will recognize the affair. You're teetering on the edge of a drastic and hurtful justification if you can't see how damaging that is.

So breaking off the friendship/affair is crucial if you want to save your marriage. The points above give clues how to regain the spark with the partner you've committed to. But you have to make the decision to try.

A mental or emotional affair is just as hurtful to a relationship as a physical affair, if not more so, because it's a connection that has lasting consequences. If you find yourself defending yourself with the claim "we're just friends," look at it from your partner's eyes and check this: if the shoe were on the other foot, would you be fine with this "friendship?"