



## Episode 13

### Trust After Betrayal

#### **HCH Narrator 1:17**

Welcome to the Helping Couples Heal Podcast, a place for healing and hope for couples impacted by betrayal resulting from infidelity and or sex addiction. Your hosts are Marnie Breecker and Duane Osterlind, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, certified sex addiction therapists and founders of respected treatment centers in Long Beach, Los Angeles and San Diego, California. Marnie and Duane co-created Helping Couples Heal, a comprehensive program for couples recovering from betrayal trauma, including an in person two day workshop and online aftercare program, and this podcast series is the first component of the program. Thank you for listening. Marnie and Duane are committed to helping you recover from the devastating impact of betrayal trauma, and are honored to support you wherever you may be in your healing. If you've lost hope, you've come to the right place. Now, take a slow, deep breath, and let's begin with the Helping Couples Heal podcast.

#### **Marnie Breecker 2:20**

Hello, everyone, welcome back to the Helping Couples Heal podcast.

#### **Duane Osterlind 2:23**

Welcome, everyone. Glad you're listening.

**Marnie Breecker 2:25**

So this is Marnie, and I'm here with Duane. And before we start today, I would just like to thank those of you who have been writing to us and providing feedback. We have been getting a lot of feedback recently and we are really appreciative. We appreciate the time that you've taken to write to us and to respond. And we also want to acknowledge that we know that not everybody is going to agree with everything that Duane and I say. And we know that we're going to have, and we do have, guests on our podcast, and you will likely not agree with everything that our guests say. And we just wanted to speak to that. Because you know, when you do a podcast like this, and you're speaking to such a wide audience, you know, there's going to be both positive and negative reactions to different things. And we feel like in order to be as effective, as comprehensive, for us to do the very best job that we can to speak to this topic, we need to really be open to all reactions and have a very open dialogue. So we are grateful that you're that you're trusting us, we hope that we have earned your trust and that you know that we are here with one goal in mind. And that goal is specifically to support all of you who are still struggling.

**Duane Osterlind 3:41**

And I'd also like to be able to add that we also understand that as clinicians and as people, we're constantly learning new information. So we also understand that as we get new information about these topics, that may change our viewpoint on something and that we're going to grow with it. And we're going to continue to pursue the best possible outcome for anybody who is struggling with betrayal trauma, and we're going to be willing to learn and listen and understand that we don't have all the answers. We're still learning. And we're still growing. And that's also part of this podcast as well.

**Marnie Breecker 4:24**

Yeah, and being willing to have difficult conversations.

**Duane Osterlind 4:27**

Right, yeah, because this is a hard topic. There's a lot of pain and there's a lot of hurt and a lot of trauma. It's hard to walk through all that, to hear everyone's story and what they have to say and their feelings on all sides of that equation.

**Marnie Breecker 4:43**

I was just gonna say speaking to exactly that with betrayal, partners have been denied the truth, which is what the greatest wounding is, right? Is that denial of truth and the shattering of trust? And I imagine what might be a little bit challenging here or confusing is that when it comes to speaking about how to treat betrayal trauma, I don't know that there is only one truth. And that might be hard for people to hear. I think that there's truths in certain areas, right?

**Duane Osterlind 5:13**

Right.

**Marnie Breecker 5:13**

But the reality is based on all the feedback that we have gotten from so many different partners and addicts and clinicians, it's clear to us that some people resonate with some of the things that other people might offer that we don't even agree with. And then it's clear that we operate from a way that there are people that are completely convinced this is the only way to do it. And it really resonates and works for them. But that doesn't mean that it's the truth to somebody else. And so, you know, I just want to speak to that and acknowledge that, that that is probably very difficult, because I imagine as a betrayed partner, I would really want truth, I would want solid concrete answers. And I'd want there to be a definite truth. And I think in our conversation, you know, not just today, but in all of these episodes, and with all of our guests, it's not necessarily one truth, right? And not one size fits all.

**Duane Osterlind 6:06**

Yeah, there's a saying that I live by a lot. And I don't know who said this, or where I got this, but it's kind of rung very true for me, as I've grown as a clinician and as a person. And that's beware the tyranny of the one right way. I always go to that and know that I'm open for learning and seeing new information and new ideas, and willing to shift my thinking, when those new ideas make sense to me, and continue to grow in that that process. And as we do this podcast, we're going to be doing the same thing.

**Marnie Breecker 6:37**

Yeah, and I share that philosophy with you, Duane. And I also want to say again, that as a betrayed partner, I think it would probably be very painful for me if listening to this podcast, or any other podcast, or even reading a book or an article and seeing information presented that is so opposite of the experience I had, in other words, reading something that's supposed to be billed as being helpful. And if I've had a totally opposite experience, and in fact, had been further traumatized, I can imagine that that's really hard. And so I don't know what the answer is to that I feel for everybody that's listening, and who's struggling. And I hope that people are able to recognize that we are truly doing our very best to have as open and honest a dialogue about betrayal trauma as is humanly possible. And we continue to welcome your suggestions, your ideas, your feedback, whether it's positive or negative. And we hope that you will continue to stay in touch with us and let us know what's going on for you and how you're reacting to what we're talking about.

**Duane Osterlind 7:36**

What I'd also like to say is, if you're out there and you're working with someone that it doesn't feel like a fit, go get another opinion, go talk to more people, find what works for you, no matter what. Go out there and look for it.

**Marnie Breecker 7:49**

And you know, this might be opening up a whole other can of worms. But to that point, something that I think happens a lot with betrayal trauma recovery, or relational recovery, is that there might be a partner therapist who is very partner sensitive, very trauma informed, and then the addict's therapist might not be operating from that same lens or approach. And I do think that it can become very confusing and can create further obstacles for the couple if they are seeing therapists that are not on the same page. And so I do think it's important when couples are seeking help together, that they do make sure and they asked the right questions of their therapists to make sure that everybody is going to be working on the same team.

**Duane Osterlind 8:31**

Right from the same model.

**Marnie Breecker 8:32**

Exactly.

**Duane Osterlind 8:32**

I think what we could do a whole episode on that topic alone is coordinating care, your own care, and finding a team that can support you through all of that, that everybody's coming from the same model, because it can get very confusing if people are coming from different models.

**Marnie Breecker 8:48**

Right? If you're just doing your own individual work, I think it's less of an issue. However, if you're in a relationship, and you want the relationship to heal, truly, that coordination of care that you talked about is crucial. And just really making sure that you're with people that are working from a relational model. Otherwise, I think that that can create more treatment induced trauma. And I think that, we know it, I hear it over and over and over again from clients.

**Duane Osterlind 9:10**

Definitely. So let's move a little bit farther. This conversation took a little bit longer than we thought it would. But let's talk about the topic we're going to talk about today, which relates to this in a way, which is establishing trust in a relationship,

**Marnie Breecker 9:26**

And why it's so difficult with betrayal trauma to reestablish trust, and rebuild trust and intimacy.

**Duane Osterlind 9:32**

Right.

**Marnie Breecker 9:32**

So you know, we both, Duane and I, have been working in this field for a very long time. And both of us, as well as most of the colleagues that we know, would agree that it's very rare that we've seen a couple enter the process of recovery from betrayal and have a very easy time, reconnecting, rebuilding trust and intimacy and all of that. And so there's obviously then a universal response to betrayal, which is that once trust is shattered, it's very difficult to rebuild, especially in the context of a relationship where there's an expectation of trust and safety. And where somebody would have, you know, as I hear partners say a lot, "I would have bet my life on the fact that my husband never would have done what he did." Rarely do we see a case where a couple comes into recovery from betrayal and they're able to skate right through, right, where it's easy, and they're able to easily rebuild trust, and intimacy and safety and all of that, the universal response that we see with couples is a lot of relational trauma, and that it can take years to rebuild trust. And so what we wanted to talk about briefly in this short episode today was, why is it so difficult to rebuild trust after betrayal?

**Duane Osterlind 10:43**

And I think that goes to the answer of safety. Right? Is that once that safe haven, if you want to call it that, is shattered or that idea that my partner is the person I can go to, we can't trust that we're going to be okay, going to that.

**Marnie Breecker 11:01**

Right, that safe haven that you thought you had is no longer there.

**Duane Osterlind 11:05**

Right. Having that safety is how we can be relational. And if we don't have it, and that has been betrayed, it's a huge risk to put ourselves out there, to be vulnerable. to expose ourselves to all these difficult feelings that come in a relationship, if we're not certain or have some level of certainty, right? We don't have to have full certainty, we just have to have enough certainty that we're going to be treated okay.

**Marnie Breecker 11:34**

Well, certainly not that our partner is going to in any way hurt us or do anything to jeopardize our emotional or physical well being.

**Duane Osterlind 11:43**

Right. And I think Brene Brown talks a lot about this, the price for intimacy and connection is that vulnerability. And that vulnerability is that I am going to expose myself to you, my person, and that I'm hoping you will accept that and be with it and allow me to be myself fully. And in a betrayed relationship that has been broken, and you can't have the trust that your partner will respond. They don't have to respond perfectly. But you don't have the trust that they'll respond respectfully, compassionately, not necessarily do they have to agree, but you don't have that faith anymore. You don't know what's true about it. And that's so hard. And to get that back is where the person has done the betrayal, that consistent, noticeable trustworthy actions come into play to build that trust back. And that takes a long time because of the price and the vulnerability for the person who's going to give that other person trust is so high.

**Marnie Breecker 12:47**

Yes. And I would also say that, you know, even with one betrayal, if there's a relationship that suffers one betrayal, I think it's difficult to rebuild trust. But when we're talking about what we normally see with betrayal trauma, which is more than one betrayal, you know, a series of betrayals, sometimes over the course of many, many, many years, or even over the course of an entire lifetime together sometimes, that is so much more difficult than to try to heal from something like that. And you know, what we see a lot with betrayal trauma treatment, or in betrayal trauma treatment, is what we talk about over and over, that staggered disclosure. So in terms of rebuilding trust, typically what we see is that in the early stages, a partner really wants to rebuild trust, you know, and is desperate to be able to rebuild trust and makes efforts even at that, but when some new information dribbles out again, and there's a new discovery, and then perhaps a new discovery and a new discovery that makes later healing and trust very, very difficult.

**Duane Osterlind 13:45**

Definitely, you know, I was thinking, as you were talking too, I was thinking one more element. So now you have all this trauma, right, which creates all these intense emotions, so to be relational, and build trust back, but when we have all these intense emotions, it can be difficult to be present with our partners, it can be difficult to listen, you know, these, these intense emotions come in, and they also disrupt the process. And that's not to say, I want to be very clear, that's not to say that you shouldn't have anger or anything like that, or you shouldn't have these intense emotions, but they can impact how we respond and react. And we have to be aware of that. We have to have some awareness of how that impacts the relationship and relational healing.

**Marnie Breecker 14:34**

Yeah, and this is a sensitive topic because I think many times partners expect and want and I understand why they would, the person who has hurt them to be able to quote unquote, fall on their sword as many times as necessary over and over and over again, and that they could have whatever reaction they experience in the moment is and so, the easiest one to talk about would be yelling or screaming. And while in theory I absolutely understand that it would make sense that you would want to scream and yell, from a neuroscience perspective, what we know about the brain, the other person is often literally not capable of taking in and holding that response and staying present. So it makes relational healing very complicated, because oftentimes what are natural responses to pain and trauma, which the partners are having, are not able to be met with the compassion and empathy and love that they need, and they feel angry, and they expect their partner to be able to do that and have that. But what we know, again, based on neuroscience, what we know about the brain, that oftentimes when somebody has their own trauma response, maybe to being yelled at, their brain, they might go into that fight, flight or freeze and totally just shut down, or get angry and retaliatory or defensive or run out of the room or slam a door. And then that leaves the partner feeling more traumatized, more hurt, more abandoned, and also frustrated and confused about why the person who did this can't just apologize over and over and over and continue to fall on his sword.

**Duane Osterlind 16:10**

You're right, it is such a balancing act. And that's what I think also makes it so difficult that both people in the relationship have to work on that common goal of hearing each other, even in those intense moments, listening to each other and being there for each other. And it's a tough road.

**Marnie Breecker 16:33**

Yeah, and being a partner sensitive and partner trauma informed therapist does not mean that we tell the addict or the person who has betrayed their partner, that they have to just take whatever response comes their way, because it's not realistic. Because, you know, most of the people that are in this situation come from their own trauma history. And they're bringing that into the current situation. And so I will say that working with couples is incredibly challenging for this reason, because you have a traumatized partner who has truly been shattered and devastated by what's been done, and, you know, natural responses, but then another person who's there whose shame is so high, because they're seeing the consequences of what they've done. And now they're trying to face the person that they hurt the most. And oftentimes, they just can't, without a lot of help and support from professionals learn how to tolerate their own trauma responses, work through them in order to remain present for the reacting partner.

**Duane Osterlind 17:37**

And being able to do that, being able to do all of that emotion regulation, being present, gives you the best chance of having that relational healing and rebuilding that basic trust in a relationship that you are both there for each other. It takes that work.

**Marnie Breecker 17:57**

Well, I think what I hear you saying also is that that's why it is so important that an addict is working with - if an addict comes into treatment and is in a relationship, it's important to be with a therapist who's relationally minded, because I believe it's incumbent upon the addict's therapist to help him develop the skills of empathy, and have compassion and of managing their own trauma reactions. So that instead of you know, going into the trauma reaction and shutting down and then causing more of a rupture in the relationship, for them to learn how to manage themselves, so that then they're able to show up for the relationship. And I'm going to put in a quick plug for a book that I think is fantastic in this regard, which is called *Growing Yourself Back Up*. And it talks all about trauma reactions, or another word for that would be a regression, and I think offers a lot of great tools to learn how to manage trauma reactions.

**Duane Osterlind 18:55**

Right. So it's like, as we paint this picture, you've got the betrayal that's happened due to the acting out behavior and the addiction. So you have all of that trauma. And then what you're also saying is that we bring all of our own internalized trauma, maybe from our own childhood, into this as well. And that's all in this big pot that we're working on. And that does become challenging. Now, what I would say is that if both people really put in the work, not only do they get to heal the trauma of the betrayal, at a certain point, they also begin to heal their own interpersonal trauma. Now that's down the road, that is secondary to the betrayal trauma at first, but it really is the big, beautiful, wonderful part of doing this healing is having that and that's really what I think everybody is seeking. All of us, whether we have betrayal trauma or not. We're seeking those deep relationships where we can find healing.

**Marnie Breecker 20:01**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm 100% with you, Duane. And when you were talking a minute or so ago about the previous trauma that we can bring in, right, to the current situation, what I thought about is so often that trauma, especially early childhood trauma involves betrayal of one sort or another. Right? So it might not be obviously, it could be a sexual betrayal in some way. But it there's typically some kind of betrayal by the people that we trusted the most. And so to grow up, and then get into a relationship with somebody who we trust is now going to take care of us and now have our back. And to find out that we are again, betrayed, that is really, it's being re-traumatized. And it cuts to the core of our resiliency. And it really does make later trust restoration a lot more difficult. And I think it's really important that we talk about these things, because oftentimes I think people say, "Why is it so difficult to heal from betrayal? You know, get over it, move on. They're doing so much work, they've apologized, they've made amends, they're going to meetings, they're doing all these things? Why can't you move on?" And the reality is, you just can't move on, you know, betrayal is, as the brain studies have proven, betrayal does things to one's brain that makes it very difficult to just move on. In fact, I would go as far as to say it makes it impossible.



**Duane Osterlind 21:26**

Yeah, I just don't think that's realistic to just move on. There has to be healing. And there has to be corrective experiences of trust building, over and over, for a while, where that now becomes the norm. And that safety is reestablished. But it takes a dedicated effort, it takes time. But it's definitely possible. And both you and I have seen it, and it's beautiful to see it as well.

**Marnie Breecker 21:52**

Yeah, it's incredible when you can see that. And for anybody who's listening right now who might be at the beginning, or even in later stages, but still are struggling so much with the trust restoration and being able to do those very trustworthy actions to help rebuild trust in the relationship. I wonder if we can ask for your help from other people here who have been working at this and seeing some healing, maybe you can send in some comments that we can post on the website about what are the things that you've done or that your partner has done that are working? What are the things that are really helping to rebuild trust, and I would love to see that. And I'm sure that there are lots of listeners out there who would be really, really eager to see some of those responses.

**Duane Osterlind 22:36**

Oh, I think that would be a great idea. I would love to hear that as well, and love to share all that hope.

**Marnie Breecker 22:42**

Me too, me too.

**Duane Osterlind 22:43**

Alright, so once again, we want to thank you for listening to the Helping Couples Heal Podcast. If you're liking it and getting a lot of value out of it, please rate and review us in iTunes, that really does get us to the top of the list and helps other people who might need this find it and once again, if you think it's really valuable, please share it with someone who could benefit from it. We'd appreciate that as well.

**Marnie Breecker 23:09**

Thank you again, everybody, for your support. We look forward to continuing to walk this journey with you. And we will see you next time.

**Duane Osterlind 23:17**

See you on the next episode. Take care.

## **HCH Narrator 23:21**

Thank you for listening to the Helping Couples Heal podcast, where your healing is the number one priority. If you'd like additional resources about betrayal trauma or to learn more about the Workshop, please visit [helpingcouplesheal.com](http://helpingcouplesheal.com). If you are finding the podcast helpful, please support Marnie and Duane in continuing to reach others impacted by betrayal trauma by leaving a review on iTunes and sharing this podcast with someone you care about. Once again, thank you for listening. We're grateful for your trust and look forward to continuing to support you on your journey of healing.