



## Episode 37

### Time and Expectations

#### [00:00:00] **Helping Couples Heal Podcast**

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 respect to 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, an 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

#### [00:01:00] **Marnie Breecker**

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the helping couples heal podcast. This is Marnie and I'm here with Duane.

#### [00:01:06] **Duane Osterlind**

Hello, everyone. It's great to be with you today.

[00:01:09] **Marnie Breecker**

And we are going to be talking today about the topic of expectations with regards to the time that it takes and the work that it takes to heal from betrayal trauma, and we think that this will be helpful because really people come to this world with All sorts of expectations and assumptions. And we see that it can really bring a lot of suffering and confusion and frustration to people that are trying to recover. So we're going to talk about that today, but before we do just want to remind everybody out there that if you are finding this podcast helpful, please remember to rate and review us on iTunes because it really does help other people who are suffering and needing help find us as well, so thank you in advance for that. And let's jump in and let's talk about this topic Duane.

[00:01:55] **Duane Osterlind**

All right. I think this is such an important topic because when people are coming in to get healing and to get help and they're suffering, they want out when we're in pain, we want out of that pain.

[00:02:11] **Marnie Breecker**

We want to be out of pain immediately.

[00:02:12] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes. We want to be out of pain immediately. We don't want to be there. No one wants to be there.

[00:02:17] **Marnie Breecker**

So between when we talk about time and we say, it's going to take a lot of time to heal from betrayal trauma. Well, that's true. I think that's also a little bit confusing because taking a lot of time can mean different things to different people. Some people might think, Okay, we're talking about six months. That's a lot of time, right. Or some people might think a year or some people might think month, and some people, but probably not most would say five years and more than that. And what we see the reality is that it does usually take upwards of three to five years and we're not saying by any means that in that time there's no joy. There's no happiness, there's no connection. There's no healing. But to get to a point where most couples say they want to get to, that does not happen very quickly. I think that it's important to set those expectations right from the start.

[00:03:10] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes, absolutely. I remember when I was just beginning as a clinician and I was training under Patrick Carnes and I was specifically working in the sex addiction field. And I remember he said the time it takes for a person to heal from addiction is three to five years. If they do all of this work and everything like that. And I was thinking in my mind, what three to five years.

[00:03:37] **Marnie Breecker**

Me too.

[00:03:38] **Duane Osterlind**

And I said, no way, I guess my personality, probably you too Marnie. It's like, we're going to speed that up. We can speed that up. And, and so in my work, we built a whole program. We threw everything at these issues and lo and behold. Come to find out that really it's three to five years. It's just that time that the brain needs to really change and grow. It needs that time to be able to shift and change. Now, a lot of people, when they hear three to five years, they can get a pang of anxiety and a pang of like, oh my gosh, I don't think I have three to five years in me. There's no way I could do this. This is too hard. And what I want to say is three to five years, but it's getting better in those three to five years. I think the first year is the hardest

[00:04:43] **Marnie Breecker**

Potentially

[00:04:43] **Duane Osterlind**

Potentially.

[00:04:44] **Marnie Breecker**

cause there are that are likely listening who might be three to five years in who are still really struggling and saying, no things have not gotten better.

[00:04:52] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes. And I would say with the three to five years, there's a caveat there that people are really doing this work and getting help that works for them.

[00:05:00] **Marnie Breecker**

And committed and fully committed to the process.

[00:05:03] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes to the recovery process, their own personal recovery and the recovery of the relationship. Absolutely. But even with that work, it seems to be three to five years. That seems to be the time frame that the brain needs to be able to heal.

[00:05:23] **Marnie Breecker**

Well, that's a really good, that's a really good point because when people wonder and ask, well, why should it be three to five years? That's ridiculous. Especially if I'm doing all the work, I'm sober. I'm going to meetings and seeing my therapist, I'm in a group, I'm doing all the things, shouldn't it take a shorter period of time.

[00:05:38] **Marnie Breecker**

And why is it taking so long for her to heal? And the reality is, as Duane just said, this is not a switch that you can push about. Okay. I'm okay. And I forgive you. The brain has literally been traumatized. The brain has experienced trauma and it doesn't just reverse itself in a day. Just like the brain doesn't recover from any other kind of trauma in a day or two days.

[00:06:02] **Marnie Breecker**

It can take years.

[00:06:03] **Duane Osterlind**

Yeah, absolutely. And I, when I say to three to five years, I want to rescue everybody out there. Who's in a panic because it's like, oh my gosh. Oh my gosh, that's so long. But remember you're healing along that road. So year one does not look like year two and year two doesn't look like year three. It's getting better and hopefully you're progressing if you're getting the right help. And I would say, if you're not feeling that progress, if someone's out there and they're like, look, we've been at this for five years, then there's a missing piece. And that's where you have to go and find out what's not working and try new modalities. Another thing I would say is that, what I found too is when we surveyed people who had done our program in the past, what I found was. I thought, okay, well, we'll just do the things that work. We'll just take the things that work for everybody and we'll just use that and we'll cut it down. We'll cut down the time and we'll make it quicker. What I found is that what worked for one person didn't necessarily work for another person. So one person would say, oh my gosh, that was the best part of your program. It was the most helpful. And then another person would come to me and say, I didn't get anything out of that part of that program. It was useless to me. So I also understood that you have to be willing to experiment and try all different modalities. If something isn't working, try something different.

[00:07:29] **Marnie Breecker**

And here's the thing I want to say this because again, a lot of our listeners might be feeling stuck, not necessarily in their healing, but in the relational healing because their partner is not doing the work or doesn't seem committed. And the truth is as painful as this might be to hear. The reality is that nothing's going to heal the relationship if the person who caused the betrayal is not wanting to do that. Even if that person is saying, I'll do whatever it takes. If their actions are not matching their words, if they are not seeking help, if they are not taking guidance from professionals, if they are not willing to shift their thoughts, and, and learn new tools and practice those tools, then it doesn't matter how many years. None of it matters because there does need to be a real commitment and ongoing, consistent effort from the person who's caused all of this trauma. So again, just when we talk about this timeframe, three to five years, please know that we're talking about people that really are actively working actively and consistently committed, actively, and consistently taking the steps, finding new information, doing the research, talking to professionals, talking to other people that there meeting along the way. But I really do want to share something about this idea of time.

[00:08:44] **Marnie Breecker**

Because like you said, at the very beginning, the thought of being in pain is something that we, as a culture run from. Who wants to be in pain and who wants to suffer. When we're facing something that does seem like it's going to take time to deal with, it can feel so daunting and scary and make us want to run. And especially if you hear well, there's this timeframe, right? Like, look at this timeframe three to five years. Well that doesn't always work no matter what's going on.

[00:09:11] **Marnie Breecker**

And so I just want to use this example. To offer some, some, some comfort, maybe to some people who are listening to this and struggling with hearing about this timeframe. So in the Jewish religion, we have something that's called an unveiling for those people that might not be aware. And that's something that happens about a year after a person dies and that's when you come back to the cemetery, into the tombstone and you unveil the tombstone. Up until that point, there's just, there's either been nothing there or the tombstone has arrived, but they keep a black sheet over it. So you don't see it. And then you come together and there's a rabbi and the family and loved ones.

[00:09:46] **Marnie Breecker**

And there's, it's, it's sort of meant to be, as you unveil the tombstone, it's like the end of the morning, and I remember when my mom died and we were coming up to see the unveiling and I kept hearing what the unveiling was about I felt so angry, because I remember saying I am not done with mourning. How could someone even think of deciding that there's a timeframe for mourning? And I really had to do a lot of work around that and talk to rabbis and talk to friends and family. And I, when I came out of that with was, it does not mean that it's the end of mourning for everybody. Right? It's it's the symbol, but that the reality. No one can decide when somebody's grief or mourning ends. Nobody can decide. when healing will begin, when healing will end, it is such an individual process and giving yourself permission to be on your own timeline is really really important.

[00:10:44] **Duane Osterlind**

I think that's so important to say, because we're so individual in how we process, and I think we do have to speak in generalities like three to five years. That seems to be a general timeframe. But once again, everybody's unique in this. And so they've got to find their own road.

[00:11:06] **Duane Osterlind**

What I would say is what I haven't seen is people being able to heal within a month or two of this work. I think the trauma is too intense for the relationship. And usually the individual who's engaged in the betrayal has their own early childhood trauma that set them up to be able to be in this place anyway, which has to be worked on, but I think we have to look at it through some of these generalized lenses and give it somewhat of a framework, but also know at the same time every couples different.

[00:11:47] **Marnie Breecker**

Every couple is different, and I also want to say that many of our listeners actually loved the interview that we did with Stan Tatkin awhile back. And Stan mentioned in that interview, as you might remember something about it taking one year and I made a comment like, well, Stan, I don't know that our listeners are going to be very happy to hear that because they'd been at this most of them a lot longer.

[00:12:10] **Marnie Breecker**

And he said specifically, well, that's, if you, right off the bat, get the right treatment. And what I want to say about that is that sadly what we see over and over. And I truly wish this was different. It's quite heartbreaking and distressing to see over and over again, that the majority of clients that come in have been around the block with treatment, they have been bouncing around, there's a lot of treatment induced trauma so typically most people don't learn about an addiction or about betrayal, and then just find the right therapist, or the right health and professional. Even looking at one year I just don't think we can put that. Um, we certainly can't promise that to people because it's just not what I see. I don't see that. I know you don't see that it does take it takes different timetables, and I wanted to also say, when you said we've never seen anyone or we don't see people a month or two in healing from this, I want to say that there are people that might seem like they're doing that.

[00:13:09] **Marnie Breecker**

Like they, they just found out and suddenly a couple of months in there, they seem like they're doing great. They might not even want our services anymore. But what I've seen in those cases is that that was so painful that the people had to compartmentalize it, suppress it, focus on other things, get themselves into work and other projects and relationships, and sometimes even into their own compulsive behaviors. Just because it's too painful, they don't want to deal with it. And then eventually it comes back and then they have to deal with it. So, that's generally what I see when people seem to recover so quickly.

[00:13:41] **Marnie Breecker**

I'm thinking about one of my clients who in the early stages kept coming into a group, but she seemed great. All the other women were like, we want what you have, why are you so okay. And, and actually it wasn't for probably a year after she took. What's now our workshop at the workshop I did with Dr. Mimwalla. And that just burst her open that's when she was finally able to recognize how much pain she was in and, and how much work she had to do in order to change how she was, how her, how she was feeling and how her relationship felt for her.

[00:14:16] **Duane Osterlind**

And once again going back to how we are all unique in how we deal with traumatic events and how we cope, this person may have needed to cope that way for a while. They may have not had the internal strength to look at that pain and walk through it until they were ready to do that. And so I think in working with this, it's like laying that foundation so that someone can get that help at a time when they need it and their.

[00:14:46] **Marnie Breecker**

So to put also a little bit of perspective into, well, what's really going on in those three to five years, if we're using three to five years. Or in whatever those years are, what's going on, that takes so long. You mentioned one thing which is so important and that's the brain, that's the recovery of the brain and the trauma, our nervous system, when it comes to trauma, as we've talked about, probably on almost every episode, there's damage to our nervous system, and just like any other injury to any other part of our body, it takes time to heal. So that's, that's one thing, just the brain trauma.

[00:15:19] **Marnie Breecker**

But then there's also so many other things like learning new skills. And learning how to practice them, for some people they have no empathy, and that's what the partner needs. And so that could take a long time, first of all, to find the proper treatment professionals that can really help you with empathy, and explain how empathy is so crucial to relational healing, and then teach you the skills and provide you an opportunity to practice the skills.

[00:15:47] **Marnie Breecker**

Like that's just one thing. There's so many other components that have to happen for couples to meet. Sort of to that invisible finish line.

[00:15:59] **Duane Osterlind**

I think so. I was just thinking, as you were talking we talk about that term that we use scaffolding. The beginning of this is laying out the scaffolding to hold all of the work that you have to do to allow the brain to shift and change. And it does shift and change when you start to do it, and once again we're all unique. We're all humans. We all have limitations in certain skills. Some of us are going to be much more empathetic than others, but those are all things. I think that you can work with in a relationship, when we work with our partners, through our limitations, we can find ways around it. We can work through it, but we have to have that scaffolding laid out, and that takes time. Sometimes the way I look at it is that the first year is building that scaffolding. It's building that structure and healing comes through that.

[00:16:54] **Marnie Breecker**

Well, the structure that you're talking about and the scaffolding is all about ultimately creating the safety, that's necessary to continue the work.

[00:17:01] **Duane Osterlind**

That's what I was going to get to you. You get that scaffolding that then builds that safety, that then helps heal the trauma brain. Because there's safety there, you can, re-experience these memories and these events in a safe environment in your relationship, but you've got to have that scaffolding there to hold it.



[00:17:21] **Marnie Breecker**

Right. So what we see again why it takes so long is that period of scaffolding and creating safety can be a year. It can sometimes be longer, especially if people have had treatment induced trauma and have bounced from different therapists to different therapists and finally are landing and almost starting over, which is so unfortunate, but it's the truth.

[00:17:39] **Marnie Breecker**

So then you've got that time for the scaffolding and creating safety. And that has to happen before you can do some of those other things I mentioned, like learn empathy and other relational skills. Also that other big thing that has to happen in the early stages, and often it does not, is the disclosure or whatever form that, that, that takes for your relationship, whether it's a formal disclosure, which we really advocate for from our perspective. But some, people do it differently, but whatever it is that you do, whatever the structure is, giving the partner, who's been betrayed all the information, all the truth, so that you can have a foundation to even move forward. I don't even think you can truly like this to me, the scaffolding and. The disclosure of everything and giving the partner that information to me that that's tandem that goes hand in hand that has to happen together because there needs to be some scaffolding that happens in order to even provide the structure, to do the disclosure, but it has to come pretty quickly.

[00:18:41] **Marnie Breecker**

And then the connection, the vulnerability, the bonding, and you and I talk about this a lot, that can't happen at the beginning. That just can't happen because why would we encourage someone who's been hurt and doesn't feel safe and there's no trust to get closer and be vulnerable.

[00:18:58] **Marnie Breecker**

So again, talking about the timeline, the reason it takes a while is because there's all these different processes and stages and while recovery is not necessarily linear. There's not what we wished we could say. It's step one, step two, step three, step four, it's not as linear as that, but there is some, what's the word? Duane there's some process.

[00:19:20] **Marnie Breecker**

There's some trajectory path.

[00:19:23] **Duane Osterlind**

There is a path forward and there is a kind of a theme that moves people along in this recovery process that we see unfold in the couples we work with.

[00:19:35] **Marnie Breecker**

And so, you know, many of you listening, I don't know, some of you might be feeling actually quite optimistic after hearing all of this, and some people might feel the opposite. Maybe some people are now really scared and, it's already been two years and the thought of it being longer is feeling overwhelming. What I want to say is that the truth is, that the couples that Duane and I work with and that we see move through this process. First of all, they say it's worth it. But second of all, again it shouldn't be 24 7 at year two, year three, year four. It should be getting better, even if it's baby steps.

[00:20:08] **Marnie Breecker**

So if nothing's changing, if it's not getting better, if you're at year three, year four, year five, and you know that you've been putting in all the work then something is going on, that's causing the experience of being stuck. And I highly encourage you to talk to the people that you trust and find out what's going on. Try to figure that out and come up with another plan because it's common to get stuck, but then it's really important to get unstuck.

[00:20:38] **Duane Osterlind**

And a lot of times we can know we're stuck, but we can't see how we're stuck. And so we need other people to be able to shine the light on that or give us the skills we need to get unstuck,

[00:20:55] **Marnie Breecker**

This is a hard thing. It's funny cause as we're talking. So aware of how much I want to give hope to the people that are listening. I wish I had a magic pill, a magic switch. I wish that I could say, like you said it earlier, come on. We're great. We're really good at this we've got something special. We can help, change the trajectory and make it six months from discovery, but that's just not possible. And Duane you and I are so committed to being in reality because addiction and betrayal all occurs in the context of lies and secrecy and the opposite of reality. So we need to be honest and share that, yes, it can take a while. Please don't compare yourself to other people whose journeys might have been less time or more time than yours, recognize that it's such an individual process, and there's so many factors, and be gentle with yourself, but please know that the only reason that Duane and I are here talking about this is because we do believe in healing and relationships, thriving and coming out the other side. I'll be honest. I've heard people say, well, I never would have wanted to go through this pain because it's been horrific. I can't imagine not having gone through it because our relationship would never have become what it is now. And that might be so hard to imagine, but I've heard it over and over.

[00:22:19] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes, me too. And it's amazing to see. I think that's what keeps us motivated in doing this work. And I'm the same way I'm saying this, and thinking of the people out there who are like, oh my gosh, this is too much, too long, too hard. And I want to say, just baby steps, just keep seeking out the support that you need, keep finding the steps you can do to move forward. It does get better, and even though you may be in immense pain in this moment, maybe it's a recent discovery and, just found our podcasts and you're just super overwhelmed. It does get better. It can get better, whether the relationship is together or not.

[00:23:07] **Duane Osterlind**

You can get the support and the pain you're in right now does not need to last forever. It doesn't have to last. It won't last forever because as human beings, we're always shifting in and out of emotions. But one thing that we know when we're feeling pain, our brain often tells us that we're this way forever, this is it. It's always going to be this way and it's not, and get the support that you need and keep reaching out for help.

[00:23:36] **Marnie Breecker**

I want to leave you all with something that actually, my dad sent to me last week. He said that he found this in Newsday and he was referring to grief, when he sent it to me, grief from the loss of a person, but when I read it, I thought of all of you out there who are dealing with betrayal trauma and the grief that comes with it and it felt so, it, it really resonated.

[00:23:58] **Marnie Breecker**

So I want to share it with you. I think for those of you who have been betrayed. It's going to be incredibly validating about your experience and for those who have betrayed your spouse or partner, I want you to listen to this too, and hopefully this will give you a greater understanding of the experience that your partner has every day, as she's grieving all of the losses that come with this. So the name of the article is, you don't just lose someone once you lose them over and over sometimes many times a day. When the loss momentarily forgotten, creeps up and attacks you from behind fresh waves of grief appear, as the realization hits home, they are gone again. You don't just lose someone once you lose them every time you open your eyes to a new dawn. And as you awaken, so does your memory, so does the jolting bolt of lightning that rips into your heart? They are gone again, losing someone is a journey, not a one-time event. There is no end to the loss, there is only a learned skill on how to stay afloat when it washes over you be kind to those who are sailing the stormy sea, they have a journey ahead of them and a daily shock to the system each time they realize they are gone again, you don't just lose someone once. You lose them every day.

[00:25:17] **Marnie Breecker**

I hope that hearing this is helpful to many of you and touches you the way it touched me. Please be gentle with yourselves. We're so grateful to have the opportunity to be here to support you and we look forward to coming back again, to talk about something else that can be helpful on your journey.

[00:25:35] **Duane Osterlind**

Yes, thinking about all of you out there and sending our compassion to each and every one of you.

[00:25:41] **Marnie Breecker**

See you soon

[00:25:42] **Helping Couples Heal Podcast**

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