

Emotional Cheating

Joseph and Sarah Elizabeth Malinak, M. Div.

Emotional cheating is what happens whenever a person who is in a committed relationship prefers to share mental, emotional, spiritual or physical parts of himself or herself with someone outside the relationship. Even though physical sex doesn't take place, it feeds intimacy needs that should be met inside the committed relationship, not outside it. To that extent, it can create a pleasure response that leans towards or even becomes sexually stimulating.

This kind of intimate relationship can happen between "office spouses," where a friendship develops too much intimacy within the co-worker or employer/employee relationship. You may be familiar with the term "office wife" applied to men's secretaries or personal assistants. In years past and presently, that relationship is rife with the possibility that a male boss becomes so dependent on a reliable and loyal assistant that she essentially becomes the wife at the office. However, in this day and age of relative equality between the sexes, you can find office husbands and office wives among peers in the workplace. When people work together successfully through the demands and stress of the workplace, they can become bonded through shared experiences and shared support. When you or your spouse experience as much or a greater sense of intimacy with that person in the work place as within the marriage; there is a problem.

Emotional cheating can happen in volunteer organizations where people come together for a common cause and friendships develop a chemistry that gets expressed through shared intimacies. It can happen in a church or other spiritual or religious institution where emotionally connecting with other people is a rich and rewarding experience. It can happen driving the baby sitter home on a weekly basis, where her burgeoning interest in life, philosophy, and the kind of husband and provider you are fascinate her.

It can happen between professors and students in colleges and universities and between teachers and students in high school. Where some of the young minds are fresh and passionate in their perspectives and opinions, they are hungry to be taught by someone they admire. The combination of enthusiasm and admiration is seductive. A meeting of the minds between teacher and student is one thing. When the teacher needs the admiration of the student and seeks it out, creating a sense of "we," a line has been crossed into emotional cheating.

It can happen in the bonding that takes place as projects are completed together, as two people work side-by-side to save lives, and as two people come together in any situation where they feel they uniquely share something together that they don't share with anyone else (not even their spouses).

Emotional cheating is toxic because it pulls on your primary relationship. It may seem as though you just made a new friend, but if your spouse feels betrayed by your level of interest in this "friend," then chances are you have crossed the boundary into emotional cheating. If you feel any sense of guilt about what you share with your friend, you need

to take a look at what you are creating. If you feel hunger to share any piece of information, insight, or experience with him or her, particularly at the exclusion of your spouse, you must look at the very real possibility you are emotionally cheating.

This isn't to say that people shouldn't have friends of the opposite sex! Besides, emotional cheating can occur between best girl friends or best guy friends. It is when you hunger to share anything with someone else at the expense of your spouse. What constitutes "at the expense of your spouse" is a personal matter between couples. Some couples are so different from each other that their marriage depends on their having multiple friends with whom they can share common interests. In such a case, emotional cheating may never become an issue. For them, if cheating is going to happen, it will only be expressed as a physical relationship because they are so free to share each other with friends and family.

For others, when a spouse feels left out of part of his or her beloved's life, it is probably appropriate to acknowledge this as a yellow flag of caution. Who you are as individuals and as a couple determines the parameters of your intimacy as a couple over against how intimate you can comfortably be with those outside your relationship.

The presence of jealousy, guilt, fear, and anxiety are all potential yellow flags of caution. Although not proof of anything, they are a starting point for conversation about what is best for your marriage. A variety of factors are involved. If you suspect your spouse of emotionally cheating, is he or she an only child? Only children do not always have appropriate boundaries around sharing. Both oldest children and youngest children can feel entitled to their special friendships. Are there issues with parents that cause your spouse to need a larger number of intimate friends than you need? The bottom line here is having a conversation, not a confrontation. The situation may not be as personal and offensive as you think it is or it may be. Exploring it with as little judgment as possible and with as much respect for your spouse as possible can go a long way towards you getting what you want: to be the most special and adored person in your spouse's life.

This is a complex issue as every person involved can be oblivious to the problem or the consequences for a very long time. Whether an honest mistake has occurred or a serious problem is progressing, someone is being asked to give up a relationship that has become special and valued. Sensitivity to that loss, even as you require it, can go a long way.

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You can discover this secret for yourself in the e-workbook called *Creating the Love You Want: Five Unique Steps to Improve Your Marriage*. Go to <http://www.CreateTheLoveYouWant.com> and order your copy right now. With it, you can begin making a difference for yourself tonight!

