

IS *lying* TO YOUR *partner* EVER OKAY?

*Relationship expert Jan Day
asks the question*

By the time we've betrayed our partner, it's clear that something is going wrong within the relationship, whether we've admitted it or not. Communication has usually broken down meaning that we haven't been able to express our needs or wants, and we probably haven't felt very connected or satisfied for a long time. And furthermore, we haven't been able to express that dissatisfaction to our partner and possibly even to ourselves. And so, betrayal happens.

Afterwards, we feel bad because we haven't lived up to our own values and we don't want to face that fact and so we lie about what happened. Usually we hide the truth because we don't want to feel the shame of confronting what we have done and we don't want to face the consequences. Sometimes we might disguise this as 'not wanting to cause our partner unnecessary pain' but in reality we just don't want to face the pain that we've caused.

COULD IT BE THE BEST CHOICE?

Of course we all want to be in a relationship where we feel trusted and where we can communicate and express ourselves freely. Being lied to isn't what we generally sign up for.

However, there are times when lying may be the most resourceful thing to minimise harm. For example, in cases where there is a power imbalance and where violence or control are manifesting in the relationship, telling your partner that you have betrayed them is likely to result in abuse or violence. If this is the case, it would be wise to seek counselling and support to help you leave the relationship.

It may also be that you know you've let yourself and your partner down and want to repair the relationship. If communication and talking about difficult subjects hasn't come easily to you both,




then it may be helpful to delay telling the whole truth until you've built some foundation for discussion, understanding and listening. That is a challenging practice at the best of times, and learning with a subject as seismic as a betrayal may not give you both the best chance to repair the damage.

Having said that, in most cases confronting the truth, however unpalatable and shocking, can be a wake-up call in a relationship. Of course, it is likely that anger and pain will be felt and expressed and it will be uncomfortable. But that can often lead to a clearing of the air that allows a couple to speak the whole truth to each other for the first time. Betrayal or having an affair can lead to both breakdown and revival. If a relationship survives this kind of issue, it is likely that it will go on to be stronger with a depth of intimacy that comes from being willing to say what is true, however difficult.

Another situation where withholding the truth about a betrayal may be understandable is in a situation where you have become a long-term carer for a very ill partner and as a result your own needs for intimacy cannot be met. Finding ways of nourishing yourself in this situation may be what enables you to carry on, and at the same time, depending on their situation, it may not be appropriate or kind to tell your partner.

One excuse that I've heard often is that what someone doesn't know can't hurt them. That is unlikely to be true. A betrayal in the



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How to tell the truth in a relationship

Follow these five easy steps to re-establish communication in your relationship

1. Be clear about what you want to express, what is important for you and what your intention is. What do you want to happen? Tell your partner why it is important for you to tell them this. Remind them that you are sharing this because the relationship you're your intimacy with them matters to you.
2. Stay calm and openhearted. Speaking difficult truths is likely to be stressful so you'll need to consciously slow your breathing and take longer, deeper breaths. Feel your feet on the ground and sense your own inner smile encouraging you from inside. Take your time and slow things down if you need to.
3. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Share what you are feeling and be open about any fears you have in regard to how what you're saying might be received. Give your partner a chance to understand you.
4. Don't make assumptions about how they will respond. Be willing to witness and hear their feelings, even though it may be uncomfortable. Be ready for them to get defensive or upset. Prepare yourself to listen to that so that you don't react impulsively in anger or attack. Ask questions so you can understand their perspective more deeply. Show interest in how they feel and what their thoughts are.
5. Choose the time and place carefully with sensitivity for what will give them the best chance of hearing you. Check in with them to ensure that it is a good time for an important conversation. Be considerate. Don't approach them when they are just back from a business trip, stressed about work problems or dealing with bereavement.

form of either lying or withholding the truth inevitably takes away from the intimacy of the relationship. What you are doing in that case is selfish and more about you getting what you want than being considerate to your partner.

THE PROBLEM WITH LYING

There is a telling story about the Buddha standing in the forest when a terrified man ran by. A gang of brigands approached soon after and asked if he had seen a man running by when he was stood there. He could truthfully reply no, as he had been standing somewhere else when the man ran by.

If your partner asks you a straight question, such as: "Are you having an affair?" they have already sensed that something is happening. In this situation it would be hard to make a case for lying. Your partner is asking for the truth, however hard it may be.

In the end, we always feel less than good about ourselves when we lie, especially deliberately. It erodes our self respect and results in a deep inner shame. Unless it is clear to you that telling the truth would do significant harm, I'd encourage you to make a practice of it. You'll feel more courageous and empowered and will foster relationships that are deeply intimate and fulfilling.

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