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Dear Dr. Grantham:

My wife recently left me for another man after nearly sixteen years of marriage and has asked for a divorce. I thought we were happy and never saw it coming. This has been the most painful thing I have ever experienced in my life. I am embarrassed and very sad. All I want to do is stay home and sleep. It takes all I have to go to work in the mornings. How can I get past this?

S. F.

Dear S. F.:

Research suggests (Myers, 1986) that men left by their spouses tend to suffer deeper feelings of abandonment and anger than do women in the same circumstances. Pain and grief are normal feelings that occur when a person loses a spouse and the trust, commitment, family and dreams of a future that are part of the marriage. In divorce situations that involve an affair, this grief may include feelings of betrayal which result in sadness, anger, depression, loneliness, anxiety. This in turn may create a desire to run away or just “pull up the bed covers” and hide. Although it is difficult to believe, there is hope for a better tomorrow.

Let me suggest a few things:

- 1. Embrace and explore your pain and grief.** Ask yourself if your pain is from the feelings of abandonment and betrayal or more about feeling you have failed as a man or a spouse. Acknowledge your fear that you might never be able to trust again. Know that it is O.K. to have these feelings, but recognize that withdrawal, though it feels safe, will hurt you more. In order to rebuild, it is important to admit your hurt, accept your pain, and learn to believe in yourself again.
- 2. Reach out to your support community.** During this process, it is important to reach out to supportive friends and family. It is very difficult for us as men to open up to others about our hurts and embarrassments. This prevents us from hearing from other men in similar pain. Thus we deprive ourselves of deep personal male friendships that talk beyond sports and hunting—healing is done in community...friends, family and men who have gone through this, too.
- 3. Seek out a counselor to help you deal with your feelings .** A counselor can provide a safe environment in which to explore the intense emotions you are experiencing. With his or her help, you can learn ways to deal with your wife’s behavior and develop a plan for life beyond the divorce.