

Cheating Parents: Recovering from Parental Infidelity

Dennis Ortman

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"I am surprised that so little has been written about the impact of infidelity on children," writes Dr. Dennis Ortman, a clinical psychologist and former Catholic priest who specializes in treating individuals dealing with substance abuse and emotional problems, especially those related to the trauma of infidelity. "Make no mistake about it," he writes, "when parents are unfaithful, their children suffer. The effects may be hidden for many years, but they will eventually emerge as these young people engage in intimate relationships and parent their own children."

Ortman has found that children of unfaithful parents will often respond with fear, sensing that the marriage and family are no longer safe and secure. Dependent on their parents, they wonder who will take care of them. Absorbing the tension in the home, their health and schoolwork may suffer. They may become defiant and rebellious and express hatred for their parents, coupled with guilt for feeling that way. They lose trust in their parents and in themselves, and may even blame themselves for the situation.

Ortman offers hope for those willing to do the hard work of recovery, though he does not promise that, once the vows have been broken, a marriage can be saved. With provocative and insightful questions and wise counsel, he provides potent, truth-based pathways to healing for the whole family. "Just as the truth will set you free to move on with your life, being truthful with your children will help free them to trust you again," he writes. "You can begin to model a mature, truth-based relationship for them. Your recovery can begin to alter the family legacy of infidelity."

KRISTINE MORRIS (Summer 2014)

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