

STEPS TO AN AFFAIR

1. READINESS

The first step is the condition of emotional readiness. Something is occurring in a man's life that has him leaning away from the marriage.

2. ALERTNESS

The second stage in the affair process is a growing awareness of a particular person in the web of relationships. This may begin by simply thinking occasionally about the other person. The innocent thoughts can be turned to fantasizing about her. As she becomes more present in his conscious thoughts, she may begin to appear in his dreams as well. The dreams are often filled with sexual fantasy. Sometimes a man in this stage will shoot group photographs where the woman is present at the office party or at a get together of families on a holiday. The man then finds himself returning to the snapshots again and again. It is not unusual for the man in this stage to try to mentally capture the woman who is becoming a strong focus of interest. The rationalization developed is that there is no harm fantasizing. It's only human.

3. INNOCENT MEETING

During this time of heightened awareness for other women, there can be truly innocent, chance meetings, often legitimate business contacts that can potentially build the relationship. This is the stage where some flirtation can develop, prolonged eye contact, interchange of harmless-sounding sexual innuendo, enticing body language. Both people involved at this point would deny any real interest in each other.

4. INTENTIONAL MEETING

Meetings occur frequently, which appear to be by chance when in reality one person has acted intentionally such as, waiting for hours at a particular street corner. When the woman appears, he walks up to her and acts surprised as if she's the last person in the world he thought he'd see. In real life, this stage would be humorous if it weren't so sad. This kind of game playing has adolescent flavor to it. It proves that the excitement of attraction to the opposite sex can overpower rational side. Sexual attraction can easily make fools out of us. At this point, a person enters a real danger zone.

5. PUBLIC LINGERING

The man and woman now spend time together while in-group settings. They will tend to shut others out by turning away from the group and avoiding eye contact with others. There is a growing interest in each other at this point. Topics of conversation include personal history, interest in sports, politics, and business. Observers might pick up something unusual about the relationship at this stage. The man and the woman would still deny any suggestions that this was more than normal adult relating. The public setting helps the couple to rationalize. The man thinks: "It's fine to focus on her. Nothing can happen. We're with others."

6. PRIVATE LINGERING

Soon the man and woman find that they are still together long after the others have left. There is now a growing excitement in being together alone. It is a seductive feeling, enticing. Conversation shifts from ideas to feelings. Caring is shared. There is an entry through conversation into private and personal areas. The man and woman still feel fine about the relationship because the meetings still begin in public.

7. PURPOSEFUL ISOLATING

Now the man and woman begin to plan times alone for "legitimate" purposes. The man asks the woman if she will meet and help him sort out his marital problems. Or, the woman asks the man to stay late at the office to lend his expertise to a certain project she's trying to wrap up. The couple will still deny any suggestion that their relationship was not completely appropriate. At home the man's wife might notice a decrease in verbal and nonverbal communication. He seems suddenly detached, cool, almost formal in his relating. There may be uncompleted phone calls.

8. PLEASURABLE ISOLATING

Now the man and woman are planning times alone with each other for the sheer enjoyment and fun of being together. The relationship takes a youthful euphoria. There is more intimacy. The man and woman are touching. There is a warm touch to the hand and arm, or the hand is slipped around the waist. During this stage, the spouse will often notice that there are large blocks of times not accounted for. There is a noticeable decrease in pleasurable times together in marriage. The man and woman will still rationalize the relationship by saying that adults need good friends of the opposite sex. There is nothing wrong with being friends.

9. AFFECTIONATE EMBRACING

Secret longings for each other become intense. There is embracing without letting go. There is increased touching and playful caressing. Childish games like tickling and wrestling are often played at the stage to increase the physical contact. The rationalization is that there is nothing wrong with physically expressing support for one another. At the same time with their spouses, there will be a decrease in affectionate embracing and physical contact.

10. PASSIONATE EMBRACING

Affectionate touching and embracing lead to passionate interchanges. When alcohol is involved, a couple moves quickly through these stages. Anything that reduces inhibitions contributes to increased physical desire and expression. The couple will still rationalize and say that is fine to get aroused because it is innocent and unplanned. "Besides, my wife no longer makes me feel this way," the man thinks.

11. CAPITULATION

The couple gives in to sexual intercourse. Denial is eliminated at this stage. There is no way that they can deny the reality of what has occurred between them.

12. ACCEPTANCE

Here the man and woman admit to themselves and to each other that they are truly having an affair. If they continue their relationship from this point, it is out of mutual choice. Here the emotional investment in the affair is at its peak, and the emotional investment in the marriage is at its lowest point. The spouse is almost always aware by this time. Her husband is home less. He is frequently away overnight without explanation. He may even find a creative way to allow his wife to discover the affair. The tension of living a double life is usually too much for someone to bear for very long.