

— THE — *Relationship Reset*



Addiction Toolkit – Betrayed (*Don*)

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ISBN: 979-8-90329-007-9 (Digitized Downloads)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026902524

Story:

Don and Donna came into therapy at a point when their relationship felt worn down and uncertain. They had been together for many years, but the strain created by Donna's addiction had slowly pulled them apart. Neither of them had planned for their life to reach that place. What once felt natural between them had become tense and distant. Conversations that used to come easily now felt awkward or avoided altogether. Trust had been shaken, and with it came a quiet sadness that both of them carried in different ways.

Donna was struggling with her own internal battles. **Her addiction had affected** how she showed up in the relationship, but it had also affected how she saw herself. She often felt ashamed and uncertain about whether Don could ever see her the same way again. Don, on the other hand, had begun withdrawing. Instead of confronting the hurt directly, he pulled back into himself. He spent more time alone and spoke less about what he was feeling. The distance between them was not loud or dramatic. It was quiet and steady, and over time it had created a feeling that they were living beside each other rather than together.

The Betrayed Partner - Don

Don eventually decided to begin therapy on his own because he noticed how much he had started isolating. He described feeling overwhelmed by his emotions whenever he thought about the relationship. Sometimes anger would rise quickly. At other times it was sadness or disappointment. These feelings often made him shut down instead of engaging with Donna. During therapy he began learning practical ways to slow those emotional reactions so he could respond with more intention.

When addiction enters a relationship, the betrayal is not only about broken trust. It becomes deeply personal. The partner who has been hurt often begins to turn the pain inward, asking questions that slowly reshape how they see themselves.

You may find yourself wondering if you were enough. Enough attention. Enough support. Enough love. The mind tries to make sense of what happened, and in doing so, it often lands on a painful conclusion: *If I had been better, this wouldn't have happened.*

That belief can settle in quietly but powerfully. It can change how you interpret the past and how you move through the present. Moments that once felt secure now feel uncertain. You may replay conversations, revisit memories, and search for signs you might have missed. This is not because you are weak. It is because your mind is trying to restore a sense of control in a situation that once felt safe and now feels unpredictable.

As trust breaks, your sense of safety shifts. You may notice yourself becoming more watchful. You might ask more questions, check more details, or feel uneasy when things are unclear. Control can start to feel like protection. If you can monitor things closely enough, maybe you won't be caught off guard again.

At the same time, there can be an internal tug of war. Part of you may not want to feel this way. You may recognize that the checking, the questioning, and the guarding are exhausting. Yet another part of you feels that letting go of that control would be risky, even dangerous. This is the emotional aftermath of betrayal. It is not simply about trust in your partner. It becomes about trust in your own judgment, your own awareness, and even your own worth.

Over time, these patterns can create a painful cycle. The more you question your worth, the more you feel the need to protect yourself. The more you protect yourself, the harder it becomes to feel close, open, and connected. What began as a response to being hurt can slowly shape how you experience the entire relationship.

It is important to understand this clearly. Their addiction is not a reflection of your value. It is not evidence that you were lacking. Addiction is rooted in internal struggles, unmet needs, and coping patterns that existed long before and outside of you. When the mind tries to make it about your worth, it is trying to create an explanation, but it is not telling the truth.

Healing begins when you gently separate what is yours from what is not. The pain you feel is real. The impact on your trust is real. But the belief that you are not enough is not a fact. It is a wound speaking.

You are not controlling because you are broken. You are trying to feel safe again. You are trying to protect your heart from being hurt in the same way. That makes sense. At the same time, part of healing will involve slowly learning new ways to feel safe that do not require you to carry the full weight of vigilance and fear.

You are allowed to rebuild your sense of worth separate from what happened. You are allowed to regain trust in yourself, even before trust in the relationship feels fully restored. Perhaps one of the suggested affirmations for Rebuilding Worth and Safety could become your own or develop your own affirmation. I would suggest writing yours down and repeating it at least 8 times daily and especially during times when you question your worth and safety.

Affirmations for Rebuilding Worth and Safety

I am not the cause of another person's addiction.

My value is not defined by someone else's choices.

I was enough then, and I am enough now.

My feelings are valid, and my pain deserves care.

I can learn to feel safe without losing myself in fear.

I am allowed to set boundaries that protect my well-being.

Trust can be rebuilt slowly, and I can take that process at my own pace.

I am not broken. I am healing.

I can separate my worth from what I have experienced.

I am learning to trust myself again, one step at a time.

Yours: _____.

One of the skills that stood out to Don was the **S.T.O.P.** skill. At first, it sounded simple, but he soon realized how powerful it could be when practiced consistently. Instead of reacting quickly to his feelings, he began learning to pause. In those moments he would stop, take a breath, observe what he was feeling, and then proceed with a more thoughtful response. This small pause helped him recognize when his mind was moving into fear or anger. The pause created space for him to choose how he wanted to act rather than simply reacting to the moment.

Over time Don noticed that emotional regulation allowed him to see Donna differently. When his emotions were calmer, he was able to notice the effort she was making to rebuild her life. The S.T.O.P. skill did not erase the past, but it gave him a way to stay grounded in the present instead of becoming overwhelmed by it. This shift helped him begin thinking about the kind of partner he wanted to be during the rebuilding process.

Another tool that helped Don was creating an **Intention Statement**. This statement was simple but meaningful. It reminded him of the kind of man he wanted to be in his marriage and the kind of environment he wanted to help create. When difficult moments came, the statement helped guide his actions. Instead of asking himself whether Donna deserved kindness or patience in a particular moment, he asked himself what kind of husband he wanted to be. That shift helped him focus on his own values rather than reacting only to the past.

Don also began practicing **small, controlled actions** that encouraged closeness. These actions were not dramatic gestures. They were simple and steady. He began initiating short conversations



again. Sometimes he would ask Donna how her day had gone or sit with her while they shared a quiet moment in the evening. These small efforts were intentional. They allowed both of them to experience moments of connection without pressure.

Alongside these actions, Don started using **affirmations** each morning. He would read them quietly to himself as part of his daily routine. These affirmations reminded him that healing relationships require patience, steadiness, and hope. They also helped reshape the way he viewed Donna. Instead of seeing her only through the pain of the past, he began reminding himself that people can grow and change when they are given support and time.

As the weeks passed, the atmosphere in the home began to shift. It was not immediate, and it was not perfect. Trust takes time to rebuild, especially after it has been damaged. However, the consistent effort to regulate emotions, act with intention, and stay connected slowly opened new space between them.

One practice that became meaningful for both of them was setting aside time each week to talk about the future. This was completed in their **Weekly Check-In**. (Download the Weekly Check-In: www.JohnSlatePhD.com.) Rather than focusing only on the past, they began sharing the kinds

of lives they hoped to build together. They talked about small dreams and long-term hopes. Sometimes these conversations took place while sitting quietly together in a comfortable space they began to think of as their safe place. In those moments they allowed themselves to imagine what their relationship could look like if healing continued.

These weekly conversations did something important. They reminded both of them that their story was still being written. Instead of feeling trapped by what had already happened, they began picturing a different kind of relationship ahead of them. The process was slow, but it allowed hope to grow again.

Don often reflected on how much had changed through simple but consistent practices. Learning emotional regulation through the **S.T.O.P.** skill helped him slow the emotional storms that once pushed him into isolation. His **Intention Statement** helped him act from his values instead of reacting to fear. **Morning affirmations** helped reshape the way he saw his wife and their relationship. The **small daily actions** he chose to take helped rebuild moments of closeness that had once seemed lost.

For Donna, those changes mattered deeply. She began to feel that the relationship had room to breathe again. While the work of recovery and rebuilding trust was still ongoing, both of them were now participating in the process of their different and unique recovery journey. The distance that once defined their relationship slowly began to shrink as they practiced patience, honesty, and small acts of connection.

Their story did not become perfect overnight. Relationships rarely do. What changed was their willingness to keep moving forward together, one thoughtful step at a time, guided by intention, emotional stability, and a shared vision of what their future could become.

Skills:

When emotions rise quickly, our reactions often happen before our thinking has a chance to catch up. This is especially true in relationships where hurt, fear, or disappointment has built up over time. In those moments the brain moves into protection mode. Words come out too quickly. Tone becomes sharp. A person may shut down or say something they later regret. The S.T.O.P. skill was designed to interrupt that pattern. It creates a small but powerful pause that allows a person to move from emotional reactivity into thoughtful action.

The value of the S.T.O.P. skill is not that it removes emotions. Emotions are important signs about what matters to us. The problem occurs when emotions take control of our behavior before we have time to think. S.T.O.P. gives the mind a moment to slow down so that decisions can be guided by values and long-term goals rather than by immediate emotional pressure.

S.T.O.P. is an acronym that reminds a person of four small steps that can be practiced in difficult moments.

This is the first and most important step. When you feel the surge of anger, fear, or hurt, you mentally pause. You do not react right away. You hold your words and actions for a moment. Even a brief pause can prevent a reaction that might escalate the situation.

T means Take a breath.

Breathing slows the nervous system and helps the body settle. A slow breath signals to the brain that the moment does not require immediate fight or escape. It gives your thinking mind time to come back online so you can respond with intention rather than impulse.

O means Observe.

This step invites gentle curiosity about what is happening inside and around you. You notice what you are feeling and what thoughts are moving through your mind. You might notice anger rising or a fear that the relationship is not safe. You also observe the situation itself. What is actually happening in the moment may be different from the story your emotions are telling.

P means Proceed with intention.

After pausing, breathing, and observing, you choose how to move forward. This step asks a simple question. What action would reflect the kind of person I want to be in this moment? Instead of reacting automatically, you choose a response that supports your values and the kind of relationship you want to build.

Consider a moment when Don comes home after a long day and notices that Donna seems distant and quiet. In the past he might have reacted quickly, assuming she did not care about him or that she was hiding something. That assumption could lead to frustration or withdrawal. Instead, Don practices the S.T.O.P. skill.

He first stops and recognizes the tension building inside him. Rather than making a quick comment, he pauses. He then takes a breath, slowing himself down and allowing his body to settle. Next, he observes what is happening. He notices his thoughts moving toward suspicion and remembers that these thoughts may be shaped by past pain rather than the present moment. Finally, he proceeds with intention. Instead of reacting with anger or silence, he chooses a calm question and says, “You seem a little quiet tonight. Is everything okay?”

This simple pause changes the direction of the interaction. The conversation becomes open instead of defensive. Donna feels less attacked and more able to share how she is feeling. Over time these small moments of emotional regulation help create safety and trust within the relationship.

The S.T.O.P. skill is simple, but when practiced regularly it becomes one of the most powerful tools for emotional stability. It gives people the space to choose their response instead of being

carried away by their emotions. In relationships that are healing and rebuilding, that small space can make a meaningful difference.

Intention Statements are short personal guides that remind you of the kind of person you want to be and the kind of direction you want your actions to follow. It is not a rule and it is not a demand placed on someone else. Instead, it is a quiet commitment you make to yourself about how you want to show up in difficult moments. When emotions are calm, most people already know the kind of partner, friend, or parent they want to be. The challenge comes when strong feelings take over. In those moments the mind often reacts from fear, anger, or protection rather than from personal values. An Intention Statement helps reconnect behavior with those values.

Many people find it helpful to write their statement in simple language that reflects their goals for the relationship and their own character. A statement might say something like, “I will respond with patience and curiosity so I can build safety and understanding in my relationship,” or “I want my actions to move us toward connection rather than distance.” The wording does not have to be perfect. What matters is that the statement reflects the direction a person wants their behavior to follow.

An Intention Statement becomes especially useful when it is paired with the S.T.O.P. skill. The S.T.O.P. skill creates the pause that allows a person to step out of automatic reactions. The Intention Statement then helps guide what comes next. Together they form a simple process. S.T.O.P. slows the moment. The Intention Statement provides direction for the response.

When the S.T.O.P. skill reaches the final step of proceeding, the person can briefly recall their Intention Statement before choosing how to act. Instead of asking, “What do I feel like doing right now?” the person asks, “What action would reflect the intention I have chosen for myself?” This shift moves behavior away from emotional impulse and toward thoughtful action.

Some people find it helpful to include the Intention Statement directly within the STOP process, so it becomes part of the mental routine. After stopping, breathing, and observing, the person silently repeats their intention before moving forward. In this way the steps might look something like this in practice.

- Stop and pause the reaction.
- Take a slow breath to settle the body.
- Observe what you are feeling and what is happening around you.
- Proceed in a way that reflects that intention
 - Remember your Intention Statement. Repeat often.

This process may only take a few seconds, but those seconds can change the direction of a conversation or a relationship moment. For example, Don might feel irritation rising during a disagreement with Donna. Instead of reacting immediately, he pauses and uses the STOP skill. As he reaches the final step, he reminds himself of his Intention Statement, which might be something

like, “I want to create safety and closeness through patience and understanding.” Remembering that intention helps him choose a calmer response. Rather than speaking sharply or withdrawing, he asks a thoughtful question or speaks with a softer tone.

Over time the combination of S.T.O.P. and an Intention Statement becomes a reliable guide during difficult moments. The pause prevents reactions that create more damage. The intention reminds a person of the direction they want their life and relationships to move toward. Practiced consistently, these small internal steps help people act from their values even when emotions are strong.

Controlled small actions are deliberate choices that move a relationship in a healthier direction. They are called controlled because they focus on what a person can manage in the moment. Instead of trying to fix everything at once, the focus remains on behaviors that are realistic and repeatable. This approach prevents people from becoming overwhelmed and helps create patterns that others can begin to rely on.

These actions also strengthen self-trust. When someone follows through on the small commitments they make to themselves, they begin to experience a sense of internal reliability. They see that their actions match their intentions. Over time that consistency reshapes how they see themselves. A person who once believed they could not control their reactions, or their behavior begins to recognize that change is possible through steady effort.

One helpful way to choose these small actions is to build them around personal strengths. Strengths give direction to behavior because they reflect qualities that already exist within the person. When people use their strengths intentionally, their actions often feel more natural and sustainable.

For someone whose strength is kindness, a controlled small action might involve choosing to offer simple gestures of care each day. This might include preparing a cup of coffee for their partner in the morning, asking a thoughtful question about their day, or expressing appreciation for something their partner did. These actions are small, yet they communicate attention and warmth.

A person whose strength is patience might focus on slowing down conversations that could easily become tense. Instead of interrupting or reacting quickly, they allow space for the other person to finish speaking. This simple act of listening shows respect and creates emotional safety during discussions.

Someone whose strength is responsibility may choose to follow through carefully on commitments that support the relationship. This might include arriving home at the agreed time, completing shared responsibilities around the home, or keeping small promises that were previously overlooked. Reliability in everyday responsibilities sends a strong message that change is happening.

Another person might have the strength of encouragement. They may use this strength by offering supportive words when their partner is trying to grow or recover from a difficult experience. A

brief statement such as “I see the effort you are making” can strengthen connection and remind the other person that their progress is noticed.

What makes these small actions powerful is their consistency. One kind gesture may be appreciated, but repeated kindness begins to shape the atmosphere of the relationship. One patient conversation may ease tension, but steady patience builds emotional safety. Over time these controlled small actions form patterns that replace the old patterns of distance or conflict.

As these patterns grow, both partners begin to feel something important returning to the relationship. Predictability begins to reappear. Each person starts to see that the other is making real effort. Trust grows not because of promises, but because daily behavior begins to show a new direction. At the same time, the person practicing these actions gains confidence in their own ability to live according to their values.

In this way, controlled small actions serve two purposes at once. They help rebuild connection within the relationship, and they quietly restore a person’s belief that they can guide their own behavior. Over time these steady steps create the foundation for deeper closeness and stronger trust. Discover your strengths below:



Self-Reflection: Strengths That Build Trust and Connection

Relationships grow stronger when people begin using their natural strengths in thoughtful ways. Many times, individuals focus only on their mistakes or weaknesses, especially when a relationship has been strained. This reflection page invites you to look in another direction. Instead of focusing on what has gone wrong, begin identifying the strengths that already exist within you.

Strengths often appear in small everyday behaviors. They may show up in how you speak, how you listen, or how you respond during difficult moments. When these strengths are used intentionally, they become controlled small actions that help rebuild both trust and connection.

Below is a list of strengths that often help relationships grow. As you read through them, place a check mark beside the ones that describe qualities you see in yourself or qualities you would like to practice more intentionally. Use the blank beside each strength to write a short note about how that strength might appear in your relationship.

☐ Patience

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Kindness

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Listening carefully

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Encouragement

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Responsibility

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Honesty

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Reliability

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Calmness during stress

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Thoughtfulness

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Loyalty

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Forgiveness

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Openness to learning

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Curiosity about my partner's feelings

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Gentleness in my tone

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Humor and lightness

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Problem solving How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Respect

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Consistency in my actions

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Willingness to apologize

How I might show this strength: _____

☐ Emotional self-control

How I might show this strength: _____

Identify Your Three Strongest Relationship Strengths

From the list above, choose the three strengths that feel most natural or most important for you to use right now.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Planning One Controlled Small Action

Choose one of the strengths you listed above and think about a small action you could take soon that reflects that strength.

The strength I will practice: _____

One small action I could take within the next few days: _____

When I will practice this action: _____

How this action could help build trust or connection: _____

Reflection Relationships rarely change because of one large moment. They change through many steady and intentional steps. Each time a person pauses, chooses a thoughtful response, or follows through on a small action that reflects their values, something important begins to grow.

It is the accumulation of repeatedly controlled small actions that slowly rebuilds the value we feel about ourselves and the value we bring into the relationship. Over time these actions reshape how we see ourselves and how others experience us, allowing trust and closeness to grow again.

Lastly, to continue your journey of healing, you might want to sign up to receive the [Relationship Reset Newsletter](#), a free publication on my site at www.JohnSlatePhD.com. You can receive weekly mental health guides to your inbox that help you manage your emotions, and rebuild your identity which is normally affected when you feel betrayed in a relationship. There are also affordable courses and workshops that offer answers and guidance on your journey of healing. If you find you and your partner getting into arguments, you should download either the [5-Minute Emotional Reset for Couples](#) or the [Repair Conversation Guide](#). Please download the [30-Day Challenge](#) to have structured daily actions and discussions to rebuild the relationship. These tools are free and have helped others going through the same issues as you may be. If you are having difficulty with relationships, my recent book may be of value to you ***Your Relationships Can Change: The Self-Help Relationship Workbook***. The book is 432 pages of emotional regulation skills, and relationship repair tools.

***“Until your identity is restored, resentment still lingers and trust will remain broken,
even if your partner never returns to their addiction.”***

— THE — *Relationship Reset*



Addiction Toolkit – Disrupter (*Ben*)

Story:

Not long ago I met a couple in an unexpected way. It was not in an office or through a referral. I was riding my bike through my neighborhood on a quiet afternoon when I passed a couple standing near the sidewalk talking. We exchanged simple greetings as people often do when neighbors cross paths. As the conversation continued, I mentioned that I was a counselor. Something about that small introduction changed the tone of the conversation almost immediately.

People usually keep introductions brief. We say hello, talk about the weather, and continue on our way. This interaction unfolded differently. The moment they heard I was a counselor, their expressions shifted. There was a pause, the kind that happens when people are deciding whether to say something they normally keep private. Within a few moments it became clear that both of them were carrying something heavy.

The Disrupting Partner – Ben. The disruption - inappropriate emails

At first the story came out slowly. Ben spoke quietly and cautiously while Betty, his partner, stood beside him with visible frustration. What began as a casual conversation turned into something far more personal. Ben explained that he had been exchanging emails with a coworker at his office.

At first the messages seemed harmless. They began as ordinary workplace conversations, small comments about projects and daily work matters.

Over time, however, the tone of the emails began to change. The conversations became more personal and gradually crossed boundaries that should not have been crossed. What Ben described was not something that happened suddenly. It was a series of choices that slowly moved in a direction he had not fully considered until the consequences became clear.

Late one night Ben received an email while he was sleeping. The notification sound from his phone woke Betty. Curious about who might be sending a message so late, she looked at the screen. What she found immediately raised questions. As she looked further, private conversations that Ben believed had remained hidden suddenly became visible.

In a matter of minutes, the situation that had existed quietly in the background became completely public within their marriage. Betty described the moment as a shock that moved quickly into anger. The feeling of betrayal was immediate and intense. Trust, which she believed was stable, suddenly felt shattered. In that moment she felt deeply hurt and humiliated. Her reaction was strong and direct. She told Ben to leave the home and made it clear that she intended to begin divorce proceedings. The next communication she expected to send him, she said, would be divorce papers. After a few days, Ben returned to a very quiet and cold house.

Standing there that afternoon on the sidewalk, both of them were still carrying the emotional storm that had followed that discovery. Their emotions were raw. Betty felt betrayed and angry. Ben felt ashamed and uncertain about what to do next. Both of them were overwhelmed by the situation and unsure whether their marriage could survive it.

When Ben looked at what his actions had done to the relationship, the first feeling that came up was shame. Not just guilt about what he did, but a deeper, heavier sense of *what this says about who I am*. His thoughts sounded like, *What kind of person does this?* or *Maybe this is just who I am underneath it all*.

Shame has a way of turning behavior into identity. Instead of seeing the addiction as something he engaged in, it starts to feel like it defines him. This is where the question begins to take hold: *Will I ever be good enough again?* Not just for his partner, but for himself.

There was also the quiet fear that followed him through the day. *Will I ever be forgiven?* Even when his partner is trying to move forward, he may still feel marked by what happened. He might notice that trust has changed, that questions come more often, that there is more checking, more hesitation. While he understands why, it can still feel like he is being watched, evaluated, or micromanaged.

This creates a painful tension inside. On one hand, he knows his actions caused real harm. On the other hand, constantly feeling monitored can reinforce the belief that he is not trusted, and maybe never will be. That belief can quickly turn into discouragement. *If I am always going to be seen this way, what is the point of trying?*

At times, shame can push us in two different directions. One direction is withdrawal. We may shut down, avoid conversations, or become emotionally distant because facing the hurt feels overwhelming. The other direction is defensiveness. We may react to questions or concerns with frustration, feeling like we are being judged no matter what we do. Neither response comes from a place of strength. Both come from the weight of shame and the fear of not being enough.

What is important for Ben to understand is this. Shame will keep him stuck if it is allowed to define him. Growth begins when he separates who he is from what he has done. His actions need to be owned, but they do not have to become his identity.

Rebuilding trust with his partner will take time, but rebuilding trust with himself is just as important. If he continues to see himself as someone who is broken or unworthy, his behaviors will eventually follow that belief. Identity drives action. If he begins to see himself as someone who is capable of change, accountable, and committed to growth, his actions can begin to align with that new identity.

He is not trying to prove he is perfect. He is learning to become consistent.

Skills to Overcome Shame and Rebuild Identity

1. Separate Behavior from Identity

When shame rises, practice naming the difference between what was done and who you are. Instead of saying, *I am a bad person*, shift to, *I made choices that hurt my partner, and I am taking responsibility for changing those choices*.

This creates space for growth instead of staying stuck in self-condemnation.

2. Practice Transparent Consistency

Trust is not rebuilt through words alone. It is rebuilt through repeated, predictable actions over time. Choose a few key behaviors that demonstrate change and commit to them daily. This might include honesty about your day, following through on commitments, or initiating [Weekly Check-Ins](http://www.JohnSlatePhD.com) (a free download www.JohnSlatePhD.com).

Consistency reduces the need for your partner to monitor because your behavior becomes reliable.

3. Respond Instead of React to Micromanagement Feelings

When you feel controlled or watched, pause before reacting. Ask yourself, *What is my partner feeling right now?* Often it is fear, not control for the sake of control.

Respond with calm reassurance rather than defensiveness. For example, *I understand why you're asking. I want to help you feel safe, and here's what I've been doing.* This shifts the moment from conflict to connection.

4. Build Self-Trust Through Small Promises

Shame erodes self-trust. Rebuilding it starts small. Make daily promises you can keep. Simple things like completing a task, being where you said you would be, or following through on a commitment.

Each kept promise becomes evidence that you are changing.

5. Use the Pause and Slow the Moment

When emotions rise, especially shame or frustration, pause, take a breath, slow your thoughts, your words, and your actions. This prevents reactive responses that can reinforce old patterns and allows you to act in alignment with who you are trying to become.

6. Practice Identity Statements

Begin to actively rewrite how you see yourself. Choose statements that reflect who you are becoming, not who you fear you are. Repeat them daily, especially when shame is loud.

Examples:

I am someone who takes responsibility for my actions.

I am capable of change and growth.

I am learning to show up with honesty and consistency.

I can rebuild trust through my actions.

7. Accept That Forgiveness is a Process

The question, *Will I ever be forgiven?* can create pressure and impatience. Shift the focus from seeking immediate forgiveness to becoming someone who is worthy of trust over time.

Forgiveness is not something you force. It is something that grows as safety is rebuilt. Ben is not trying to erase the past. He is learning how to live differently in the present. Shame will tell him he is stuck. Growth will show him that he is capable of becoming someone new through consistent, intentional change.

What began as a brief neighborhood conversation slowly turned into something more meaningful. They began asking questions about whether relationships could recover from situations like theirs. They wondered whether rebuilding trust was even possible after something so painful had been revealed.



As we talked, it became clear that both of them were still deeply emotional and reacting from the immediate pain of what had happened. That reaction was understandable. When trust breaks suddenly, emotions often move faster than thoughtful decisions.

Before long they asked if we could meet again in a more structured way so they could talk through the situation more carefully. What had started as a chance meeting eventually turned into scheduled sessions where we could begin working through the damage together.

During those early sessions both Ben and Betty brought strong emotions into the room. There was anger, sadness, confusion, and a deep sense of loss. Trust had been shaken and neither of them knew whether it could ever be rebuilt. Yet the fact that they both agreed to sit down and begin the process of talking through the situation was an important first step.

Those conversations became the starting point for understanding what had happened, why it had happened, and what it would take if they chose to begin rebuilding trust again.

What to Expect

Weeks 1–2: High emotion, lower trust.

Weeks 3–4: Slight stabilization if transparency and consistency of your actions are present.

Trust will not return in 30 days. Stability could begin in 30 days. Trust to begin building in 60 - 90 days, if enough emotional safety efforts are put in place (which follow). The following Micro-Practices are actions to regularly put in place to begin reconnection.

10 Micro-Practices to Rebuild the Relationship

(For Both Partners — Choose One in the evening or combine together)

1. The 10-minute reconnection and reassurance. You sit together, undistracted and say: “*I choose you.*” No prompting. Volunteer it.

2. The Appreciation Anchor. Name one specific behavior you appreciate about your partner like: “I appreciated how calm you were when I got anxious.” Specific praise rebuilds connection.

3. Memories rebuild connection. Think of one of your favorite times together, naming what you loved about that memory

4. The Micro-Promise Tracker. Choose 2–3 small daily promises (text back, be on time, volunteer transparency). Track completion for 30 days. Reliability rebuilds trust faster than emotion.

5. The Ownership Sentence. “I am responsible for my choices. I am capable of change.” Admitting I made a mistake, reassures your partner that you are taking responsibility and choose to change.

6. The Respect Rebuild Action. Do a behavior that reflects maturity or that you care: flowers, be punctual, handle responsibility, hold a door, take the trash out, bring home a card. Initiate a hard conversation.

7. Trigger Awareness Discussion: Ask your partner how their day went or were they triggered about the disruption today? No fixing. Just compassionate listening and sincere apologies.

8. Nervous System Night. Sit together, practice 5 minutes of slow breathing together, co-regulation because you care. End with one appreciation without expectation of an appreciation back.

9. Fear Naming: State to partner: “One fear I haven’t said out loud is...”

10. Boundary Clarification: State one new boundary that you have decided to put in place to be sure another disruption doesn’t take place. Blocker, app, support group, sponsor . . .

Journaling Prompts

To Rebuild Your Integrity, Responsibility, and Identity

Radical Ownership (*No Minimizing*)

1. What exactly did I do? Be specific.
2. What parts have I been tempted to soften or justify?
3. What impact did my behavior have on my partner emotionally?
4. If I were in their position, what would I feel?
5. What trust expectations did I violate?
6. What promises did I break — spoken or unspoken?
7. Where have I minimized the damage?
8. What did this behavior communicate about safety?
9. What am I fully responsible for?
10. What would full ownership sound like without “but”?

Understanding My Why

1. What emotional states preceded my behavior?
2. Was I avoiding stress, loneliness, rejection, boredom, shame?
3. What did the behavior temporarily give me?

4. What discomfort was I trying to escape?
5. What belief justified my actions in the moment?
6. What lie did I tell myself?
7. When did this pattern first begin in my life?
8. What need was I trying to meet in an unhealthy way?
9. What healthier alternatives did I ignore?
10. What is the deeper pattern beneath this event?

Shame vs Responsibility

1. What shame statements do I say to myself?
2. Are those statements about identity or behavior?
3. What is the difference between “I am bad” and “I made harmful choices”?
4. How does shame affect my defensiveness?
5. When I feel accused, what identity fear gets triggered?
6. Do I fear being permanently labeled?
7. How does shame make me want to withdraw or over-explain?
8. What would responsible maturity look like instead?
9. Can I sit with discomfort without self-hate?
10. What would self-respectful accountability sound like?

Actions to Prevent Another Disruption

1. Build a Trigger Map (*Be Proactive, Don't Wait for Urges*)

Identify in writing:

- Emotional triggers (loneliness, boredom, stress, rejection, shame)
- Situational triggers (late nights, isolation, phone use in private)
- Cognitive triggers (“I deserve this,” “It’s not that bad”)

Disruptions rarely happen randomly. They follow patterns.

2. Install Structural Barriers

Prevention is not willpower.

Examples:

- Accountability software
- No devices in private late at night
- Shared passwords (if agreed)
- Screen limits
- Clear digital boundaries

Structure reduces opportunity.

3. Practice Immediate Disclosure

If you slip emotionally, mentally, or behaviorally:

Disclose A.S.A.P. within 24 hours at the latest. Secrecy escalates damage. Honesty reduces it.
Delayed disclosure = second betrayal.

4. Replace the Behavior With a Coping Plan

Ask:

“When I feel ____, what will I do instead?”

Create a 3-step plan:

- Call someone
- Go for a walk
- Cold water reset
- Journal urge for 5 minutes
- Pray / meditate
- Do pushups / movement changes feelings

Unreplaced habits resurface.

COUPLES PROGRESS AUDIT WORKSHEET

Rebuilding Trust • Measuring Safety • Tracking Growth

Use: Weekly or bi-weekly. Complete this together. **Purpose:** Evaluate patterns, not perfection

PART 1 – SAFETY & STABILITY CHECK

Rate each item from 1–10

(1 = very low, 10 = strong and consistent)

Betrayed Partner Completes:

Emotional safety this week: _____

Transparency felt consistent: _____

Defensiveness decreased: _____

Repair happened faster: _____

Anxiety intensity decreased: _____

Trust feels slightly stronger: _____

Partner Rebuilding Trust Completes:

I responded without defensiveness: _____

I practiced proactive transparency: _____

I kept small promises: _____

I regulated shame effectively: _____

I initiated repair quickly: _____

I acted with integrity when no one was watching: _____

PART 2 – WHAT IMPROVED?

1. One behavior that increased safety this week: _____
2. One moment we handled better than before: _____
3. One way repair felt faster: _____
4. One emotional shift I noticed: _____

PART 3 – WHERE WE STILL STRUGGLE

1. A trigger that still escalates us: _____
2. A pattern that feels stuck: _____

3. A moment that felt unresolved: _____

4. What made that moment difficult? _____

PART 4 – DEFENSIVENESS & SHAME REVIEW

(Partner Rebuilding Trust)

When confronted this week, I tended to:

- ☐ Listen calmly
- ☐ Over-explain
- ☐ Minimize
- ☐ Withdraw
- ☐ Get irritated
- ☐ Take responsibility

What I did well: _____

What I need to improve: _____

PART 5 – HYPERVIGILANCE & SAFETY REVIEW

(Betrayed Partner)

This week I noticed:

- ☐ Less checking
- ☐ Fewer intrusive thoughts
- ☐ Calmer body reactions
- ☐ Still high anxiety
- ☐ Increased fear
- ☐ Emotional exhaustion

One thing that reduced anxiety: _____

One reassurance that helped: _____

PART 6 – TRANSPARENCY & STRUCTURE CHECK

Were structural boundaries respected this week? Yes / No

If not, what happened? _____

Were there any delayed disclosures? Yes / No

If yes, what impact did that have? _____

Do boundaries need adjusting? _____

PART 7 – REPAIR SPEED METRIC

After conflict, how long did disconnection last?

- ☐ Under 1 hour
- ☐ Same day
- ☐ 24–48 hours
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ Still unresolved

What helped repair? _____

What slowed repair? _____

PART 8 – INTIMACY & CONNECTION

This week we experienced:

- ☐ Emotional closeness
- ☐ Vulnerable conversations
- ☐ Gentle physical affection
- ☐ Increased tension
- ☐ Emotional distance

One connecting moment: _____

One step toward closeness: _____

PART 9 – IDENTITY GROWTH

Betrayed Partner: I am becoming someone who _____.

Partner Rebuilding Trust: I am becoming someone who _____.

As a couple, we are becoming _____.

PART 10 – NEXT WEEK’S ADJUSTMENT PLAN

One behavior to increase: _____.

One behavior to reduce: _____

One new structure to try: _____

One reassurance to practice daily: _____

FINAL RATING

Overall progress this week (1–10): _____

Is trust:

- ☐ Slightly stronger
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Fragile but improving
- ☐ Regressing
- ☐ Stabilizing

IMPORTANT REMINDER

Look for trends, not perfection. Trust rebuilds when:

- Safety increases gradually
- Repair speeds up
- Transparency becomes automatic
- Shame decreases
- Anxiety softens

Lastly, to continue your journey of healing, you might want to sign up to receive the [Relationship Reset Newsletter](#), a free publication on my site at www.JohnSlatePhD.com. You can receive weekly mental health guides to your inbox that help you manage your emotions, and rebuild your identity which is normally affected when you feel betrayed in a relationship. There are also affordable courses and workshops that offer answers and guidance on your journey of healing. If you find you and your partner getting into arguments, you should download either the [5-Minute Emotional Reset for Couples](#) or the [Repair Conversation Guide](#). Please download the [30-Day Challenge](#) to have structured daily actions and discussions to rebuild the relationship. These tools are free and have helped others going through the same issues as you may be. My book -***Your Relationships Can Change: The Self-Help Relationship Workbook***. The book is 432 pages of emotional regulation skills, and relationship repair tools.

“It is never too late to become the person you want to be.”