

Should I make my husband take a polygraph test?

How do I deal with an expert liar?

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Question: My husband has lied about pornography and his online sexual conversations with females. Now he's been caught in an affair. He claims it's over, but cell phone bills proves it's not. He's an expert liar, so I never know the truth and I'm ready to give up. I say he needs to get rid of his computer and cell phone, but should I make him take a polygraph test also? To me, lie detectors are the surest way to sift truth from lies, but are they worth the money and do they work?

Answer: Thank you for sharing your painful story with us. My response to your question comes from my perspective as a licensed therapist who has spent years working with couples where one or both spouses wandered outside the marriage (i.e. pornography, sexual text messages, or casual meetings ending in sexual relationships). The common denominator is always secrets and lies. Trust is shattered and wounded partners doubt they have enough glue or energy to put it back together again.

The validity of polygraph testing has been debated for years by researchers and respected counselors. The courts refuse to consider the test results as reliable for proving innocence or guilt. The fear of being caught could result in a quicker confession, however, problems occur when your marriage is at stake and you get a false positive or a false negative reading. Also, consider the possibility of gaining a sense of security, but he then has another affair or seeks out porn again immediately following the test. How many polygraphs are enough? If you feel you need test results, your marital problems are more severe than you might realize.

Your husband's consistent deceitfulness reveals major personality flaws (sins) that must be confronted. (See clear directives for you in Matthew 18:15-17.) The old adage, "People are as sick as the secrets they keep," is true. The Bible tells us to beware of liars whose consciences are seared. Getting rid of the computer (and cell phone) and demanding a polygraph test might seem helpful, but unless he is motivated to seek marital counseling and resolve what drives his lies and adultery than you have gained little. If he truly wants to change and work on the marriage, a therapist can assist you both in recovering from this heartbreak.

I want to be fully honest - repairing the damage and starting over is not easy, but most people in your shoes believe the blessing is truly worth the energy spent. Hopefully you will be encouraged to know you don't have to go it alone. God is willing and able to supply the glue that will sustain you, as you lean on Him and learn to thrive as husband and wife.