



A COUPLES REPAIR TOOL

# AFTER A TRUST RUPTURE THE REPAIR MAP

A guide for couples rebuilding after a breach of trust — hidden behavior, a broken agreement, a hard discovery. It maps what the rupture actually broke, what the hurt partner is living with, and the work each person has to do to find solid ground again.

## THREE THINGS TO KNOW GOING IN

### BEFORE YOU START

- A rupture is rarely about the act alone. The deeper injury is usually the secrecy, the broken agreement, or what the discovery came to mean.
- Repair runs on the hurt partner's timeline, not on the other person's wish to have it over with.
- Shame blocks empathy. It's hard to stay present for someone you've hurt while drowning in your own collapse, so steadying yourself is part of the work, not a detour from it.
- Trust isn't restored by a single apology. It rebuilds in many small, consistent moments that prove the words.

## WHAT A RUPTURE ACTUALLY BREAKS

The pain is rarely about the behavior on its own. It's about what the behavior took with it.

### SAFETY

The sense that this relationship is a place to let your guard down. Until it returns, the nervous system stays braced.

### THE SHARED STORY

The version of the relationship both people believed they were living. Learning it wasn't fully true is its own grief.

### SELF-TRUST

If there was denial or "you're imagining it," the hurt partner now distrusts their own read on reality too.

## WHAT THE HURT PARTNER LIVES WITH

These are normal responses to a rupture in safety, not overreaction. Understanding them is the start of empathy.

### GRIEF

Mourning the relationship and the partner they thought they had. The sadness is loss, not just upset.

### HYPERVIGILANCE

"What else don't I know?" Checking, re-reading the past, bracing for the next surprise.

### INADEQUACY

"Am I not enough?" Even when it isn't truly about them, it can land as a verdict on their worth.

### QUESTIONING WHAT'S REAL

When the truth came late, they second-guess their own perception of everything since.



## THE REPAIR ARC

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Repair tends to move through three stages, in order. Skipping ahead to closeness before the hurt is heard is what makes repair stall.

### STAGE 1

#### Atone

The partner who caused the rupture takes full, non-defensive accountability and stays present for the hurt — for as long as it takes, without rushing to be forgiven.

### STAGE 2

#### Attune

Both turn toward the pain with curiosity instead of defense. The hurt is heard and understood before anyone tries to move on.

### STAGE 3

#### Attach

With safety slowly re-earned, the couple rebuilds closeness and intimacy on ground that can hold it again.

## TWO ROLES, ONE REPAIR

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Each partner has a different job. Neither is harder or more important — they only work together.

### IF YOU CAUSED THE RUPTURE

- Catch your own flooding — heat in the face, the urge to explain — and steady yourself before you respond.
- Aim for guilt (“I hurt you”), not shame (“I’m worthless”). Shame pulls the focus back onto you.
- Listen without defending, justifying, or fixing: “Tell me more about what that was like.”
- Let it not be over yet. Patience is part of the repair, not a failure of it.

### IF YOU WERE HURT

- Your pain is information, not an overreaction. Name what you need to feel safe again.
- Ask for the specific things that rebuild trust, rather than waiting to feel different first.
- Pace yourself. Healing isn’t linear, and a hard day doesn’t erase the progress.
- You’re allowed to take the time you need. Repair doesn’t run on anyone else’s schedule.

**Some ruptures are too tender to repair alone.** Rebuilding trust is some of what couples therapy does best — a neutral third person can hold the process when it’s too raw to hold yourselves. Adapted from the Gottman Method’s trust-repair work.

**EDUCATIONAL ONLY — NOT THERAPY.**