

Coming Clean

Disclosing Well - Men's Protocol

The following guidelines will help you come clean about your sexual behavior in a way that will provide the greatest potential for forgiveness and healing. While this document describes the interaction in terms of your wife or committed partner, you can use the principles found in this protocol with others you are close to. It is always a good idea to limit early disclosure to only those who have been directly affected by your failure.



1. Timing is critical

You will need plenty of time and privacy to do this well.

If you initiate the conversation

Do not initiate a conversation about your failures until you are ***ready to tell her everything***. When you feel that you can be completely honest, approach her when you have privacy and plenty of time. Do not tell her you want to talk about something at a later point. She will likely insist that you talk then and there.

She will have many questions. Answer every one of them honestly. Again, if you do not think you can tell her everything she wants to know, wait to initiate the conversation until you feel you can be completely honest.

If she initiates the conversation

If your spouse initiates a conversation about your sexual behavior in a private place with sufficient time to talk, answer all her questions truthfully. If she brings it up in a situation where you do not have privacy or an extended time frame, let her know that you want to have the conversation but you prefer to wait till you can have privacy and/or more time. Offer an alternative time. She may become agitated and insist but if you *lack privacy or time*, repeat your desire to be completely honest with her but that this is not the time or place.

Absolutely do not tell her you are not ready to talk! Even if you feel unprepared, do your best. Delaying will only have her fearing the worst. Your wife's imagination at this point will be going places you haven't.

2. Stay in the process

She may require several sessions to get the information she needs. Do not assume that just because you answered all her questions in one session that it is over. She may be back tomorrow with more questions. Stay humble and remain in the process.

There are two sides to this exchange. You are coming clean and she is learning exactly what she will have to forgive. It is as important for you to stay in this process, as it is for her get the information she needs. Any reluctance on your part will be interpreted as you withholding information. If she feels you are not coming clean, she cannot move toward forgiveness.

3. How much detail?

Some women want to know all the intricate details of their husband's sexual acting out. Other women do not want those details in their mind and will be content with basic answers.

Give the level of detail she asks for no matter how painful it is for you to answer. Be specific if she needs specifics. If she only asks general questions, answer in general terms. Below is an example of an exchange related to pornography. This same example could apply to an affair or other sexual acting out. Some women will stop after question one. Others will take you all the way into the details.

From general to specific questions, just keep answering the questions until she has what she needs.

1. Do you look at porn?
Good answer – Yes
Poor answer – Not much/ hardly ever
2. How often do you look at porn?
Good answer – Often enough that I'm feeling really bad about it.
Poor answer – Not very often.
3. How many times in a week do you look at porn?
Good answer – 2 or 3
Poor answer – Depends on the week, some weeks not at all.
4. When do you look at porn?
Good answer – Mostly at night after you are asleep.
Poor answer – Never when the kids are awake.
5. Where do you look at porn?
Good answer – "In the den" or "At the office"

Poor answer – I never do it in our home/bedroom.

6. Do you masturbate when you look at porn?

Good answer – “Yes” or “No” or “Sometimes”

Poor answer – Hardly ever, mostly I just look.

7. What kind of porn do you look at?

Good answer – “People having sex” or “Naked women”

Poor answer – Mostly just the really mild stuff.

8. What do the women look like? She may want hair color, body type...

Good answer – Blonds with large...

Poor answer – I don’t know, I don’t pay attention to those things.

Again, answer **ALL** her questions truthfully. Let her take the lead. Do not assume she wants the intricate details. She may not. But, when she asks for specifics, answer her questions completely. Withholding information will only provide an opportunity for secrets to remain between you. Secrets between you will ultimately undermine the process of healing and restoration.

No matter what level of disclosure your wife has asked for, you should process your complete and detailed confession with a counselor or pastor.

Keep No Secrets or They will Keep You!

4. Don’t expect or ask for forgiveness right away.

You may suddenly feel better now that the secret is out. However, she will be in extreme pain and shock, especially if your sexual activity is a complete surprise. You need to understand she is simply incapable of forgiveness at this point. She has to process this information. All you can say now is “I’m sorry.” Forgiveness is not on the table yet.

5. Once the conversation begins, remember the 5 steps:

- **Man up!** – Be Strong and Courageous
- **Humble up!** – Be truly sorry for you actions
- **Own it!** – Don’t try to minimize or rationalize your failures
- **Stop the Blame Game!** – Do not blame her or others
- **Embrace the Pain!** – Don’t try to stop her from crying – cry with her

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