

Counseling Corner

Will You Ever Trust Me Again?

from the American Counseling Association

It happens to many of us. We do something that causes one or more people to lose trust in us. It might be something as serious as infidelity in a relationship, or fairly minor like a teen missing too many curfews or caught being untruthful.

When we've shown someone important to us that we aren't trustworthy, it can be a painful and confusing process to win that trust back again. The person who lied often feels he or she can never do enough to be trusted again. And the person who was deceived probably feels it would be foolish to trust the offender again soon, if at all.

While it isn't always possible to win back somebody's confidence, there are ways to increase the chances that you will be trusted again. A starting point is to avoid making excuses and instead to admit you were wrong, to apologize for what occurred, and to make it clear that what happened will not be repeated. But those words need to be followed up by actions.

A major next step is to deliver on what you promise at all times. It's necessary to begin building trust again in even the smallest of ways. If you say you'll call, make sure you do. If you say you'll be on time, or do the laundry, or run that errand, make sure you actually do what you've said you would. Don't forget or have to be reminded, and if you can't deliver on what's been promised, let the other person know ahead of time, not with an excuse after the fact.

You also have to be realistic about how long it will take to win back someone's trust. It can take a lot of you following-through on your promises before the other person begins to believe in you again. It may seem to you that you've demonstrated you can be trusted many more times than your original transgression deserved, but it can be difficult once a trust has been broken it can be difficult for the other person to accept that you've changed.

At first, you may think that a broken trust can never be repaired, but most of us are capable of understanding that we all make mistakes. The key is to continue to demonstrate to the other person that you've learned from your mistake and are not going to make it again.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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