

We survived her affair

One couple tell **Olivia Gordon** how therapy and hard work saved their marriage

Is it possible to bring a marriage back from the brink of divorce? Clemency, 30, and Toby, 35, did just that.

They live in the south of England with their four-year-old daughter and Clemency's 13-year-old son from a previous relationship.

Clemency's story

I got pregnant at 16. I come from a good background and have a loving family who were supportive, but my boyfriend and I were both so young, and when I was 19, we split up. I wanted to go to university, but because I was a single mother, I worked hard and ended up in marketing.

I was 22 when I met Toby, an entrepreneur. It was a dream come true and I fell in love. We married a year later, I started working in Toby's business and I quickly got pregnant. Before the baby, we were excited about doing everything together, but when our daughter came along, life turned upside-down. We didn't have any time on our own, what with the children, the business, and me finally training to get an accountancy qualification.

Toby was working long hours, and we were constantly bickering and battling over sleep. All the romance seemed to have gone from our relationship and we stopped having sex. Eighteen months after we married, I took on a freelance job, and Tom, a colleague, took an interest in me. Quickly, this developed into an affair.

It sounds awful, but it made me so happy — I think it was because I'd settled down so young, I'd missed out on having fun. I felt terrible about the children, but I didn't feel guilty about cheating on Toby. I thought I'd made a mistake marrying him, and when somebody else started giving me everything I wasn't getting from him, it was intoxicating.

I kept it a secret from everyone. After a couple of months, though, I began to feel really bad. I was still, at heart, in love with Toby — we had a family and I wanted to work things out.

I ended the affair and left the job. Now I had to confess. One night, when the children were in bed, I started crying. I was terrified he'd hit the roof and leave us. But I took a deep breath and said: "I had an affair. It didn't last long. I don't want to see him again and I want to work things out."

Toby didn't shout or scream or cry; he didn't do or say anything. He was in shock. We tried to sort things out over the next few months, but we struggled. There was now mistrust — Toby questioned my every move. He never confronted me directly, but he'd snap at everyone. I tried to explain why I'd had the affair, but he didn't want to hear it.

We were ready to divorce, but as one last try, I considered therapy. I knew the NHS list was long, so I looked for a private counsellor. A friend recommended a psychologist who had helped another couple. She was expensive, but, if only for our children's sake, I hoped it would be money well spent.

It took some persuading to convince Toby — he was reluctant to open up to anybody. The therapist saw us

individually and together once a week for six months. We went through my whole past, and Toby's. The focus ended up being on understanding why I'd had the affair. Therapy highlighted that we hadn't been nurturing our relationship, and that I'd grown up too young.

Toby had to get to a point where instead of just saying, "My wife had an affair", he understood it was because our relationship hadn't been working. We really worked hard — making time for each other, insisting we listened to what the other was honestly saying. I had to be able to express when I wasn't happy, instead of pretending to be fine. And Toby learnt to share his feelings.

We hadn't been to dinner on our own for years — now we started awkwardly going out every week or cooking a special meal when the children were in bed. At first we didn't know

what to talk about other than work and the kids. But it became easier. It took a while to get our sex life back — we felt almost nervous with each other at first — but it went from strength to strength.

It's now been 18 months since we completed therapy. Of course family life is still stressful, but rather than looking at things negatively, we tell each other how we feel and take action, getting a baby-sitter or planning romantic holidays. We're happier and feel like a team again. There is life after an affair and I want other couples to know that.

Toby's story

When Clemency told me about the affair I was destroyed. I'm not very comfortable showing my feelings, so I didn't shout or kick her out, although I felt like it. I lost all trust in her and couldn't believe she could be so selfish. I couldn't get over the hurt and rejection.

Clemency felt there was no point in continuing our relationship unless we tried outside help. In our first session I wasn't optimistic, but therapy made me look at the affair differently. Although Clemency had the affair, in therapy I realised that I was partly to blame because I hadn't put enough effort into showing her how much I love her.

We realised how important family life is and I learnt that I wasn't expressing my feelings. I'd felt resentful that Clemency had so much time with the children while I was working late. So little things, like being at home for dinner and sharing time as a family, have become really important.

If we hadn't got help, we'd have continued in a very unhappy and destructive pattern, or we wouldn't be together at all. Instead, I'm happy to say we now have a truly solid marriage. ►

Clemency and Toby's therapist, Trudy Hill, practises at Seventy Thirty (seventy-thirty.com).

The best way to find a therapist is through personal recommendation. Or go to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy website, bacp.co.uk, for a list of therapists in your area

GO THE DISTANCE

- Make time for sex, even if it feels awkward or artificial at first.
- Go on a date. Have fun. Dress up for each other.
- Don't lavish all your care and attention on your children. Your partner needs some, too.
- Don't withdraw. Try to work out problems before they get too bad.
- Don't pretend that things are fine if they're not. If you have a problem expressing your feelings, therapy can help work out your emotional blocks.
- If things are bad, get help from a professional, but don't expect instant results. If the therapist is not right for you, try another.