

QUESTION

My husband of 3 years just told me that he has a 1-year-old child from an affair and wants to maintain a relationship with this child. What should I do?

This is a crisis for most every married couple. If we could put aside the issue of your husband's hiding this affair and child, we might be able to make sense of what to do. First, we could view this situation as similar to that where you have married a man with a child from a prior marriage, only you found out after you got married making this more complex. You did not agree to this family format when you decided to marry your husband and it is understandable you would be quite upset. The complexities you have to deal with are that your husband now has priorities that compete with your marriage, i.e., the position of who the most important people in the world are to him, time he has to spend with the child, financial costs, and an interpersonal triangle between you, him, and the other child and the child's mother.

While no therapist can give you a simple answer, I will try to give you ways to think about this and what kinds of decisions you might make based on your personal situation and your level of tolerance for complexity. This discussion assumes you could get past the anger and upset you have at your husband; not so easy of course.

If you do not have children with your husband, you might understandably feel you want to start over with another man. This might be the most common decision a woman in your situation would choose and is not unreasonable at this juncture. The only caveat would be to ask yourself, "If my husband had a child from a prior marriage would I have still married him?" If the answer was yes, then you might be of the mind-set to continue the marriage knowing that you might have some stress with the situation, but it is also possible you might

welcome the other child into your family and enjoy being with this child as an extended family member. Of course your husband needs to be clear he is not having any ongoing relationship with the mother and has a deep desire to continue with you.

If you do have children with your husband, you need to take the impact of a break up of the family on the



children into consideration. Break up fully with child visitations, break up the marriage but live together or nearby and function in a friendly way as parents, or stay together fully, are the possible reasonable choices.

Whatever you choose, you need to confirm your husband's future dedication to you, exactly how your husband foresees his relationship with this child and the child's family, and see what his emotional, time, financial, and other responsibilities with this child and

the child's family would be. Regarding your personality needs; I recommend that you don't stay with him just because you are needy, and that you don't break up just because you are angry.

You need to make an informed decision based on some of the rational I have presented when you are in a cool state of mind. If you are really stuck you might want to talk the situation over with a therapist. It might be a good idea to bring your husband to a therapy session where the therapist could also help you understand what issues may have led to your husband having this affair to begin with. You are in a tough place and my heart is with you in your endeavor to sort this all out.

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The discussions herein are meant as general information and advice only. Each person needs to make their own personal life decisions and to contact a mental health professional for consultation if deemed appropriate.

Dr. Douglas Berger and his staff at the Meguro Counseling Center in the Shibuya-Ebisu area provide mental health care for individuals, couples, and families, in both English and Japanese.
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