



How long does it take to rebuild trust?

Sometimes it's couples where one partner has had an affair. Other times it's between parents and a teen where the teen has stolen, lied or has been doing drugs. The issue is trust and the question is, "How long does it take to rebuild trust when broken?"

Trust refers to being able to rely, depend or have confidence in someone or something. It is not simply based upon a statement of intention given at some place or time. It's certainly more than a promise, which too is a statement of intent, but perhaps asserted with greater intensity giving the impression of greater meaning. Between people, real trust is an outcome of observed behaviour over time where one's commitments are consistently met.

Depending on either the severity of the non-trustworthy behaviour or the frequency of non-trustworthy events, the length of time to redevelop trust can vary greatly.

A low frequency, high intensity event such as an affair can undermine trust so significantly that the rebuilding process can take years. Other events such as a child stealing change on an intermittent basis may also take time to repair, not because of the intensity of the event, but due to the ongoing and intermittent nature of the event. Single, low intensity events generally take the shortest time to repair.

The key to rebuilding trust is understanding that rebuilding takes more than just time and an apology. While an apology is an important part of the rebuilding process, as stated above; rebuilding real trust is a function of observable behaviour over time where one's commitments are consistently met. Thus trust is an outcome of behaviour, just as lack of trust is also a function of behaviour.

Given the non-trustworthy behaviour, the person who broke the trust will have to understand that for the present and foreseeable future, they cannot be taken at their word. Their trustworthiness will be a function of their deeds or actions. Hence, their behaviour must be observable and subject to scrutiny. Those who have had an affair will have to better account for their time. Those who gamble will have to account for their money. Those who steal will have to account for their whereabouts and those who make inappropriate

use of the Internet may have their access restricted or use monitored. The person who violated the trust will have to appreciate that this burden is the consequence of their non-trustworthy behaviour. Talk and promises are no substitute for observable behaviour over time to the rebuilding process.

The rebuilding process continues generally to the satisfaction of the person whose trust was violated. It may be that certain safeguards will be required for a substantial length of time, such as regular attendance at sobriety meetings or phone calls during the day to state one's whereabouts. In other cases, the rebuilding process may bring the level of trust quickly back to the pre non-trustworthy event and hence further ongoing efforts to scrutinize behaviour would no longer be necessary. The length of time to satisfy the person whose trust was violated will vary according to the significance of the event and prior or ongoing other non-trustworthy behaviour the other person displays. Hence, once must be fully trustworthy in all aspects.

Want to rebuild trust then? Start with an apology and then commit to observable and appropriate behaviour. Where necessary, repair or put in safeguards to protect against further non-trustworthy behaviour. Repair may require counselling or attendance at special programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Repair may also require restitution. Safeguards may include regular phone calls home or accounting for one's whereabouts.

Remember, the responsibility for rebuilding trust lies with the person who demonstrated the non-trustworthy behaviour and to the reasonable satisfaction of the person whose trust was broken. The process will take as long as it takes!

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