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## Jealousy, Power, Control and the Office Affair

By Sandra W. Froese, Ed.D, LPC-S, © 2011, all rights reserved.

**Problem:** In the following session with a marriage counselor, John thinks that his wife Jane (not their real names) is having an "emotional affair" with a male co-worker. She expresses that she is tired of his jealous and controlling behaviors. She says that he blows such situations at her workplace out of proportion. Is she or isn't she? What is the solution?

**John:** I believe my wife is having an "emotional affair" with a male co-worker. I have told her that she should not have a relationship with any male co-worker at her office because it crosses boundaries and is a violation of the trust in our marriage.

**Jane:** I am angry that you think that I would betray you and jeopardize our marriage. Your jealous and unreasonable attitude about my relationship with male co-workers will only drive a wedge between us. I have to work with all the people in my office, including the guys!

**John:** My wife's continuation of a relationship with a male co-worker is against my wishes. I think she should respect my wishes by not having lunch with any male co-workers. I consider having lunch with a male co-worker a "date."

**Jane:** Our team, males and females, occasionally go to lunch together, but that is all. We consider having occasional lunches together as "team building." I am concerned that you want to control what I do, who I see and how I act at work.

**Professional Counselor:** *Why is this situation so threatening to the husband? Is he afraid of losing his wife to another man or does he seek control of his wife? Is he jealous and lacks trust when she is out of his sight? Is he using strong-arm tactics and threats to control her? If he wants Jane to stay with him, he must look at her world through her eyes. He must trust that she is loyal to him and their marriage unless proven otherwise--and she needs to do the same.*

**John:** My wife told one of her male co-workers that I have a problem with their relationship and yet it continues. Both know that I don't approve, but he still continues a relationship with my wife. Does he have an unhealthy attachment to her and her with him knowing that I don't approve?

**Jane:** I do not want my husband to create a scene, so I warned my male co-workers that my husband has a problem with my relationship with other males. If he comes into our office, I don't want trouble. There are no unhealthy attachments—our office is a work environment!

**Professional Counselor:** *Emotional affairs can and do happen. Boundaries must be strictly observed in the workplace at all times. Does the husband have evidence of his wife's inappropriate behavior with a male co-worker? Does she stay late at the office without a good reason? Is there evidence of phone calls, e-mails or text messages that appear inappropriate? Does she go out of town with a male co-worker on business trips? If so, then he should rightfully confront his spouse with evidence and seek marriage counseling. If there is no evidence, then he should not bring up the subject.*

*Both need to love, cherish and give positive attention to each other so that emotional needs are met. If this couple wants their marriage to survive, both need to start with changing their selves--not each other. The best advice I can give is when at work, concentrate on being the best employee you can be, and when at home, make an effort to be the best husband and father or the best wife and mother you can be. Marriage requires each giving 110 percent.*

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