

unfaithfully yours

He's behaving differently, she suspects he's cheating. Clinical psychologist **Danielle Hannington** opens the can of worms that is infidelity.

SOMETHING JUST DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT. Pip has noticed that Tony has been more distant from her, and snapping for what seems like no reason. He is restless and on edge. At first she thought that work demands were getting to him. But he angrily dismisses her when she tries to talk about it. When she tries to talk about anything. The more he withdraws from her, the clingier she becomes. This makes Tony even more irritated.

So she tries nice. But no matter what she does, how she talks or behaves, it makes no difference. He doesn't want to be part of her suggestions or conversations, and his words and actions clearly show he's really not interested. Tony tells her that he needs space and to just leave him alone.

However, she notices that he seems to be his old self around his friends, more so in fact. He has new energy and confidence, and there is no end to the laughs and smiles. He goes out more often, and when she asks if she can come too, Tony tells her that these are boys' nights, or that she really wouldn't enjoy herself. One time he fired back to her that she should get her own friends and stop trying to control him.

Pip becomes more hurt and confused. She feels helpless when she reaches out to Tony, because nothing she does seems to be right. She asks if he still loves her. "Of course," he responds, but Pip didn't feel it from him anymore.

Tony also begins taking a new pride in himself. He is more interested in his appearance, and is coming home with new clothes. He goes back to the gym.

But he is also much more secretive and guarded. He keeps his mobile phone with him, rather than leaving it on the table. He checks it more regularly, although it is set on silent. He is now careful about closing down the computer, whereas in the past it was of no concern if his email account was left open. He also leaves his briefcase locked in his car.

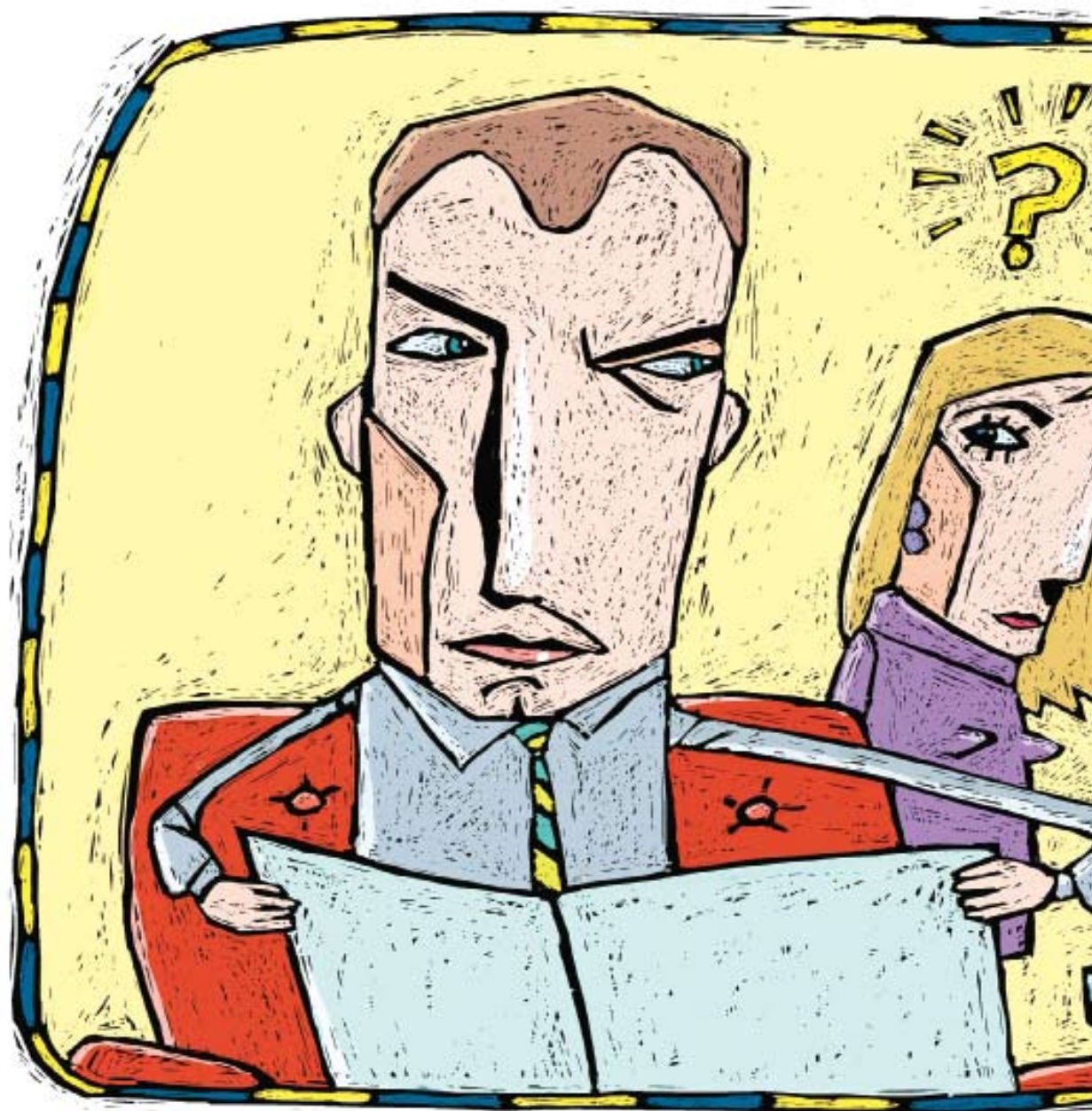


ILLUSTRATION DON LINDSAY

Pip begins to suspect Tony is seeing someone else. She tries to talk to him about it, but is met with hostility and counter-accusations. So instead Pip decides to do her own digging. She checks their phone and bank records. She goes through his pockets. She starts adding little pieces together that just didn't feel right. A car parking ticket recorded at a time when he would normally be at work. Irrelevant notes written on paper with a hotel logo. ATM withdrawals at times

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and places inconsistent with Tony's usual patterns.

Pip feels herself becoming more anxious and even a little bit crazy. Consumed by his withdrawal and her suspicions. She begins obsessing about what might be in Tony's briefcase. She really wants to look, but knows it is his private space. She is torn; overwhelmed by thoughts of his dishonesty and betrayal, but wouldn't she be betraying his trust if she were to sneak through

his things? Would her rifling be negated if he were being unfaithful? And what if her suspicions were wrong?

Pip makes an excuse to use Tony's car. She knows it's wrong to look but can't help opening his briefcase. But it isn't until she sees his mobile phone bill that she really feels her stomach churn. She sees the same number over and over again, a volume of texts sent at different times, day and night. She calls. It goes to message bank, a woman named Sarah.

So Pip confronts Tony again. He angrily denies it and then she tables her "evidence". Tony uses anger to try to deflect her questions. He is furious that she has gone through his belongings. He berates her for being suspicious and paranoid. He tells her that there is something wrong with her and that she needs help. He storms off and goes for a drive.

A few hours later he comes home and his mood is totally different. He is quite and sombre. His tears and admissions eventually flow and the truth starts to come out.

Next week: To stay or go: what happens now?



We're in this together

EVEN THOUGH I MAY BE SITTING ON THE OPPOSITE LOUNGE, I really can identify with what so many of my clients talk about. I'm on the other side of 40, the mother of two very active young boys, working hard to provide a good life for them, and juggling the demands of the house and a relationship. The people who come to my clinical psychology practice are not crazy or pathological — just ordinary people trying to understand, and cope with, the struggles of their everyday. For so many of us, the day to day can be so overwhelming. Family, job, finances, school, day care, his needs, your needs . . . And the expectation that it should be easy, calm, loving and harmonious. Since when! No wonder we are so tired all the time. So I invite you to share your questions and stories and read what others, men and women alike, are experiencing too.

ASK DANIELLE

Q I've been really struggling with this ever since our four-year-old was born. I love my husband very much, but I am finding it so hard to make time for us. By the time I finish work and pick up our little girl from day care, make dinner, clean up and eventually get her to bed, I am too exhausted for us. Sure, he helps where he can, but he just doesn't seem as tired as me, or as affected by it. It's really creating a problem for us.

A Firstly, look at increasing your own energy levels with exercise and a good quality nutritious diet. Smart time management to schedule in "you" time each week is also vital. Be honest and realistic with yourself about time wasting (such as TV and computers). You may need to schedule "us" time into your week. Thinking how you might be able to manage even three hours of undivided attention each week with each other is a start and try to build over time. Realistically, this is not going to be as it was before children. Make time for quality rather than quantity. The important point is conversation. So it might be that one or two nights a week, the TV goes off early, facebook is shut down, and the two of you really start to connect again, as lovers and friends, rather than getting lost in the world of Mum and Dad.

Danielle Hannington is a clinical psychologist specialising in relationships. Send your questions to westweekend@wanews.com.au

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telltale signs

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