

Can Cheaters Ever Change?



By Sarah Foulkes, GalTime.com

It can be a devastating blow to a committed relationship. One partner strays and the other is left picking up the pieces—and left with difficult decisions. If your significant other cheats on you—can he or she change? When is there hope to salvage the relationship... and when is it hopeless?

The latest example: after ten years of marriage and sticking by her husband through his self-admitted infidelity in 2003, Vanessa Bryant has filed for divorce from NBA star Kobe Bryant citing 'irreconcilable differences'. Reports say Vanessa believes the basketball star was up to his old tricks again.

It's obviously a difficult time for the Bryants, who put out a joint statement through their publicist:

"The Bryants have resolved all issues incident to their divorce privately with the assistance of counsel and a Judgment dissolving their marital status will be entered in 2012. We ask that in the interest of our young children and in light of the upcoming holiday season the public respect our privacy during this most difficult time."

Which leads us to the question, can cheaters ever change?

According to Sharon Rivkin, a licensed marriage and family therapist, and expert in dealing with extramarital affairs, ***some cheaters change and some don't.***

"The cheaters that don't change are the ones where the cheater feels a huge sense of entitlement, is a narcissist, lacks any sense of remorse, and has virtually no impulse control,"

Rivkin says. "The cheaters that can change are the ones who do not have a character disorder or addiction and who have cheated because they were very unhappy in their relationship, their relationship had deteriorated to the point that they were not getting their needs met, and they had very poor communication skills."

Rivkin emphasizes that an affair never happens out of the blue— and is actually an extreme symptom of a relationship that's been in trouble for some time. It actually serves as a powerful catalyst that can either end a relationship or take it to a greater level of intimacy.

So what are some signs that a cheater will (or will not) change? Those willing to change show that willingness with their actions, Rivkin shares.

Signs that a cheater will change are:

1. A sense of remorse and pain over cheating.
2. The willingness to get help individually and/or as a couple to change the issues that caused the cheating in the first place.

3. The willingness to show their partner their cell phone, emails, etc. without getting defensive.
4. The ability to break off the affair to work on their primary relationship.
5. Admitting that they DID cheat (no excuses) and that it was wrong.

Signs that a cheater will not change:

1. No remorse.
2. History of cheating in other relationships and reluctance to seek help.
3. Continuing to be secretive with their phones, emails, texts, etc.
4. Inability to stop the cheating. Character disorder, i.e., narcissism, sex addiction.
5. Inability to actually admit that what they did was wrong...lots of rationalizing, excuses, and blame.

Of course not everyone is dealing with a husband who plays professional basketball and who is allegedly cheating on them.

But when is it time to give up and get out of a relationship?

"When the cheating continues even though the partner is saying they aren't cheating," Rivkin affirms. "If a person continues to cheat, like Kobe Bryant, there is virtually no hope that this behavior will change."

According to Rivkin everyone needs to explore their own relationship and circumstances.

"When couples don't stay together, it has less to do with the particular circumstances of the affair than with the couple's long-term history, and with their willingness and ability to explore it," Rivkin says. "Sometimes it seems the reservoir of resentment and hostility is just too overwhelming, and that so much damage has been done that there is little left to salvage. For some people, they are done with one indiscretion and some aren't. The only right answer is what is right for

you.”

After all is said and done, Rivkin expresses that if you feel you can't trust them again, even if they show signs of change, you may need to walk away.

“It's not a failure or a sign of weakness to leave a destructive relationship,” Rivkin states.

What are your thoughts on cheaters changing? What about the Kobe divorce?