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The girlfriend I love cheated on me and regrets it ? what should I do? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am in a LDR and my girlfriend recently admitted that she had cheated on me. She said, and I believe her, that she really loves me and that this was a mistake she regrets. However, I can't take it out of my mind and forget about it. I am angry that she ruined the purity of our love story. It feels like it's no longer "a dream come true" ? merely a watered down version of it because it is no longer "flawless." I feel like a pushover for not doing anything about it. (I'm really in love with her and I can't bring myself to break up just for that.) How can I forgive her? Will I always keep these poisonous thought inside? How can I prevent this from shadowing every aspect of our relationship? Am I "selling short" and blind to her untrustworthiness? How can I trust her again?

A sad loverboy

Answer

Dear A sad loverboy,

You are torn between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, you love your girlfriend and want to forgive and trust her; on the other, your feelings were hurt, your perspective of your relationship has been changed, and you don't want to feel taken advantage of.

The way you describe your relationship prior to the cheating, as "flawless" and pure, while it sounds wonderful, might be a clue into your expectations of relationships in general. Should a relationship be flawless? Cheating aside, did you ever notice other flaws or have concerns about your relationship? Flaws, concerns, problems, issues ? whatever you call them ? are common in relationships, maybe even universal. In a long distance relationship it can be easy to ignore or overlook flaws for awhile. Because we don't see our loved one as frequently, we can idealize our relationship and those few precious in-person visits. Expecting or dwelling on relationship perfection of the past may hinder your healing process. Instead, you might approach your situation as a chance to strengthen the bond you two once shared. Perhaps you could sit down with your girlfriend and each make a list of all of the qualities you love about one another and another list about things that need improving in your relationship. You could discuss your expectations regarding fidelity, open communication, and honesty, and listen to her expectations. How can you achieve the improvements you've both listed? Are they reasonable? What are you willing to compromise on?

Another possibility may be to explore your feelings by agreeing with your girlfriend to allow yourselves to see other people. Dating helps pose two options: first, it may help you realize partners who are better suited for you, allowing you to cut your losses and move on; or second, realize you truly love your girlfriend and believe her regrets are legitimate, thus enabling you both to work through your past problems and move forward as a couple.

Before you make your final decision, you can weigh out the pros and cons of staying with your girlfriend. If the "pro" list outweighs the "con" one, your answer may be evident. If, however, the situation is reversed, you may want to take some time to figure out your options with a trusted friend, family member, or counselor.

If you're a student, consider speaking with a professional in your school's counseling office. Visits are confidential, and you are usually allotted a certain number of free or discounted sessions. Identifying your feelings and expressing them are key to healing. Remember to be patient with yourself as your opinions and views may vary on a day-to-day basis. People and relationships aren't perfect, so giving yourself time to consider your expectations and needs may be your first step toward healing.

Alice!

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