# ACCOUNTABILITY CLUES

When survivors ask their partners to change, they often have difficulty discerning whether real change is occurring. There are several reasons for this:

* Abusive partners may have made promises before but slipped back to old behavior quickly, so it takes more time to trust.
* Coercive partners may gaslight and claim they are changing when they are just becoming more manipulative and sneakier about it.
* Partners may have occasional relapses as they are learning new behavior.
* Memories of past abuse may intrude into survivors’ perceptions, making it harder to discern.

Change takes time. It often is about “two steps forward, one step back,” as the saying goes. However, partners’ willingness to be accountable is the key ingredient. The chart below gives some guidelines that will help in evaluating whether change is occurring.

**SIGNS OF CHANGE: SIGNS OF NO CHANGE:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Stops controlling behavior and acknowledges any time they slip back. | Continues or falls back into controlling patterns without acknowledging and correcting. |
| Listens to and values your feelings and opinions even when they disagree. | **Accuses you of being controlling when you express a need or hold them accountable.** |
| Understands that trust returns as new behavior occurs and does not blame you when you have doubts, fears, or are triggered. | **Tells you to “get over it” when you express hurt, doubts, or something triggers you; accuses you of being unable to forgive.** |
| Apologizes for the past and acknowledges behavior to family and friends. | **Doesn’t acknowledge past control and keeps treatment a secret from close family or friends.** |
| Makes decisions cooperatively with you. | **Makes decisions that should be joint and tells you how it will be.** |
| Acknowledges mistakes without blaming you. | **Blames you for their mistakes or abusive actions.** |
| Respects your right to spend time with friends or family and to make choices. | **Has a double standard regarding rights and behavior; claims rights but calls you selfish.** |
| Uses techniques they learn in treatment or therapy and shares that information with you. | **Misuses assertive techniques they learn to facilitate sneakier control and claims you’re just as abusive.** |

**Reflection**

Keep a log of their behavior that you’re unsure of. If it’s too confusing to discern whether your partner is changing, talk it over with a friend or family member whom you trust or with a therapist.

Confusion may be a red flag. It’s important to learn to trust your gut. That is also something that takes time as you are recovering.

Even when partners are changing, sometimes there has been too much hurt to save the relationship. The relationship emotional bank account (comprising goodwill, respect, trust, common interests and dreams) has been depleted too much to survive. When this is the case, acknowledge that you’ve given it a chance, and that is all you can do. Losing the relationship is a consequence of their behavior, not a short-coming of yours.