Is it cheating if you have permission?

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WOODLAWN, Md. - You said 'til death do us part, but as those years drag on, you might be wishing you had an alternative. Some couples are finding it, using a new buzzword in relationships. And it begs the question, is it cheating if you have permission?

When you walk down the aisle, you're expecting it will be the two of you forever. But what if down the road your partner wants to change the rules? LaDawn Black knows that's a reality for many couples. The twists and turns it takes to keep a relationship hot and fresh are nothing new to her. In the late night hours, the host of 92Q's the Love Zone, lets racy topics fly. And the idea of open relationships is something she's discussed before with her callers.

Open relationships made headlines a few months back when Newt Gingrich's ex-wife made his supposed private request for an open marriage a public headline. But Black, a relationship expert, host and author, says more and more couples are considering it. They're even using a decidedly modern term coined by columnist Dan Savage. They call it being monogamish.

Black is quick to toss out some antiquated notions of the concept. She says, "It's not swinging, it's not swinging. Basically you come together as a couple and you establish rules."

They're rules you never thought you'd negotiate when you said I do. But Black says as couples try to make marriage work, the idea of letting your mate make a move with someone else may be an option. She explains, "People are open to it because instead of chasing and investigating, why not have everything on the table?"

To many, being monogamish means laying out ground rules that let one spouse or both see other people. Those rules give the partners the option to have emotional or physical relationships with pre-set boundaries, expanding the notion that to succeed, a marriage has to be just man and wife.

University of Maryland sociology professor Dr. Philip Cohen says the institution of marriage is changing, "I think traditional marriage is really a buzzword more than a reality now."

As a result, Cohen says people are creating their own definitions of what makes a successful union. They marry later, have kids without ever marrying at all and even marry several times, looking for the perfect partner. Cohen says, "Traditional marriage is really still an ideal that many people, I would say, most people still hold. What they find is it's often not practical or doesn't work."

And when it doesn't work, some may head down the path of being monogamish hoping to save the marriage. But it won't be easy. Maryland psychologist Doctor Ryan Curtis says, "I think you've got to be careful. Really, really careful."

Curtis says there's little research into the practice of open or monogamish relationships. But for the approximately 2-4% of the population who give it a try, he cautions that adding a partner may not solve your problems. It may make them worse, "I'm not convinced it leads to greater satisfaction in the relationship. Things like commitment issues and jealousy issues, I don't think you get rid of those necessarily in a monogamish relationship."

But LaDawn Black knows that under the cover of radio anonymity, some are willing to stand behind the idea, even support it. When it comes to getting their spouse to sign on to the concept, well, that's a different story.

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