
Losing Intimacy in My Relationship

A LIFE EFFECTIVENESS GUIDE

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Introduction

There are times in all relationships when things are not smooth, issues arise that need to be addressed and intimacy in the relationship becomes flat and stale. Often this is because people have conflicting expectations, are distracted with other issues, or have difficulty expressing what is on their minds in ways that other people can really hear and understand. Intimacy is often the first thing to be pushed aside when there is conflict and sometimes the partners in the relationship just don't know what to do to make the relationship more intimate again.

The goal in an intimate relationship is to feel connected in a deep spiritual way with your partner. The intimacy needs to be safe, supportive, respectful, non-punitive and peaceful; where you can feel taken care of, wanted, unconditionally accepted and loved just for existing and being alive. You feel part of something incredibly special in such a relationship and aloneness or loneliness never becomes an issue. You experience forgiving and being forgiven with little revenge or reminding of past offences and you find yourself giving thanks for just being able to share your life with this chosen person.

A healthy intimate relationship has a sense of directedness and you experience being free to be who you are rather than who you think you need to be for the other. People's feelings and the processes of the relationship come before material achievements and money. This type of relationship encourages your personal growth, supports your individuality and does not result in you or your relationship partner becoming emotionally, physically or intellectually dependent on one another.

How Badly Do You Want Intimacy in Your Relationship

A story was told at an all women meeting where one of the participants wistfully spoke of the elk. According to this woman, the female elks live and raise their young in the company of other female elks. The male elks come around once a year; the females pick out the best males, mate, and then separate for the rest of the year.

This woman was envious of this arrangement and suggested that humans might be better off to emulate the elk's ways. However, it is easy to observe from that story that if we, as humans, emulated the elk, the people with whom we would have intimate relationships would be kept at a distance. It is impossible for emotional distance and intimacy to co-exist!

This is not an issue of gender or sexual preference but rather an issue of intimacy within relationship. Intimate relationships, whether between sexual partners, close friends or family members, are opportunities for spiritual growth and personal healing.

If we find that we are putting distance between ourselves and anyone we are intimate with, then one of two things may be happening: either fear of one kind or another is present or the dynamics are changing between the two of you and you begin growing in different directions, causing emotional separation.

Often people talk about being in disconnected relationships and having disconnected sex. Disconnected sex does not bring intimacy. It only provides a temporary mask which covers up the challenges.

It is a point to notice that many people are searching for a connection of the heart and soul and they often turn to sex enhancing drugs as a way of trying to bring more intimacy into the relationship - that intimacy that is missing or has evaporated over many years of marriage or relationship.

Intimacy is not something that you can fix with a drug. It takes two people truly interested and willing to work towards a deep spiritual and emotional connection of the heart and soul.

Gary Zukav, author of *Seat of the Soul*, talks about the new species of human that is being born today. We're no longer here for physical survival as our ancestors, but rather for a spiritual awakening.

This spiritual awakening is happening in great numbers because people desire to live more consciously and authentically in alignment with who they really are. Intimate relationships or spiritual partnerships are helping people to do this.

Most of us spend our whole lives, consciously or unconsciously, trying to find our connection with Spirit. This is the same connection that we feel in a deep union with another person.

If there is distance between two people and they want an intimate connection, there's only one way - and that is to tackle the core issues that they fear may destroy the relationship.

Kenny Loggins, in his book *The Unimaginable Life*, asked the question – “How badly do you want an intimate relationship?” Do you want distance and separation like the elk or do you want a deep spiritual connection?

The choice is up to you.

So with that in mind, let's discuss some issues surrounding intimacy – what is it, how do we lose it and how do we get it back.

Defining Intimacy in a Relationship

Defining intimacy is not an easy task because its meaning varies from relationship to relationship, within relationships and it changes over time. In some relationships, intimacy becomes synonymous with sex and feelings of intimacy may be connected or confused with sexual feelings. In a wider view of relationships, intimacy has more to do with shared moments of closeness or joy than sexual interactions. In any case, intimacy is linked with feelings of closeness among partners in a relationship. But what is clear, no matter what definition you give to it, intimacy and healthy relationships go hand in hand. Indeed, intimacy is a basic ingredient in any meaningful relationship.

Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share the whole of who we are - our thoughts, feelings and experiences we have as human beings. It involves being open and vulnerable to another person and being open and honest about your thoughts and emotions. Showing someone else how you feel and what your hopes and dreams are, is a very intimate choice and if it is with someone you love, it can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship.

Intimacy is achieved when we become close to someone else and know deep within ourselves that we are loved and accepted for who we are.

The Meaning of Intimacy

Intimacy is a journey – it is not a tangible thing. It takes place over time, is ever-changing and is not stagnant. In fact, any kind of stagnation in a relationship kills intimacy.

Intimacy can also take many forms. One form of intimacy is cognitive or intellectual intimacy where two people exchange thoughts, share ideas and enjoy similarities and differences between their opinions. If they can do this in an open and comfortable way, they can become quite intimate in an intellectual area.

A second form of intimacy is experiential intimacy where people get together to actively involve themselves with each other in mutual activities. This can range from a couple to a group of many people and doesn't always involve talking or sharing but may just include activities – for example, a group of women all working together on a quilt.

A third form of intimacy is emotional intimacy where two persons can comfortably share their feelings with each other or when they empathise with the feelings of the other person, really trying to understand and trying to be aware of the other person's emotional side.

A fourth form of intimacy is sexual intimacy. This is the stereotypical definition of intimacy that most people are familiar with. However, this form of intimacy includes a broad range of sensuous activity and is much more than just sexual intercourse. It is any form of sensual expression with each other. Therefore, intimacy can be many things for different people at different times.

Intimacy with another person can be seen as the:

- Unmasking of yourself in order to make yourself vulnerable in a trusting, loving, secure relationship.
- Sense that you have a special, unique, and distinct bond joining you and another person.

- Sense of closeness and proximity or oneness and unity.
- Sharing of tenderness, caring, and affection.
- Sharing of secrets, hidden feelings, and private thoughts.
- Free will offering and receiving of each other.
- Sense of being in a non-punitive, non-abusive and non-manipulative environment.
- Mutual respect, recognition, and approval of each other's need to be a sexual being. In a marital relationship this shared sexuality ultimately results in loving sexual intercourse.

10 Steps to Recognising Intimacy in a Relationship

The following ten statements describe intimate relationships:

1. **Continuous, honest communication** and contact with one another exists even if the contact is not in person but is by phone, email, or some other form.
2. A **mutual task to carry out** is willingly shared, discussed, and enjoyed together.
3. An **affinity or attraction** to one another exists to the exclusion of others.
4. The **company of one another is sought** even when you both have a wide selection of other individuals from which to choose.
5. A **sixth sense** or other extra sensory facility develops with which you can communicate at a non-verbal level, with no need for words to clutter or detract from the communication.
6. A **sense of humour** or sense of play and casualness develops in which you enjoy "give and take" and are relaxed in each other's company.
7. A **protective sense of privacy** and guardedness about your relationship exists; it is not subjected to public scrutiny, criticism, or judgment.
8. The **relationship is a productive enterprise** resulting in mutual satisfaction, reward, and reinforcement for each other.
9. The **relationship has a purpose, direction, and order** to it that is reasonable, realistic, and healthy for both of you.
10. A **firm commitment**, agreement, or contract exists with each other to be mutually supportive, understanding, and accepting of one another.

How to Develop Intimate Relationships

Awareness – be aware of yourself and start where you are, and don't try to start some other place. Start with the form of intimacy where you feel most comfortable. If a particular form of intimacy is difficult for you, whether it's intellectual, experiential, emotional, or sexual, that's not the place for you to try to start to develop an intimate relationship with another person. If you're more comfortable with intellectual intimacy, start by sharing thoughts, talking with another person about their opinions and ideas. Once comfortable in an intimate relationship on that basis, then other intimate areas can be approached and developed.

Knowledge – every intimate relationship does not have to include all the different aspects or types of intimacy that have been mentioned. Many compatible and satisfying intimate relationships can exist in any one of the four areas or any combination of those areas.

7 Ways to Improve Intimacy in Your Relationship

Good relationships don't just happen. Many people have the attitude that, "If I have to work at it, then it can't be the right relationship." This is not a true statement, any more than it's true that you don't have to work at good physical health through exercise, eating well, and stress reduction.

There are choices you can make that will not only improve your relationship, but can turn a failing relationship into a successful one.

1. Accept personal responsibility

It may not seem like it, but this is an incredibly important choice that you can make to improve intimacy in your relationship. This means that you learn how to take responsibility for your own feelings and needs and refuse to blame your partner for not making you feel happy and secure. It means learning to treat yourself with kindness, caring, compassion, and acceptance instead of self-judgment. Self-judgment will always make you feel unhappy and insecure, no matter how loving your partner is.

For example, instead of getting angry at your partner for the feelings of rejection you may experience when he or she is late, preoccupied and not listening to you, or not turned on sexually, you would explore your own feelings discover how you might be rejecting yourself.

When you learn how to take full, 100% responsibility for yourself, then you stop blaming your partner for your unhappiness. Since blaming your partner for your own unhappiness is the number one cause of relationship problems, learning how to take loving care of yourself is vital to a good relationship.

2. Compassion, understanding and acceptance

Treat your partner the way you would like to be treated. This is the essence of a truly spiritual life. We all yearn to be treated lovingly – with kindness,

compassion, intimacy, understanding, and acceptance. Relationships thrive when both people treat each other with a deep intimacy. While there are no guarantees, sowing intimacy often reaps intimacy in return. If your partner is consistently angry, judgmental, uncaring and unkind, then you need to focus on what would be loving to yourself, and loving to the other, rather than reverting to anger, blame, judgment, withdrawal, resistance, or compliance. Kindness to others does not mean sacrificing yourself. Always remember that taking responsibility for yourself rather than blaming others is the most important thing you can do. Seek further help such as counselling or coaching if your partner is still not able to treat you with kindness, or as a very last resort you may need to leave the relationship. You cannot make your partner change – you can only change yourself!

3. Be open to learning

When conflict occurs, you always have two choices regarding how to handle the conflict: you can become open to learning about yourself and your partner and discover the deeper issues of the conflict, or you can try to win, or at least not lose, through some form of controlling behaviour. We've all learnt many subtle ways of trying to control others into behaving the way we want: anger, blame, judgment, niceness, compliance, caretaking, resistance, withdrawal of love, explaining, teaching, defending, lying, denying, and so on. None of these promotes healthy intimacy within the relationship and in fact they create even more conflict. Remembering to learn instead of controlling is a vital part of improving intimacy in your relationship.

For example, most people have two major fears that become activated in relationships: the fear of abandonment – of losing the other - and the fear of engulfment – of losing oneself. When these fears get activated, most people immediately protect themselves against these fears with their controlling behaviour. But if you choose to learn about your fears instead of attempting to control your partner, your fear would eventually heal. This is how we grow emotionally and spiritually – by learning instead of controlling.

4. Make sure you have regular dates

When people first fall in love, they make time for each other. Then, especially

after getting married, life happens in all its busyness. Relationships need time to thrive. It is vitally important to set aside specific times to be together – to talk, play and make love. Intimacy cannot be maintained without time together.

5. Gratitude instead of complaints

Positive energy flows between two people when there is an “attitude of gratitude.” Constant complaints create a heavy, negative energy, which is not fun to be around. Practise being grateful for what you have rather than focusing on what you don’t have. Complaints create stress, while gratitude creates inner peace. Gratitude creates not only intimate, emotional relationship health, but physical health as well.

6. Fun

We all know that “work without play makes Jack a dull boy.” And so too does work without play make for dull relationships. Relationships thrive when people laugh together, play together, and when humour is a part of everyday life. Intimacy flourishes when there is lightness of being, not when everything is heavy.

7. Service

A wonderful way of creating intimacy is to do service projects together. Giving to others fills the soul and makes the heart sing. Serving moves you out of yourself and your own problems and supports a broader, more spiritual view of life.

If you and your partner agree to these 7 choices, you will be amazed at the improvement in your relationship!

Three Steps for Better Verbal Intimacy

There are hundreds of personality traits and tendencies that make a person acceptable for a successful long-term relationship. But according to relationship expert, Dr. Neil Clark Warren, there is one trait that is more important than all others. "Mastering verbal intimacy is the most important indicator of whether a person is right for you and ready for a serious relationship," he says. For the person who is dating and seeking a partner with whom to pursue a successful relationship, there is no more important task than determining if your current date has the ability to share themselves verbally on a deep and intimate level.

Dr. Warren emphasises "verbal" intimacy, the sharing of our deepest fears, dreads, joys, and inner experiences, as a great way to learn about the inner workings of our potential or current partners. He also shares three things which must be present for true verbal intimacy to begin and flourish.

1. You must know who YOU are.

Many adults, and especially men, are complete strangers to themselves. When asked to describe their feelings on certain subjects, they are unable to answer, practically unable to even understand the question. This kind of numbness often starts in childhood when boys are told to "act like a man" or to "stop crying" because "you're not hurt." These messages tell boys to ignore their inner signals. Over many years, these individuals will become oblivious to what they are feeling.

To be able to share yourself deeply you must know what you're feeling. It is vital that you understand yourself in order to develop the capability to be an equal partner in a satisfying, verbally intimate relationship.

2. You must have a desire to know each other.

We all know certain individuals that seem fixated on themselves. These narcissists may momentarily ask an inane question about you and your life, but they quickly direct the conversation back to their accomplishments. This tendency is also often a result of a childhood imbalance. If they grew up in a home where no one really

seemed interested in them, they may have developed into adults that love to talk about themselves. They constantly seem to be in the 'me' box.

When you meet someone who has a great desire to sit and actively listen to you talk about yourself, this is an excellent sign that this person may well be a promising partner in the development of verbal intimacy.

3. You must make space for verbal intimacy.

Dr. Warren explains that he is sure that verbal intimacy is most likely to flourish when "stress is low, relaxation is high, and the phone is off." No one needs to be reminded about how cell phones, pagers, and computers have made it easier for us to carry work home and elsewhere. Time that used to be personal time by default can now be turned into work time. For verbal intimacy to grow, the frantic pace of our lives must be slowed. We must make time for long walks and quiet dinners. Sometimes we feel guilty for making this space in our schedules, but no relationship can become a brilliant one without a dedication to the verbal intimacy concept.

A relationship can start without verbal intimacy. It can continue for months and sometimes years without either partner giving time or consideration to its benefits. However, over time almost every relationship will go flat - that is, lose its spontaneous excitement, unless both partners commit to enhancing their verbal intimacy.

Intimacy and Sex

For many couples, 'making love' involves a sense of intimacy and emotional closeness. An intimate sexual relationship involves trust and being vulnerable with each other. Closeness during sex is also linked to other forms of intimacy.

It is important to share a whole range of emotions with a partner, otherwise some people begin to feel lonely and isolated regardless of how good their sexual experiences may be. Explore ways to share love and affection without sex. Often, the more a couple is intimate with each other in ways other than sex, the more fulfilling their sex life becomes.

The most common barriers to healthy sexual intimacy are:

- Fear of sexual intercourse
- Fear of impotency, premature ejaculation, or no ejaculation
- Physically based sexual problems
- Lack of openness or honesty concerning sexuality
- Unwillingness to be creative, explorative, or imaginative sexually
- Embarrassment with one another in the sexual arena
- Poor body image and discomfort with nudity
- Hang ups due to moral, religious, or value beliefs
- Lack of appropriate education regarding sexuality
- Unwillingness to establish a healing environment

1. Diagnose the problem. Examine your lifestyle and make sure that you are making enough time to have sex with your partner. Sexuality is a habit, something that needs to happen on an ongoing basis or else other things will crowd it out.

2. Analyse how sex became low on the priority list. One of the biggest mistakes that couples make is when they have children, they stop being friends and lovers because they've become mums and dads. Being a parent is just one of the roles that you play, and neglecting the role of partner and lover is a huge mistake.

It's possible you may need to spend less time at the office or learn to say no to other commitments.

3. Make your sex life a major priority. Make a conscious decision to recommit to each other and move sex higher on the priority list. Physical intimacy in a relationship deserves a lot of attention. You can start by making small changes. Put your kids to bed earlier, don't fall asleep on the couch and go to bed at the same time as your partner.

4. Ask yourself what you can do to change things. Men are visually stimulated, so find places where you can make small changes in this area. Women are stimulated by verbal and emotional connection and lots of touching and hugging. Discuss with each other the ways in which you can fulfill each other's needs - make an effort to connect on that deeper level before moving on to intercourse.

5. Give yourself permission to get what you want. Claim your right and give a voice to your needs. Being sexually satisfied and feeling wanted by your partner is a legitimate and healthy part of a relationship.

6. Talk to your partner about your concerns. Remember to be sensitive when bringing the subject up and pick an appropriate time — not when you are in the middle of an argument. Your partner may resist the conversation because there may be underlying issues such as stress, depression or medication that are interfering with his or her sex drive, but be supportive. If he or she is reluctant to be open about it, encourage him or her to look within him/herself in order to gain insight into the issues. If all else fails, ask your partner to participate in a session with a counselor or Relationship Coach so you can start to make changes.

7. Stop complaining about what you're not getting and start creating what you want. Most people, especially women tend to take marital problems very personally and seriously, and consequently feel sorry for themselves. Understand that the choices you make, and the attitude you maintains, all have consequences. You are not a victim; you are an adult and can change what needs to be changed.

8. Turn toward your partner. Come up with a plan for deeper intimacy together that you can both agree on and be excited about, and will put into action.

Keeping Intimacy Alive

Intimacy in a relationship has to be a conscious choice on a daily basis. It cannot be placed in a corner to be attended to when you have more time. Healthy relationships imply a continual re-commitment to and renewal of the relationship, and a constant freshness. Intimacy is also something that must be re-created from moment to moment within the relationship.

Often taking the time to really think about an issue creates revelations for both partners. Take the following quiz to see how intimacy stands in your relationship – and where you might like it to be.

The Intimacy Quiz

How intimate is your relationship?

1. What five behaviours, things, events or interactions represent intimacy for you?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

2. What five things represent intimacy for your partner?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

3. What was the most intimate aspect of your relationship in its earliest days?

4. What is the most intimate aspect of your current relationship?

5. In terms of intimacy in your relationship, what has changed, and why?

6. What five activities can you do to keep or re-introduce intimacy in your relationship?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

The Elusive Dance

"While the one eludes," wrote the poet Robert Browning, "must the other pursue." The novelist, John Fowles, described relationships as two pendulums swinging in the same plane. When they swing together there is a maximum of comfort and a minimum of passion. Passion results when they collide, swing apart, and collide once again, as long as the pendulums don't swing apart so violently that their connection breaks and they fly off in opposite directions. Browning and Fowles are describing a delicate "dance" between partners, a rhythm beneath the relationship.

The Drawing Closer Quiz

1. In what ways do you draw your partner close, and consciously try to attract your partner? Think of four things you do to draw your partner closer.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

2. What things do you do that push your partner away? Think of 4 things you do to move away from your partner.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

3. Do you move in harmony, or are you constantly moving in opposite directions - when one of you is moving closer, is the other moving away?

4. What are 3 things that your partner does to draw you in?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. What 3 things keep you away?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Exploring Intimacy

Explore different ways of maintaining or re-introducing intimacy into your relationship, keeping in mind the elusive dance - the rhythm of your intimacy. Make a list of at least 10 acts of intimacy. This can include anything that you both agree would be intimate and might include sex, massages, a foot rub, a moonlight walk, reminiscing over old photos, or enjoying a candlelight meal together.

10 Acts of Intimacy

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

- 1.** Plan to be intimate with your partner every day for 7 days, using your 1 or more of the 10 intimate acts on your list. The point of this exercise is to make intimacy something about which you consciously think.
- 2.** What will it take to keep intimacy alive in your relationship?
- 3.** Do you see the type of intimacy that is important to your relationship changing over time? If so, in what ways? How will intimacy be different over time? How will it be the same?

In some relationships, intimacy never dies; in others, it is related to a passion that dies down and disappears over time. What represents intimacy for one person and in one relationship varies from person to person and relationship to relationship. What is important is not creating a "set" definition of intimacy, but learning what it means in your relationship and learning to keep that intimacy alive.

Obstacles to Establishing Intimacy in a Relationship

Communication – a person can enter a relationship with some mistaken notions about just what intimacy is, or misjudge the needs or the thoughts of the other person in the relationship. Communication or the lack of communication would be one of the main barriers to the foundation of an intimate relationship.

Time – intimacy takes time to develop and a person who is not willing to allow for time for an intimate relationship to occur will not be able to develop that kind of relationship.

Awareness – it is necessary for a person to be aware of him or herself and to realise what he/she has to share with another person. People who are not aware of themselves frequently are not able to be aware of other people, at least not in terms of the potentially intimate aspects of the other person.

Shyness – reluctance to share oneself with another person can keep an intimate relationship from developing.

Game Playing – people who act in stereotypical roles or try to play certain kinds of games, even if they're intimate-appearing games (such as romantic games) cannot develop an intimate relationship with someone else simply because they are not being themselves. Game playing can be a detriment to the development of intimacy and can develop only when two people are being him/or herself in a significant way with another person.

Difficulties in Achieving Intimacy

There are many reasons why some people find it difficult to achieve intimacy in their relationship. This is commonly the result of problems such as:

- Lack of communication
- Financial problems
- Work or family pressures
- Negative childhood experiences
- Past and current traumas.

We all have some barriers to intimacy. The inability to develop trust in one another, a chronic sense of insecurity, fear of failure or fear of being vulnerable to being hurt are right at the top of the list when it comes to discussing barriers to intimacy. Sometimes there is a need to overcome an inability to taking risks or an inability to let go of hurts and fears from previous relationships.

All sorts of fears can get in the way of intimacy – fears such as a fear of losing the other in death or some other tragic circumstance or a fear of rejection can loom large in some people and need to be addressed. Anger, hostility, resentment, defensiveness and conflict all need to be dealt with before a deep and meaningful intimacy can occur.

A lack of role models, particularly from each partner's family of origin, can create a huge barrier to attaining a connection of the soul and heart.

Other barriers can be:

- Inability to accept one's own responsibility in developing intimacy in the relationship
- Poor problem solving between the partners
- Power struggles between the parties for control of the relationship
- Competition between the parties
- Blaming each other for problems in the relationship
- Fear of being too exposed or being found out for whom you "really are"

- Fear of claustrophobia or being smothered in the relationship
- Desire to be left alone, isolated, and ignored
- Mental or physical health problems that impede the relationship's growth
- Fear of loss of identity
- Inability to show affection, tenderness, or caring
- Inability to be open, honest, and forthright
- Being in denial about needing help

Negative Consequences of an Inability to Handle Intimacy

If a person has a problem securing, establishing, or maintaining intimacy in a relationship (in or out of marriage) that person is most likely going to feel:

unwanted	abandoned
pessimistic about the future	not "good enough"
uncared for	rejected
depressed	left alone
undesirable	unloved
anxious over personal performance	low in self-belief
lonely	unattractive
inadequate	unwilling to get involved
isolated	angry
confused about sexual identity or adequacy	resentful

Intimacy is built up over time

Building and maintaining intimacy in a relationship takes time, and it takes some people longer than others. Often, the harder you work at developing intimacy in your relationship, the more rewarding it is. Some suggestions for developing intimacy in your relationship include:

- Celebrate the good things in your relationship. Tell your partner (in words and actions) how much you love and appreciate him/her.
- Talk openly about your feelings and what you need from the relationship.
- Create opportunities for intimacy. Take time out to be together as a couple.
- Accept that your relationship will have highs and lows. Continue to explore new ways of finding a deeper level of intimacy.
- Intimacy is damaged when one partner uses power inappropriately over the other. Abuse or violence in a relationship destroys trust and signals that the relationship is in trouble.

Behaviour Traits for Healthy Intimacy in a Relationship

In order to establish and maintain healthy intimacy in a relationship you must:

- Develop self-confidence in your ability to handle a relationship
- Believe in your self-worth, your goodness and abilities
- Let go of your fears
- Open yourself up to trust in the goodness of others
- Accept your body and body image
- Learn to take a chance, take a risk
- Resolve and forgive feelings about past hurts, pains, and failures
- Handle disagreements, conflicts, or fights
- Work out anger, resentment, and hostility over the past
- Maintain mutual assertiveness in the relationship
- Reduce competition and the struggle for power and control in the relationship
- Loosen up and show signs of physical affection and love to others
- Improve communication to an open, honest, and productive level
- Address the sexual issues in the relationship
- Recognise the need for professional help and obtain such assistance

5 Steps to Improve Intimacy in a Relationship

Here are five ways for you to be more open:

- 1.** You need to make your outside behaviour the same or congruent with your inside feelings and thoughts.
- 2.** Focus on feelings. It's usually easier to share opinions or thoughts about something. Everybody has an opinion. It's harder to share feelings. Be in touch with how you feel. Share openly the feelings as much as you can. Some feelings cover or come from other feelings. Anger may come from hurt. We might find it easier to show the anger. However, if we work really hard and try to understand the hurt, if we share and are open about it we are actually being more open at a deeper level.
- 3.** Try to change your questions into statements. We sometimes have an attitude or feeling about something and we're afraid to share it, we're afraid to be open. Instead we ask a question. We might say for instance, "do you love me?", when instead we want to say "I love you". Change your questions into statements you can make about yourself.
- 4.** Try to make your communication in the first person using 'I' statements. Begin sentences with I instead of you. You might say, "I feel happy that you're here," instead of asking, "Are you glad that you're here?" Begin your sentences as often as possible with 'I'. Finally, try not to say, "I don't know." This generally means I don't want to think about it anymore. You're probably getting to a level of being open that makes you anxious. Decide what it is and whether you can really trust it with the other person or persons.
- 5.** Some ways of being open are more helpful than others. When you're angry, for instance, there's a difference between throwing a book across the room and talking out your feelings. Both are certainly ways of being open about the

anger. However, if other people are with you, talking to them about your anger is probably easier for them than ducking from a book you just threw. It might also be more helpful. Remember also, that the extent to which others are open with you will depend on how open you are with them. Many people find that most of the relationships that they're involved in become much more important to them the more open they are in them. When we stay open to learning, new experiences open up for us. Perhaps the same can happen for you.

Languages of Love

Gary Chapman, in his benchmark book 'The Five Languages of Love', gives us a detailed look at how we may differ from our partner in the way we like to be shown that we are loved.

Your love language probably differs from your spouse's. Each of us speaks and understands one that makes it easy for us to feel loved. If you try to communicate using only your native language, it may be foreign to your husband or wife. To be understood, you need to know - and speak - your spouse's language. Which is it?

Words of Affirmation: verbal expressions of appreciation, compliment, praise, and thanks, conveyed for the well-being of the one you love. Such communication demonstrates: *encouragement* - it inspires and motivates (not pressures) another to pursue a latent interest or achieve personal potential; *kindness* - it encompasses loving tones and truthful statements to build intimacy, express understanding, share difficult feelings, or show forgiveness; and *humility* - it requests instead of demands, asks instead of nags.

Quality Time: focused, undivided and uninterrupted attention, despite busyness and business. It is demonstrated in: *togetherness* - not just proximity, but the simple emotional connection and enjoyment of being with each other; *meaningful conversation* - sympathetic (not just solution-oriented) dialogue and active listening to share feelings, thoughts, and desires in a friendly uninterrupted context; and *shared activities* - doing things together that interest one or both of you just in order to create a unique experience and mutual memory.

Receiving Gifts: tokens or symbols of affection, caring, remembrance, and thoughtfulness. They may be *tangible gifts* - little (or big) presents that you've found, made, or purchased, given either at a special time or for no specific occasion; or *gifts of self* - your physical presence in important moments or times of crisis.

Acts of Service: happily doing things you know your spouse would like you to do or helping your mate with tasks that need to be done. Examples might include keeping the house clean, putting the toilet seat down, ironing, changing diapers, cleaning the garage, cooking or going out for dinner, or attending a symphony performance. Such acts require thought, time, planning, and effort. They are done in love - not fear, guilt, resentment, or duty - and may go against social or family stereotypes.

Physical Touch: communication of your love through the body's nerve endings, with sensitivity to what methods, circumstances, and timing your spouse finds pleasant. It includes hugs, kisses, hand holding, back rubs, sitting close, hair stroking, and, of course, regular sexual intercourse. It also encompasses long, empathetic embraces and tender touches of understanding when your spouse is in tears or times of crisis.

Remember, love is a choice that often involves sacrifice. But you'll deepen the intimacy in your marriage if you learn your spouse's love language and speak it regularly.

Things to remember

- Sharing your deepest thoughts and emotions with someone you love can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship.
- Be aware of the need to explore ways to share intimacy without sex.
- Intimacy in a relationship doesn't just happen. It is built up over time.
- Abuse or violence in a relationship destroys trust and intimacy and signals that the relationship is in trouble.

Resources

The Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors

Tel: (07) 3112 2000 www.aipc.net.au

National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9639 8330

www.pacfa.org.au

Relationships Australia Tel. 1300 364 277

Relate (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services) Tel. 1800 456 555

Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054

www.aarc.org.au

Suggested Reading

- ♥ ***The Art of Loving*** (Eric Fromm) – general information for the person interested in developing intimacy.
- ♥ ***The Unimaginable Life*** (Kenny Loggins) - the passionate account of a shared journey between Kenny and Julia Loggins. It is about power and paradox, sacred selfishness and vulnerability, pain and transformation, sexuality and jealousy, passion and compassion, fear and spirit, creativity and a brand new kind of courage.
- ♥ ***Intimacy*** (Allen and Martin) – deals with the different forms of intimacy and discusses the specifics of intimacy formation.
- ♥ ***What Do You Say After You Say Hello?*** (Eric Berne) – a book which directly deals with the initial stages of forming potentially intimate relationships.
- ♥ ***Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*** (Powell) – beneficial in helping people understand their own internal barriers to forming intimate relationships.

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