
Relationships - creating intimacy

Summary

- 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.
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Intimacy in a relationship is a feeling of being close, and emotionally connected and supported. It means being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences that we have as human beings. It involves being open and talking through your thoughts and emotions, letting your guard down (being vulnerable), and showing someone else how you feel and what your hopes and dreams are.

Intimacy is built up over time, and it requires patience and effort from both partners to create and maintain. Discovering intimacy with someone you love can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship. Apart from emotional and sexual intimacy, you can also be intimate intellectually, recreationally, financially, spiritually, creatively (for example, renovating your home) and at times of crisis (working as a team during tough times).

Intimacy in relationships

Intimacy is achieved when we become close to someone else and are reassured that we are loved and accepted for who we are. Children usually develop intimacy with parents and peers. As adults, we seek intimacy in close relationships with other adults, friends, family and with a partner.

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.

However, 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 and remember that sex includes many forms of physical contact. Often, the more a couple is intimate with each other in ways other than sex, the more fulfilling their sex life becomes.

Difficulties in creating intimacy

Some couples find it difficult to achieve intimacy in their relationship. Others can find that after achieving intimacy it seems to slip away. 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:

- **communication issues** – if you and your partner are not communicating to each other what your feelings and needs are, then they are not likely to be met. If you do not feel understood by your partner then intimacy is hard to create or maintain. It's important to talk to your partner about what you need and to check in with them about how they are feeling. This act alone can create a feeling of being connected and intimate
 - **conflict** – if there is ongoing conflict in your relationship, it can be difficult to develop intimacy. It is not easy to feel close to someone you are arguing with. Anger, hurt, resentment, lack of trust, or a sense of being unappreciated can all affect intimacy. If conflict is affecting your relationship, seek help:
 - **Relationships Australia** offers counselling, mediation, dispute resolution, relationship and parenting skills education (Tel. **1300 364 277**)
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- **Family Relationship Advice Line** (Tel. **1800 050 321**) also provides advice for families experiencing relationship issues
- **practical issues** – practical issues and life stressors such as financial worries, pressures at work, concerns about children, or just being too busy to really connect with each other can affect intimacy. There are times in a couple's relationship when the needs of the couple have to be put aside while more pressing issues are dealt with, but it is important to try and carve out time together as a couple, even if it is a five-minute check in or having a cup of tea together. Small moments of feeling close to each other all add up to a greater feeling of intimacy
- **abuse or violence** – 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. It's important that you seek help. For safety and support, call **1800 RESPECT** on **1800 737 732**
- **negative childhood experiences**
- **past and current traumas.**

We all have some barriers to intimacy. It is normal for couples to work together to overcome these barriers.

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 the following.

- Celebrate the good things in your relationship. Tell your partner, in words and actions, how much you love and appreciate them. Let your partner know what you value about them and about the relationship. Put it into words and don't assume they already know. Everybody likes to be told that they are appreciated and loved.
- 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 when you can focus on each other and on your relationship. The harder it is to do this because of children, work or other commitments, the more important it is that you do it. Try to plan a regular evening, day or weekend for the two of you to be alone.
- Accept that your relationship will have highs and lows. Continue to explore new ways of finding a deeper level of intimacy. These moments don't need to be grand gestures of love. Taking time, even small moments, together is just as important as going on a date together.
- Be positive and grateful about what you have in your relationship.

Seeking help for relationship problems

Sometimes you may need help or guidance to sort through some of the problems, feelings and thoughts you have about your relationship. You could talk to a relationship counsellor, or go to a course or workshop that will help you and your partner overcome some of your relationship problems. Remember, it is normal to have ups and downs in your relationship, and building and maintaining intimacy is part of having a fulfilling relationship.

Where to get help

- **Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)** Tel. **(03) 9486 3077**
- **Relationships Australia** provides counselling, mediation, family violence services, family dispute resolution, relationship and parenting skills education, community support, employee assistance programs and professional training. Services and programs are available nationally Tel. **1300 364 277**
- **1800 RESPECT** is the national sexual assault and family violence counselling service for people living in Australia Tel. **1800 737 732**
- **Beyond Blue** is an independent non-profit organisation that provides telephone and online support for depression, anxiety, and related disorders, as well as online resources and information Tel. **1300 22 4636**
- **Family Relationship Advice Line** Tel. **1800 050 321**
- **Gambling Help Online** provides free, anonymous, 24/7 online support, telephone support, self-help tools and information for identifying and dealing with problem gambling Tel. **1800 858 858**
- **MensLine Australia** provides national telephone and online support, information and referrals for men with family and relationship concerns Tel. **1300 78 99 78**

- **QLife** provides telephone and online support to help lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities work towards better health, including mental health Tel. **1800 184 527**

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