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Intimacy

Intimacy is a relationship between people which nurtures and enhances closeness. Intimacy is created by sharing of thoughts, feelings, moments, times and events in life. It is about heart to heart sharing between people. Intimacy is about **being** with others as opposed to **doing** to others.

Intimacy is about connection. Intimacy **is** connection, connection of one person's self to another or others selves. It creates bonding between people. Intimacy creates meaning for life - a sense that life, even though it may be difficult, is worthwhile. To be intimate with one or more others gives one a sense that one belongs.

Intimacy can be experienced in brief moments, hours and years. It can be experienced between parent and child, grandparent and child, adult child and elderly parent, lovers of all ages and good friends of all ages. Intimacy can be experienced with one person or with a group of people, groups such as family gatherings, group therapy, group of close friends and enduring an ordeal with others.

Safety is a major factor in intimacy. People allow themselves to get close to others if they feel safe. When people have been hurt in relationship they tend to protect themselves from getting close to others. This interferes with getting their intimacy needs met. To deal with the isolation all manner of behaviors take place to cope with the sense of separateness and isolation. People use alcohol and drugs, over working, impersonal sex, overly focusing on hobbies, sports and other activities to numb the pain and deflect from it. It's like ignoring and coping with ongoing hunger.

People desire and seek intimacy. People who are comfortable with intimacy experience it as wonderful. People who are not familiar with intimacy or have been hurt by it, are confused; they both love it and are uncomfortable with it. Some people do not recognize the sensations of intimacy so feel confused and uncomfortable with them. As a result they often push it away by doing behaviors that sabotage it. They may provoke a fight and/or withdraw. Many a fight is caused by one person feeling uncomfortable with too much closeness. This leaves the other feeling hurt and confused, saying "But I was just beginning to think things were getting better."

People often confuse intimacy and sex. It is possible to have intimacy without sex and sex without intimacy. Courtship is so pleasant because lovers experience intimacy and sexual pleasure.

The opposite of intimacy is isolation, feeling separate or detached from others. People dislike the sense of isolation, it is a very negative experience. It is this sense of isolation which drives people to seek out contact with others. Fear of isolation often keeps people in relationships with others even if the contact is painful and negative. Children may stay with friends they no longer like to avoid feeling isolated. Couples may stay with each other, not because they care about each other, but to avoid feeling isolated and being alone. Being alone is not necessarily isolated. Feeling disconnected and or cut off from others emotionally generates the sense of isolation. Life seems meaningless when a person feels all alone in the world, when they feel they don't belong with person or group.

There is a natural flow from intimacy to separateness from separateness back to intimacy ongoing over time. People tend to flow from needing intimacy and needing separateness, and seek both in their own particular way. Some people need and want more intimacy than others. Some people need and want more separateness than others. Problems occur in relationships when there is a difference in amount and style. Problems occur when partners have been hurt and are resentful.

I believe a lot of the difficulties in relationships are due to intimacy needs not getting met. People feel alone and isolated as they sit for hours in front of their TV sets deflecting from the pain of unmet social and emotional needs.

The following exercises are designed to renew and enhance the intimacy needs between couples.

Intimacy Exercise 1:

This exercise is specifically designed to renew and enhance intimacy between couples.
(Sexual contact is **not** a part of this exercise.)

Step 1: Agreed to find 20 minutes to be together alone. Make this a time when you will least likely be disturbed.

Step 2: Agree on a fun/pleasant activity to do together immediately after completing this exercise. E.g.. taking a walk, playing a game, having a meal, etc. (no sex/lovemaking)

Step 3: Begin the exercise: Find a comfortable way to sit facing each other **fully clothed**. Do not do this exercise on the bed.
This a non-verbal exercise: Do not speak to each other.
One person begins as the ‘giver’ and the other begins as the ‘receiver’.

Step 4: 5 minutes : One partner explores the other **from the neck** up using all of his/her senses - sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.
Look at your partner as if you have never seen him/her before. **Look** at shape, color, texture of your partner’s skin, eyes, hair etc.
Listen to your partner as if you’ve never listen to him/her before.
Listen to breathing, shifting, coughing, any noises that are made.
Smell your partner as if you’ve never smelled him/her before. **Smell** his/her skin and hair
Taste your partner as if you’ve never tasted him/her before. **Taste** skin, if tears flow taste the tears.
Touch your partner as if you’ve never touched him/her before. Feel the temperature, shape, texture of skin, nose, lips, eyes, ears, head, hair, etc.

As you are exploring your partner you may find yourself thinking about what you are doing and what the other person may be thinking or feeling. This is natural. When this happens, just be aware of it and then shift back to your senses of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch. Keep re-focusing your attention from thinking to sensing. Most important to keep re-focusing your attention onto your partner. I.e.. away from yourself.
Do not give meaning to what you sense. E.g.. if your partner is smiling do not give meaning to the smile - just focus on how the smile looks, the shape if it, the feel of the smiling lips, the creases it creates etc.

The partner on the receiving side of this interaction is to focus on the sensations he or she is experiencing during this time. Soak it up! Pay attention to the sensations as if you've never experienced them before.

As you are receiving you may find yourself thinking about what you are sensing and what the other person may be thinking or feeling. This is natural. When this happens, just be aware of it and then shift back to your senses of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch. Keep re-focusing your attention from thinking to sensing. Keep re-focusing your attention to your own experience.

Step: 5 5 minutes - Reverse the roles.

Step 6 5 minutes - Reverse the roles.

Step 7 5 minutes - Reverse the roles.

Step 8 Go and play with each other. (No sex /love-making)

If you find yourself thinking thoughts such as "I don't know what to do." or "I don't know if I'm doing this right." or "I feel silly doing this." Be aware that this is thinking and re-focus yourself on what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching.

If you find yourself thinking thoughts such as "I wonder if my partner is OK with doing this?" or "Maybe I smell bad; I should have put on perfume/cologne." be aware that this is thinking and re-focus your attention back to what you are sensing.

If you are unable to find 20 minutes in the course of a week because you are too busy you should be concerned. This is a red flag that your relationship needs attention. Perhaps you are using work and activities to avoid intimacy with your partner. Improving an intimate relationship helps people deal more effectively with life in general.

20 minutes is not a lot of time in one week. Examine your priorities and decide what you want. It is up to you.

You may feel sexually aroused by the exercise. Allow this to pass without trying to do anything about it. It is very important that you not act on your impulses as it will destroy what is to be gained by the exercise and even harm the intimacy that there is already in the relationship.