

*Heading: Dating & Relationship*

*Topics: Vulnerability, Trust*

## **Intimacy**

### **Overview**

By definition, intimacy is close familiarity or a feeling of comfort. It's something you build in your relationships and involves expressing the most profound—and private—parts of yourself to one another. This means sharing integral parts of your identity like interests and experiences. Though intimacy doesn't require sexual intercourse, or even touching, both can contribute. In order to create intimacy, you must first share vulnerability and trust.

**Vulnerability.** At some point we've all felt it: the sense of being exposed and susceptible to physical or emotional harm. We may experience vulnerability when we're trying something new, like having intercourse with a partner for the first time, or when we're expressing our feelings to someone whose opinion we value.

Trust plays a major role in how vulnerable we allow ourselves to be in our relationships. This makes it important not only to build mutual confidence in one another, but to open yourself up to trusting your partner. Once we have trust, we then have the opportunity to reinforce it with intimacy. But in order to do so, we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

By fostering intimacy built on vulnerability and trust with your partner, you can encourage more meaningful interactions and deepen your relationship.

### **Vulnerability**

Not all vulnerability is bad. There. We've said it. In fact, vulnerability and its experience are important to many aspects of our lives, especially intimacy. In addition to vulnerability's perception as exposure to harm, vulnerability is also one's ability to show emotion and share weakness. This healthy frame of mind creates the opportunity for honest communication and ultimately intimacy. By embracing your vulnerability and expressing your thoughts with or without fear of judgment, you strengthen your relationship and enable yourselves to better support one another.

### **Ways to Practice Vulnerability**

One way to embrace your vulnerability is to find opportunities to acknowledge and practice it. There are a number of appropriate situations and ways to draw on vulnerability in your relationships.

- **Admit when you're wrong.** Quite possibly the most difficult demonstration of vulnerability, admitting when you're wrong builds humility and can foster great respect within a relationship when done right. It's important to be gracious and open to critique. To avoid making excuses, instead make a resolution: *"I was wrong the other day. I will try to listen better."*
- **Be truthful when you feel someone is in the wrong.** Though situations that require you to tell someone they're wrong may seem like navigating a path covered in Legos, these moments can be key turning points in relationships—and powerful shows of vulnerability. If something a partner or friend does seems wrong with you, show them respect by being honest and letting them know how it made you feel. Use "I" statements to express yourself and show how their words or actions affected you. This will motivate them to consider you the next time. If they make it clear they don't want to consider your feelings, it may signify the need to reassess the relationship.
- **Acknowledge when you're struggling with something.** Admitting that you need help can be a huge step of vulnerability, especially for those of us who are used to—and may prefer—our independence. But rather than being a sign of weakness, the vulnerability to admit that you could use a hand is an immense indication of strength, and those worthy of your vulnerability will admire and respect you for it. The next step, when you're ready, will be to accept any help offered.
- **Share your thoughts honestly.** It takes incredible courage to express something when you're not sure how it will be received. While you may fear judgment or being wrong, your honesty presents your partner with the opportunity to share their genuine thoughts and opinions as well. This enables you both to be more truthful and therefore more intimate.
- **Say no.** Saying no is likely one of the hardest things to learn within a relationship, but committing to honesty when you don't want something is just as essential to trust and intimacy as when you do. Be truthful with yourself and your partner by saying no when it's what you really feel. This not only demonstrates your vulnerability, but shows yourself the respect and care you deserve. Once you've exercised this regard for yourself, others will follow suit and treat you with the same respect.

By practicing vulnerability, you empower yourself and your partner to build intimacy.

## Trust

A strong foundation of trust underlies all healthy relationships and gives you a leg up on intimacy. In being able to trust your partner—or friend or confidante—you'll feel more confident and capable of honest communication, enabling you to build your mutual happiness together. But just like with self-esteem, many factors can affect your ability to trust.

Maybe you've had a string of relationships with partners you couldn't count on, or maybe you were betrayed by someone you trusted deeply. No matter the case, it's important to remember that there are people out there worthy of your trust. By committing yourself to building back up your faith in others, you'll eventually open yourself back up to placing your confidence in another.

## Ways to Tackles Trust Issues

If you find yourself unable to extend your trust, it's important to self-assess.

- **Talk to supportive friends and family.** By surrounding yourself with people you *do* trust, you'll remind yourself not only that trustworthy people exist but that those relationships are integral to your mental health and self-esteem.
- **Consult a professional.** The right professional therapist can be invaluable in your pursuit of trust. A therapist that suits you and your needs will provide objective guidance and a fresh perspective. They've also been trained with skills and methodologies specifically geared to negotiate these types of situations, so know you're not alone and quite likely in good hands.
- **Communicate with the person you're having trouble trusting.** Whether your inability to trust is a reflection of you or them, it's important to open up lines of communication with your partner. Discuss why you feel the way you do and how the two of you can work together to find a solution.

## Intimacy

Once you've established trust and embraced vulnerability in your relationship, you can then focus on building intimacy.

## How to Foster Intimacy

There are so many ways that you and your partner can develop intimacy.

- **Show your appreciation.** Express your gratitude in a way they'll find meaningful. Thanking them, doing them a favor, and giving them a gift are all viable ways to tell them you're grateful.
- **Ask about and listen to one another.** Even if you've known someone for a while, show an interest in them by being curious about things like what they've seen, what they care about, and why. In making an effort to learn about your partner, you tell them they're important to you and worthy of your time. There will always be more to discover as you grow together, and in some ways apart, and establishing intimacy in this way will keep you close.
- **Make time for each other.** Whether it's a weekend, an evening, or even half an hour, put away the distractions and give them your undivided attention. Prioritizing uninterrupted time together will leave you both feeling valued and promote intimacy.
- **Do something together.** Accomplishing something can provide a huge boost to your self-esteem. In the same way, accomplishing something together can offer your intimacy a push. Make dinner, learn a new skill, or even clean out the attic together.
- **Initiate physical contact.** Even without sex, physical contact can be rewarding and even comforting. Cuddling, sitting close to one another, and holding hands are all ways to engage in non-sexual, physical contact and foster intimacy.
- **Talk about it.** Yes, starting to create intimacy may be that easy. Let your friend, charge, or partner know that you're interested in developing your intimacy and pay attention

when they bring it up themselves. By getting on the same page, you allow yourselves to work together to strengthen your relationship achieve closeness.

If you find yourself unable to create intimacy in your relationship, evaluate how open and vulnerable you are with your partner as well as how much you trust one another. Past experiences can remarkably affect your willingness and ability to engage in intimacy, even with someone you care about. Once you recognize any limitations you have, you can then start to overcome them.

## How to Overcome a Fear of Intimacy

Often, the thing that holds us back from establishing intimacy is fear. You can address this in several ways.

1. **Identify your feelings and their effects.** You could be standing in the way of your own intimacy without even realizing it. Recognizing a fear of intimacy and assessing its influence on your mindset and relationships shows you what you should address.
2. **Discover your limitations and their source.** We often isolate ourselves after trauma—large or small—to avoid further harm. Before you can address the symptoms of your fear, it's important to self-assess and determine where these inhibitions originated. Only in understanding why you've put up walls can you attempt to take them down.
3. **Express your feelings.** Talking about fear of intimacy can help you to better understand it and dismantle it. This can be with a friend, family, or even your partner. Approaching the subject with your partner may also allow them to address your concerns and assuage your fears.
4. **Get professional help.** If you're finding it difficult to overcome your fear of intimacy, consider seeking guidance from a therapist or counselor. Not only do they provide unbiased opinions, they're also trained to ask the right questions and help you get to the root of any.

### Sources:

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