

## Talking Your Way to Intimacy

What is the best way to increase the level of intimacy in a relationship? How can couples who want to be closer deepen the sense of connectedness they feel? Contrary to what you might believe, it doesn't happen primarily through better sex. Even increasing the time you spend together won't automatically do it. One of the best ways to enhance your intimacy is through improving your communication.

Intimacy has to do with the inward nature of things. Intimacy grows when more about you and the other person is shared. Anne Wilson Schaef defines "intimacy" as "into/me/see." Your sense of closeness to your partner or spouse grows as you open up and let the other person look inside. If both partners are willing to share at this level, intimacy will grow.

Communication which enhances intimacy is communication which says something about you. If you and your partner talk only of facts and events, if all you ever discuss is what needs to be done to handle the pragmatics of getting through the week, closeness won't grow. While discussing these details is important, it's not enough to enhance your intimacy.

Intimacy blossoms in an atmosphere of trust, where two people are willing to take the risk of being vulnerable with one another. Without this risk, there can be no deepening of relationship. Suppose you feel uncomfortable because you sense a growing chasm coming between you and your partner. It takes courage to comment on that sense of separation. If you say, "I miss the closeness we used to share," you run the risk of your partner responding in anger or frustration. "You are *always* complaining! Won't you ever be satisfied?" Intimacy can grow if he or she responds by saying, "I've been concerned about that myself" or "Really? I haven't been aware of that. Talk to me about it."

Try these suggestions to improve the depth of your communication.

1. If you find yourself becoming bored with your partner's communication, it's probably because he or she is talking at an informational level without sharing feelings. Ask questions to get at the emotions behind what is being said. "How did you feel when your boss criticized you?"
2. If you have something to share, take responsibility for what you are saying. Instead of, "You are such a selfish jerk!" share how you feel and what you want. "I miss our walks in the park and hope we can make time to put them back into our routine." When you "own" what you have to say, you reduce the risk of your partner's response being a defensive one.
3. You have to be willing to listen as well as speak. Intimacy is a two-way street.
4. Pay attention to what is said non-verbally. Much of what you communicate is communicated in tone of voice, body language and facial expressions. A frown, sigh, or look of disgust will often be remembered long after what was said is forgotten.

It's often difficult to speak up. You may remain silent, hoping what is wrong will right itself. Usually it doesn't. You may hesitate to speak up because what you have to say seems petty. These issues are all the more reason to talk about what is going on inside of you. You will often communicate your frustration or disappointment non-verbally anyway. Speaking up allows the two of you to begin the process of improving what is lacking. This is the very process by which intimacy grows.

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