

Putting the mate into intimate

Intimacy is not just another term for sex. There is a common misunderstanding that links them together as one and the same thing, which they are not.

Intimacy is about partners sharing the deepest and most important aspects of themselves with each other. It involves closeness, warmth, trust, self-disclosure, affection and, hopefully, sex. We learn an enormous amount about ourselves in an intimate relationship.

But true intimacy requires you to feel you are not putting yourself in danger. In close relationships this can be a double-edged sword.

Your partner is the one who knows most about you and partners are most likely to protect you and help you keep that ring of confidence around you in the world.

However, this knowledge of you also means they are the ones who can cut you down the quickest, because they know how to hurt you and they know the most intimate things about you.

So in a good relationship intimacy is all about being able to be yourself in the relationship and being prepared to expose the vulnerable bits of you without fearing that they will be used against you. Intimacy means you need to be able to receive all aspects of your partner without rejecting or blocking what they want to express to you.

Allowing ourselves to be truly intimate in a relationship requires that we are able to act like adults, and to keep in the forefront of our minds that we are in this relationship for the long term, so we won't do anything to jeopardise it.

Of course, sex can be an important part of intimacy, and is good for your relationship. In good love-making that springs from a good relationship, partners can feel confident enough to release control and become one with their partner. This is when each partner is so giving to the other that the boundaries between the two dissolve and they become one.

That's a special experience and not one that everyone achieves all the time, but it might be something good relationships aim for.

In a strange way, when intimacy is concerned, we work backwards from babyhood. As babies we are completely open to giving of ourselves to our parents and receiving powerful love back.

But with the inevitable knock-backs that life delivers as we become independent adults, we become less receptive to other people because we are disappointed with the way they react to us. Also, we realise that other people's motives may not be so good when they are having a negative impact on our lives.

So the number of people you can have an intimate relationship with dwindles, but finding a partner who makes you feel confident about developing an intimate relationship is special.

Even the best relationships don't always run smoothly. Sometimes people get blocked and feel something is stopping them from making their relationship the best it can be.

To reach your potential for intimacy, it may be necessary to seek counselling to find out where the block is. Then you can overcome it and reap the benefits. Just remember that a blockage is not a complete breakdown. With a bit of help it can be sorted out.

Often when we are not feeling close to our partners or when things aren't going smoothly, we concentrate on what our partner needs to do to change things, rather than looking at what we might be contributing to the lack of emotional connection.

It's time to look at what you each have to do to solve the problem that is blocking you both, rather than just blame each other.

Maintaining or developing intimacy takes planning and time. Think romance and create pleasurable activities together.

Survival tips

- **Intimacy is not just another term for sex**
- **Intimacy requires a huge level of trust in the partnership**
- **Even good relationships can strike “intimacy blocks”, but they can be overcome**
- **Intimacy brings out the best in yourself, and the best in your relationship**