

#4 Intimacy

Intimacy refers to knowing and being known at your intrinsic core, your deepest nature. Intimacy can be physical, mental, emotional, sexual, spiritual or any combination of these elements. It is a need common to us all, yet to experience it, we must customize intimacy to each person and situation. The kind of closeness we share with a coworker differs from that with our parents, a lifelong mate, a sibling or a new lover.

When we know we are truly safe in the presence of another, the feeling of closeness emerges. Such connections help us to heal and do our personal growth work. We need intimacy to feel we belong, for it validates our innate feelings.

We can experience intimacy in myriad ways: dancing at a club, singing with a choir, walking in nature, working on a project together, struggling with a crisis or planning an adventure. We can tap into multiple sources of intimate energy with people, places and animals. The frequency of interactions, the length of time spent and the desire to generate closeness all affect the quality of the intimacy.

Our experience of authentic intimacy is so uniquely positive that we wish these moments would last longer and occur more often. It is a desired state of being. Yet no matter how strong our intention is for personal connection may be, our direct experience of intimacy can remain elusive.

As desirable as it is, intimacy is inherently risky because, inevitably, it can hurt to be so open. It is important to know who you can and cannot trust with the inner you. Ultimately, we want to share intimacy with those who make it safe to lower our guard, for they have mastered trustworthiness.

Virtues are the advanced relationship skills needed for intimacy. The interplay of basic virtues such as commitment, empathy, and openness creates the strong base needed for intimacy. Developing the ability to be intimate requires the clearest intention to create a relationship in which nurturing flows, for intimacy is a mutual exchange, a giving of one's self and a willingness to receive from the other. The virtue of understanding plays a vital role in the unfolding into intimacy.

The reward for developing our virtues is intimacy.

I struggled long to define what intimacy meant to me. Finally I tweaked the syllables of intimacy and I got "in-to-me-see." Now the key to the meaning is always in front of me. The deeper your awareness of yourself, the greater capacity you have to love. Intimacy demands more than a glance. It involves discoveries about yourself. In-to-me-"I"-see. The deeper you look within, the greater your ability to be intimate. As counterintuitive as this may seem, getting to know yourself is the greatest reward of intimacy; thus the value of introspection, of spending quality time alone with yourself, is great. Becoming friends with yourself involves gaining an intimate knowledge of who you are.

Your level of self-reflection determines the level of intimacy you can attain with others. The deeper you look into yourself, the more you will want this same level of intimacy with another. It is only when you look inside and discover your own treasures that you can share these gifts with your friends. The more you see into yourself, the more others will want to see into you. Being self-aware gives you the clarity to relate to another's core, and to offer your own.

How do you define intimacy?

What kinds of intimacy do you seek?

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