

What is Intimacy?

Kiersten Wendt

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Oftentimes when someone is uncomfortable using the word “sex”, they replace it with “intimacy”. There has been a cultural understanding that intimacy equals sex and vice versa, but this idea can be confusing, and even harmful for relationship growth.

Sexual experiences can lack intimacy, just as intimate experiences can be void of any physical or sexual interaction. So what is the difference between sex and intimacy? How do they relate to one another, and which is more important?

What is Intimacy?



Intimacy is emotional openness and acceptance between partners in every aspect of the relationship. David Sarch is a renowned marriage and sex therapist who focuses heavily on intimacy, both physical and emotional, in relationships. He explains that oftentimes when people come to him with sexual issues in their marriage, the root of the problem is actually a lack of intimacy in the relationship. When couples work on improving the intimacy of the relationship, they find satisfaction in every facet, not just sex. While not

all intimacy is sex and not all sex is intimacy, they go hand in hand, each strengthening the other.

Can you make love without love?

Another common replacement for the word “sex” is “making love”. The term “making love” implies a deep intimacy and connection between partners, but this may not always be the case. Today’s society has largely taken intimacy out of sex. Sex is thought of as a past-time, a physical activity, or even a sport.

In marriage relationships, sex is a very important part of overall intimacy and closeness. Sex has the power to increase emotional intimacy and improve physical compatibility, but sex that is lacking intimacy can also detract from emotional connection in a relationship. This does not mean that every sexual experience with your spouse has to be a deeply romantic and intense interaction. **Intimacy can be found in the small things like communicating, speaking up about what you do or don’t like, maintaining eye contact, keeping the lights on, or post-sex cuddling.**

It has been said that sex is a mirror of a couple’s intimacy. If a couple is lacking intimacy in their relationship, it will be very apparent when it comes to making love. If a couple is very close and intimate in all aspects of their relationship, their sexual interactions will mirror that, resulting in more fulfilling experiences.

How do you balance emotional and physical intimacy?



Some may ask, “which is more important?”, and the answer is both! Increased attention to creating emotional intimacy in a relationship will naturally lead to more satisfying sexual experiences, and more satisfying sexual experiences will in turn create even deeper bonds of emotional intimacy. Both are necessary in a strong relationship. Both bring feelings of fulfillment and security for each partner.

What can I do?

Intimacy is the most important element of a relationship, whether you are dating someone new, or married to your lifelong sweetheart. As relationships evolve and grow, they reach new and deeper levels of intimacy. For example, a couple who is dating will rely heavily on openness related to emotional intimacy, whereas a couple who has been married for 20 years may need to focus more on translating their emotional intimacy to sexual intimacy.

So examine your relationship- and your vulnerability! In what ways do you need to improve, and how would you like to further cultivate intimacy in your relationship? You can start by focusing on small things such as making more eye contact with your partner both in physical interactions and emotional conversations, or setting aside time to just be with your partner without any distractions. Be open with feelings that may make you uncomfortable, be a better listener, make an effort to express your affection in different ways. **As you leave your comfort zone, your vulnerability will increase, and you will feel a stronger intimacy and connection with your partner.**