

Intimacy: Seven Skills

By

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Because the term “intimacy” has been so long associated with romantic love and sexuality, people usually do not realize the importance of developing the art and skills of intimacy. In our world, intimacy is usually viewed as romantic or sexual. As discussed here, intimacy is not romantic, but is an experience that involves energy exchange and interactions with others and with the world.

Intimacy is required in almost all areas of life, including work, relationships, religious or spiritual life, and leisure. To do a thorough job at work, for example, a person must get to know the area of work in a spontaneous and deep way. S/he must have enough love for self to believe that s/he can do the work, is worthy of undertaking it, and to make the effort and complete jobs. This is intimate behavior. Intimacy is about exchanging and investing our energy in people and experiences. In almost every area of life, we must become “intimate” with people, animals, nature, and work or play activities in order to create success in our endeavors and our lives.

My friend, Michael Brown, nicknamed intimacy “into-me-and-see.” He suggests intimacy between humans is practice for intimacy with a Supreme being (some call God), allowing us the opportunity to remove blocks to the movement of energy in us before we encounter the force of energy from this Supreme being.

Many years ago, I was blessed to learn that Intimacy is characterized by seven skills. By incorporating these skills into our daily lives, we develop a greater capability for sharing intimacy.

The 7 Skills of Intimacy

The seven skills for living intimately in the world are:

1) Closeness; 2) Tenderness; 3) Vulnerability; 4) Trust; 5) Loving and Caring; 6) Reduction of the fear of humiliation and 7) Being in a state of understanding.

1. Closeness Intimacy requires closeness. Closeness is not only the physical act of standing, sitting or lying near someone, it also describes an ease in being physically or emotionally near to ourselves or others, or things (for example, a “cause” or idea).

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We are able to be close when we don't feel pressured to be perfect, because closeness can involve spontaneity, during which we're not always controlled. We can find ourselves interrupting, getting excited about something, making mistakes, making a mess of things, correcting ourselves—all things we go through naturally and want to allow ourselves to do without fear or loss.

When we allow ourselves to be close to others, we share feelings--both the so-called "negative" feelings like anger, hurt, fear, grief, jealousy or loneliness, and the so-called "positive" feelings like love, happiness, joy, peacefulness, and contentment. We risk allowing our full self to be revealed, so we can experience closeness. This risk-taking requires us to encounter our vulnerability, our fear of humiliation and our ability to trust (Skills 3, 4 and 6, described below).

2. Tenderness

Tenderness involves "treating with tender regard." In intimacy, we need to make it a daily activity. Add to this behavior being considerate, expressing gentle emotions and focusing on loving. Following such a plan will enable you to be intimate in the different aspects of life, which subsequently unfolds like a flower. Tenderness requires that you live consideration, self-protection, gentleness, empathy and other love-based behaviors toward yourself and others.

3. Vulnerability

Another skill of intimacy which demonstrates a person's inner strength is vulnerability. It involves exposing our real selves—our weaknesses, fears, tenderness, lack of knowledge or understanding, what is liked and not liked, feelings of love and other parts of ourselves for which we could be hurt, judged or criticized. Fear of vulnerability is what usually keeps people from "getting close" to others, sometimes keeping people from intimacy for their whole life. Inner strength is required to open fully for closeness, and know we will be okay if that closeness is spurned, judged, criticized or not reciprocated. We must be strong in ourselves in order to open tenderly and vulnerably to others.

4. Trust

The usual thought people have when they hear the word "trust" is "trust of others." While being able to trust others *is* important, the true basis of trust is "trust of self." When you can and do trust yourself, it is easier both to discriminate who outside of self can be trusted, and to actually trust others. When we know we can trust and rely upon our own self, regardless of what happens in life, we are safer.

We're then able to trust the "inner voice" that says "I don't like you," or "I don't want to be around you," or "I don't feel good when you're here," enabling us to stay away from people and situations that may be dangerous or hurtful.

In intimacy, a person who trusts him/her self can allow close interaction and exchange because s/he will be able to rely on an inner core, the part of our self that is used as a “reference” and can be reliably trusted, thus enabling the maintenance of personal boundaries despite the blending with others that occurs in intimacy.

5. Loving and Caring

Truly caring about what happens to yourself and others is important in both loving and intimacy. In love, caring leads to a sense of pleasure; in intimacy, caring leads to a sense of safety and security. This sets off a beneficial chain of events.

Feeling secure and safe allows you to get and remain close. Whatever you care about will draw your attention. Wherever attention is directed, you will send your personal and emotional energy. What you feed energy to will grow and become more important. This sequence operates both when you love and care about yourself, or when you’re caring about others. Intimacy with anything or anyone involves an investment of personal energy and attention.

Loving involves the seven Skills of Love. Intimacy is one of the skills of loving; and loving is one of the skills of intimacy. Loving can, in fact, occur without intimacy. Intimacy cannot exist without at least some love for self occurring first.

6. Reduction of fear of humiliation

Especially if you felt humiliated in your early life, you may have developed a defensive posture, and now fear future humiliation. Teens are especially sensitive to humiliation. If you were humiliated, your full acceptance of that humiliated self is what is needed in order to heal yourself. It may have been years since the actual humiliation, so you might even now be judging yourself for still smarting from it.

Heal yourself: Lovingly ask yourself what self needs you to do differently so you can get finished with the humiliation. Comply compassionately.

Curiously, a person who was not personally humiliated, but saw someone else being humiliated, can be even more fearful of humiliation. Also, if you’ve been told some part of your body or personality is “not normal,” you may hold a deep fear of humiliation.

Whatever your past experience, check with yourself about past or, perhaps, anticipated humiliation. Work with yourself, face the fear, and lovingly allow yourself to know that you are *really* an amazing, powerful soul. There is *nothing* wrong with you. Whoever has held the power of humiliation for you was telling you more about themselves than they were saying about you!

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7. Being in a state of understanding

The “understanding” each of us has in life is an ever-changing thing. Our understanding involves how we perceive the world and the people and creatures in it, what makes things work, how we relate with others, and about how we fit into all of these areas of life. “Understanding” implies a level of comprehension about these individual ingredients as well as how they fit together.

A good thing to keep in mind throughout the time our understanding is developing, as well as while we’re using it as a foundation for our adult life, is that each of us human beings is a learner. None of us has The Answer. With experiences and challenges, it’s beneficial to become curious about what you can learn. Because we are all students in the Giant School called earth, getting curious and finding the learning in any experience speeds our progress through that event or challenge. Our learning completes the process then, and that lesson moves to our past. Using curiosity to learn from experience allows us to end repetitive patterns, where the same kind of thing happens over and over in life. Challenges and setbacks are *designed* as our *opportunities* for growing and evolving—which is what each of us has come to the earth to do. Seek ways to stay in a state of understanding. Developing understanding is facilitated by embracing learning.

Developing Intimacy with Oneself

Intimacy is one of the skills of love, making it necessary to have some feeling of love, especially for yourself, in order to experience intimacy. The more true, fully-accepting, unconditional love you give yourself, the easier it is for you to develop ability and skill with intimacy, allowing you to develop and thrive in all areas of life.

All of life is lived “from the inside, out.” What this means is that:

- a. We are all responsible for the life we live
- b. We are, therefore, co-creators of our life
- c. What we experience in interacting with others is really a *mirroring* of what we have inside of us.
- d. This means if we don’t like our “outside experiences,” all we need do is change what is inside of us. Then, that inner change will begin to be reflected to us.
- e. To put it succinctly: If we want change, all we need do is change our self.

These “rules” apply in all of life, including Intimacy. Intimacy, like love, is easiest when developed with one’s own self first, and then is shared with others

When you learn and install the 7 skills of intimacy into your life, you’ll find yourself *automatically* developing intimacy with yourself. This ability for intimacy with others and your world will then be reflected back by others, filling you with warm, tender energy, and enhancing the quality of your life.

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Ilene L. Dillon, M.S.W., aka "The Emotional Pro," is showing the world how to develop Emotional Mastery for Life. Her book, *Emotions in Motion: Mastering Life's Built-in Navigation System*, was released in 2019. She has been transforming the world by spreading the word about the power and mastery of human emotions for five decades.

A long-time California Marriage and Family Therapist, Ilene helps people to understand why we have emotions, what they are intended to do for us, how to work masterfully with them, so that you are the Master of your emotions, rather than allowing emotions to dictate life to you. Ilene is a pioneer of the Emotional Literacy field, having published her first books in 1994. She now teaches, mentors and writes about emotions, serving all who want to develop powerful and amazing lives by bypassing emotional "management" and going directly to Emotional Mastery.

Ilene has become a "full time RV-er," traveling and working, full time, in her 24 foot RV. She may be coming by where you live and work. If you want to hear Ilene speak, or have her create a workshop for your group, contact her to find out when she'll be coming your way.

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