

The Longing for Intimacy

By Jackie Joens – July 21, 2009

The longing for intimacy in life and relationships is part of being human.

Humans are wired for connection and some of the best connections achieved are between people when they share levels of intimacy. Relationships all experience intimacy at some level. The depth of the intimacy shared should be defined by the ‘safeness’ of the relationship. Often times however, this isn’t the case. In many relationships the hunger for intimacy is the driving force that attempts to define the connection. This sense of urgency or hunger for relationship sometimes allows intimacy to grow too deep or too quickly...and then the relationship often times doesn’t work.

So how can healthy intimacy be experienced in the daily dance of relationships?

First, it becomes important that we have a good understanding of the definition of intimacy. It needs to be understood in order to enjoy the depth of reward it can offer in our relationships. One of my favorite ways to describe intimacy is, “a detailed knowledge resulting from a close or long association or study.” In other words, intimacy is a two part learning and sharing process. 1) to learn about ourselves and then choosing how much of our self-knowledge we care to share with another person and 2) to learn about others. It is a give and take of deeply personal pieces of self.

Four Branches of Intimacy

Intimacy can be divided up into four major areas: *emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical*. Because all relationships experience these intimacies in some combination and to varying levels, these different intimacies need to be understood individually as well as how they relate to each other. Once understood, then the intimacies can be explored in safe and healthy ways.

Emotional Intimacy is a type of intimacy where feelings are explored, exposed and exchanged. Not just a display of emotions – crying, yelling, laughing...but rather a conscious process of self-examination, understanding and mutual exchange. What do you think? How do you feel? What are your core values? What are your passions? What are your hurts? What are your inspirations? What are your fears?

All of these questions tap into the reality of your emotions and how they impact your life. Are you familiar with your feelings? Do you examine your emotions and understand where they come from and then choose a good course of behavior? Or are your emotions the triggers that set you down a course of habitual behavior patterns? Do you choose to act a certain way as a result of your emotions or instead do you just react to them?

What is your sense of purpose? What role does spirituality play in your life and relationships? ***Spiritual Intimacy*** is the exploration and discovery of the greater sense of self – why are you here? To understand spirituality also takes time in study, self-examination, meditation and prayer. The study of the age-old question, “Why am I here?” brings about an understanding of the meaning of life – your life. What do you believe? What are your priorities to living? When do you feel your soul being moved?

These considerations provide a glimpse into the journey of your fit into the world. When you have a better understanding of your greater purpose and your beliefs, then you are better able to share knowledge of yourself with others. Unfortunately, this is an area of intimacy that is often misunderstood and is neglected. Make no mistake, it is a fundamental piece of every person – no matter what your faith. Spend time in prayerful consideration and meditation – get to know yourself as reflected in your relationship with God.

Intellectual Intimacy is another type of intimacy that can often be neglected. Humans need to share ideas, dreams, thoughts...it is a venue where many great and wonderful ideas have found fertile ground to grow and become new creations. Discussions – especially surrounding topics of passion - bring like minds together and the resulting relationships can be rich and rewarding. Do you tend to your intellect? Are you challenging yourself to learn and grow? What are your passions? Have you explored them?

By experiencing the fire of your passions and by exercising the grey matter in your head, you expand the richness of your life. The more we learn, the more we grow and often times are eager to learn more. This knowledge exploration can surround literature, sports, mathematics, politics, culture...any subject that stirs the fire of searching for more information. What ignites the fire in you to learn, explore and grow in your knowledge base?

Physical Intimacy is the sharing of personal and physical space. In all relationships or potential relationships, there is some form of physical intimacy explored. Culturally, it seems as if the boundaries of appropriate physical intimacy are often misunderstood or just simply ignored. We do need to understand the implications of sharing our personal and physical space.

Often times when discussions first turn toward physical intimacy, thoughts go immediately toward sexual relationships. Physical intimacy does encompass more than just sex. A handshake, nudge, pat on the back, holding hands, touching an arm, an embrace, a kiss are all examples of different forms of physical intimacy. In some relationships a hearty handshake is appropriate and appreciated, where other situations may call for a warm hug, and still others no physical touch may be appropriate.

All of these are forms of intimacy that have many more expressions than can be described here. The reality is that all of our relationships speak to different aspects of intimacy in our lives- some speak to one area, others speak to a few. Our make-up has to have all four of them engaged at different times. How do you see each form of intimacy playing out in your own life? What form of intimacy stands out to you most? Why?