

## **Eight Super Simple Things You Can Do Today To Begin To Restore Intimacy To Your Marriage**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Intimacy is a state and a process where two people reveal to each other who they really are. It is a letting down of defenses and protective behaviors. Intimacy is behavioral and verbal communication of one's innermost thoughts and feelings. It involves risking exposing one's most vulnerable sides to that other person.

Intimacy as a "state" is fostered by open and honest self-disclosure, acceptance, trust, and commitment. To be intimate with others we have to feel safe enough to share our innermost thoughts and feelings. To feel safe enough, we have to take the risk to see what happens. To risk we have to have a sense of self and we have to have a fairly accurate sense of the trustworthiness of others. To want to risk with another person, we would probably be motivated by some level of positive feelings or regard for that person.

As we begin to trust our own judgment, take the risks with appropriate people, and observe trustworthiness in others, trust deepens and grows. We not only trust our own gut feelings, but begin to trust another person as well.

Commitment goes hand in hand with trust. As we expose more and more of our tender, vulnerable sides, and our significant other doesn't abandon or belittle us for our imperfections, fear reduces, and security in the relationship grows. If we are really risking who we are, conflict will occur. Commitment means being willing to stay and deal with the feelings and behavior that surround our conflicted needs or wants, to work through it to mutual agreement or acceptance. In order to do that there must be honesty and willingness to listen to the other's point of view.

In conflicted relationships, especially ones damaged by alcoholism or drug addiction, there may be very little openness, trust, honesty, or acceptance left. Vulnerable self-disclosure has long since left the building. And for good reason. To risk being vulnerable met with predictable punishment (on both sides).

To repair the intimacy in newly recovering relationships, it is appropriate to take responsibility for your own behavior and contribution to the problem and to the solution-- while not worrying about whether the other person will follow suit. Begin simply. Try these things as an experiment. Look around and see what changes occur.

1. Give your partner a compliment about his/her appearance daily. Find something positive and don't add a "but".
2. Tell your partner that you appreciate what they did that day to make your life easier. You probably already notice some of these things but never bother to say anything about it.
3. Take full responsibility for your own feelings, behavior, and decisions.

4. Don't assume that he/she knows how you feel. Tell them. Regardless of how long you have been married, s/he cannot accurately read your mind.
5. Don't assume that s/he will know what kind of reaction or behavior that you want from him/her in any given situation. Ask for what you want. Example: "I want to tell you what happened at work today, and I don't want you to tell me how to fix it. I just want you to listen."
6. Treat your partner with the same politeness you would an acquaintance. A little common courtesy goes a long way. Open doors. Offer a glass of tea if you are going to the kitchen anyway.
7. Sprinkle your day generously with hugs, kisses, and "I love you's". How could that hurt?
8. Remember that not everything is about you. Two people are going to have different intimacy needs at different times. If your partner wants distance/space while you want closeness, remember that it is not necessarily about your relationship and that it doesn't mean that they are leaving you forever.

By modeling this intimate behavior with your significant other, you make your relationship a safer place for them to try some new behavior with you. It may take a long time to allow yourself to be intimate with your significant other again, (or for some, for the first time). Give yourself credit for the letting down of defenses and your courage to take risks.

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