

Sexual & Emotional Intimacy

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Intimacy between partners in a relationship involves both an emotional and sexual component. One of the prime functions of sexuality is to reinforce and deepen the intimacy in a relationship. However, the essence of intimacy is feeling emotionally close, connected, and valued. At its core, intimacy involves a respectful and trusting friendship where each partner feels prized by the other (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2003). Of course, each partner can have emotionally close relationships with friends, siblings, parents, and mentors; but it is the integration of emotionality and sexuality in their relationship that makes a couple's connection special and, ultimately, intimate.

Emotional Intimacy

Romantic love is a intense emotional connection where both partners tend to idealize one another and their relationship. Romantic love usually dissipates within the first year of the relationship. When replaced by mature intimacy, the couple has a solid foundation to their relationship (Love, 2001). Feeling cared for and caring for the other, sharing positive feelings, experiencing empathic communication, feeling emotionally validated, enjoying a sense of “we-ness,” and establishing closeness are all integral aspects of emotional intimacy. However, emotional intimacy involves more than just affirming experiences. Genuine intimacy includes the entire range of personal and couple experiences including the sharing of weaknesses, vulnerabilities, fears, and negative experiences. In other words, couples who are intimate share a wide range of feelings—from anger to love, sadness to joy, boredom to fascination, aloneness to closeness.

Sexual Intimacy

Sexual intimacy is more than functional sex. The essence of sexual intimacy is openness and comfort, the ability to share your body, especially sensual and erotic feelings. Partners can be sexually responsive with no intimacy. Consider the one night stand or angry sex. Sex reaches its full capacity when the sexual relationship combines eroticism with emotional intimacy (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2003). Sharing yourself, your body, and your feelings is the essence of sexual intimacy. When this occurs, partners are able to share sexual thoughts and feelings, enjoy sensuality and nondemand pleasuring, give and receive erotic stimulation, come together during intercourse, allow arousal to flow to orgasm, and enjoy afterplay as a bonding experience.

References

- Love, P. (2001). *The truth about love*. New York: Fireside.
- McCarthy, B, & McCarthy, E. (2003). *Rekindling Desire*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.