

QUICKIES: intimacy

a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Intimacy is about having some kind of closeness. When we're being intimate with someone, we're letting them, or they're letting us, get closer. We do this by inviting each other into vulnerable or private parts of ourselves. These are places we don't share with just anyone.

We can experience intimacy with someone we've known all our lives, or with someone we just met. Two people *can* experience intimacy together, but so can three, four, five, ten, twenty or two hundred. People in support groups, jam sessions, families, poly relationships, intentional communities or group events can also experience or build intimacy. Intimacy can also happen in all kinds of relationships and interactions. We can experience intimacy with friends, family, neighbors, caregivers, romantic or sexual partners or someone sitting next to us on the bus.

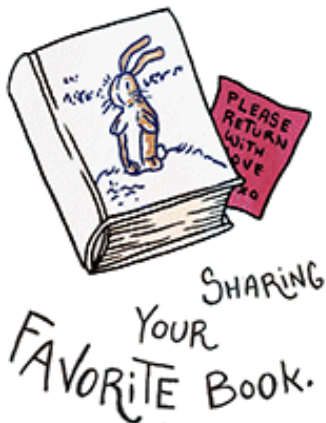
Intimacy can happen in a brief period of time and can be built over time and become deeper.

Intimacy requires trust. Intimacy can help us build more trust with each other over time. Whether we can build more intimacy has a lot to do with how everyone is behaving, not just one person. We can't create or build intimacy with someone all by ourselves. Not everyone wants or is ready for intimacy. When sharing, some people behave in ways that make people want to shut down, not open up. This doesn't support intimacy.

When some people say someone was intimate, they're talking about sex. **Sex is one way to be intimate, but sex isn't the only way to be intimate.** No one thing, including sex, feels intimate for everyone. What is and isn't intimate to people is personal and individual.

Some ways of being intimate and building intimacy are:

- Sharing our feelings, including hard or uncomfortable feelings.
- Sharing our thoughts, dreams, goals or ideas.
- Sharing touch, or other ways of being physically close, sexual or not. Just letting someone into our physical space is an intimacy.
- Showing someone a part of ourselves we do not feel proud of or think is awesome. This could be something like a body part or a tricky part of our life history.
- Letting someone into something we consider a private or sacred experience. This could be something like a hike to our own secretly discovered place or meditating or praying together. It could also be doing things in front of someone else we usually only do alone, like going to the bathroom or dancing in our underpants.
- Sharing meaningful or valuable things: like a song that makes us cry, a childhood toy, a journal or our lucky socks.



- Delegating or sharing responsibility, like letting someone care for a beloved pet, or doing a joint project about something you really care about.
- Showing someone our fumbles, faults or flaws.
- Asking for intimacy.
- Working on something broken in our relationship, or talking about our conflicts, fears or doubts.
- Helping someone, allowing ourselves to be helped or asking for help.

Handle with care. Don't forget: when we are being vulnerable together we need to treat each other with extra sensitivity, kindness and care. We're all more fragile when we're being intimate.

Intimacy should never be forced. That isn't intimacy, that's abuse. When people are intimate with each other in a healthy way, everyone respects any limits and boundaries. There still needs to be room and space to focus on everyone as individuals. Everyone also gets to choose not to be intimate in any way, at any time. Healthy intimacy is consensual. There's only sharing if, when and how everyone wants to.

Why would we want to be intimate? Being intimate can increase our ability to be compassionate, sympathetic and empathic. We can learn to be more patient and forgiving of ourselves and others. Intimacy is one of the ways we can learn to love ourselves and others. Intimacy can let us feel free to be our whole selves. We can feel accepted and accept others. It can help us grow and deepen as people and find out more about ourselves and others.

Healthy intimate relationships can feel like a good home: a place where we and others feel truly safe.