

# The 12 Types of Intimacy

When you think of intimacy with your partner, there are probably two types that easily come to mind: sexual and emotional. While both are important, there are actually 10 more types of intimacy that you can enjoy together! Experiencing more of the twelve types of intimacy will help strengthen the bond with your partner and create the ultimate feeling of connectedness.

## 1. Sexual / Physical

As the most recognizable, this type of intimacy may seem largely self-explanatory. That said, it's more than just having intercourse! Sexual intimacy is also about sharing fantasies, desires, and needs. Ultimately, it creates a safe space to open up to each other about what you like and don't like without fear of being judged or shut out.

Once you're able to comfortably communicate your sexual needs with each other, you've reached the highest level of sexual intimacy. This includes creating and respecting healthy boundaries. Not only does this improve physical intimacy, but improves trust and communication as well.

## 2. Emotional

Emotional intimacy is one of the most important types to share with your partner. It means you're able to express your feelings and emotional needs in the relationship, which requires some vulnerability.

Being able to share different emotions with your partner is what helps create trust, which builds a strong foundation for a healthy relationship. You can talk to each other about anything, no matter how difficult the conversation might be. After all, the point of being married is to have one person in the universe with whom you can be your most authentic self.

To back the importance of emotional intimacy, we can look at Dr. John Gottman's Sound House Theory. It identifies the essential parts of any successful, fulfilling relationship. The Sound House Theory holds that the foundation of all romantic relationships is understanding each other's psychological worlds, including history, hopes, worries, and joy.

By truly trying to understand each other's worlds, you need to embrace honesty and vulnerability, which leads to emotional closeness. From there, you learn to lean on one another, embrace positive perspectives, manage conflict, achieve your dreams and create shared meaning.

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## 3. Intellectual

The overall benefit of intellectual intimacy is being able to share thoughts and opinions that are respected by your partner. It can be as simple as discussing a book or having more controversial conversations about politics or finances. No matter the discussion, you remain open-minded when you have different views or opinions.

Much like emotional intimacy, intellectual intimacy requires vulnerability. It allows for a safe space to talk about tough topics without being put down or ridiculed. It is beneficial to the family to express similar and different ideas. In the exchange of ideas, we challenge our thinking and grow intellectual. This helps reduce confirmation bias, where we tend to seek things that already agree with our point of view. The problem with spending too much time with those who agree with us, is we don't learn and grow. A wealth of research indicates that being exposed to a different viewpoint will expand creative and intellectual thinking.

## 4. Aesthetic

Simply put, aesthetic intimacy means being able to share an experience of beauty together. The experience depends on your interests as a couple. Maybe you both appreciate the beauty of a sunset or would rather go see a play from your local theater group.

One of the most important parts of aesthetic intimacy is learning to appreciate each other's interests. If you are into different things, take turns experiencing each of them together. It can significantly strengthen your bond and help you appreciate and celebrate your differences!

## 5. Creative

Creative intimacy involves planning and creating things together. While taking an art class together might pop in your mind, it involves so much more!

Fostering creative intimacy can also include designing your future together. You also want to create the best versions of yourselves, so think of ways to help each other grow. Make future plans, create a bucket list, or set goals that you can reach together.

## 6. Recreational

Yep, you guessed it — recreational intimacy means finding hobbies and interests you can experience together! Common interests keep you feeling connected, especially when the monotony of everyday life kicks in.

The goal of recreational intimacy is to keep the spark alive in your relationship. Have fun together! While it's still important to have separate interests as well, make an effort to do things together to help keep you feeling connected. Often couples you don't play well outside the bedroom, don't play in the bedroom either.

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## 7. Work

Work intimacy isn't about your careers — it's about each of you putting in the work needed to keep your relationship flowing smoothly. Examples include chores around the house, taking care of the kids, making plans, or any other responsibilities that contribute to your life together.

When one of you feels like you're doing more than the other, it can cause other areas of intimacy to suffer, especially sexual intimacy. You should both be equally contributing to your life as a couple to ensure each of you feels respected and appreciated. Remember, showing up as a competent adult is hot!

## 8. Crisis

When you go through a crisis together (whether big or small), it should leave you feeling closer as a couple. Crisis intimacy means you empathize and support each other during tough times. Most importantly, you want to be there for your partner. During a crisis, both of you may feel at your most vulnerable. This is a time to be careful with each other's feelings. Remember, as a covenant partner, you have the greatest power to hurt or uplift each other, as you know the most vulnerable parts of each other.

If you share a high level of crisis intimacy, you're likely to feel more connected and in love after experiencing a difficult situation together. You're also willing to be patient and supportive during the healing process that follows.

## 9. Commitment

Commitment intimacy is not just about committing to your relationship, but also devoting yourself to working toward a shared goal. Whether it's starting a family, buying a new home, or starting your own business, you both are ready and willing to put in the effort it takes to achieve it.

## 10. Conflict

Every couple argues — even the happiest ones! Since conflict is inevitable, it's critical to be able to work through and learn from them. Conflict intimacy refers to your ability to effectively handle arguments and allow them to make you stronger as a couple.

Conflict management is one of the key factors in a successful, long-term relationship. Conflict intimacy allows you to make mistakes but remain committed as a couple. Each of you works to improve your individual behavior in ways that positively impact your relationship and how you handle conflict. John Gottman found that about 70% of the conflicts couples have are irreconcilable differences. Successful couples respect that each other is imperfect, different, and still growing. They avoid using criticism and defensiveness in their arguments.

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## 11. Communication

As you may have noticed with the other types of intimacy, good communication plays a huge role. Communication intimacy means you're able to talk openly and honestly about your needs in the relationship without your partner feeling threatened or criticized. Find out the 3 important puzzle pieces: what your partner thinks, feels and needs about a situation before attempting to fix a problem.

This type of intimacy allows for healthy dialogue about your expectations, followed by loving, open-minded feedback from your partner. You need to be able to tell each other what you need most! If your partner seems to have trouble opening up, start by opening up more yourself. As you communicate more frequently, you'll build more trust and connection, which can help your partner do the same.

Most importantly, harnessing active listening skills can significantly improve communication. The best way to do it? Put the phone down! A Pew Research Center survey found that around 51 percent of people in committed relationships say their partner is often or sometimes distracted by their cell phone while they are trying to have a conversation with them. Additionally, 4 in 10 people said they are sometimes bothered by the amount of time their partner spends on their mobile device.

Phubbing (phone + snubbing your partner) is a total communication killer, so the next time you and your partner have a discussion (no matter how small), try to focus on their words instead of a digital screen.

## 12. Spiritual

Spiritual intimacy does not necessarily have to center around religion. Simply put, it means being able to discuss the deeper meaning of life. It can certainly involve religion, but above all else, you're able to talk about your spiritual beliefs without being judged. Spiritual intimacy does not mean your opinions and beliefs have to match — it means you're willing to respect and appreciate them no matter what. Since we are imperfect, it is very likely you and your partner will see some spiritual things differently. See what can be learned from a different point of view. Get curious, as sincere questions.

While you don't necessarily have to experience all 12 types of intimacy, it's important to understand that they're all intertwined to create a strong, healthy relationship. For example, it's hard to have sexual intimacy without feeling connected on other non-sexual levels.

The 12 types of intimacy can act as a roadmap to finding overall happiness, satisfaction, and connectedness in your relationship. If you've found "your person," you'll want to explore each type. Your bond is a culmination of many different types of intimacy, not just sexual and emotional.

Expanding your intimacy allows you to wholeheartedly give yourself to another person and facilitates mutual respect, love, and understanding. If your relationship is in it for the long run, making an effort to connect on these 12 different levels will ensure it's long-lasting and full of love.

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On the chart at the below, mark how *you* are doing in each area and connect the dots to see where your tire might be flat. Remember small tires are great on smooth surfaces, but don't handle bumps in the road well. Pick one area of intimacy and consider how you can be 10% better at it this week.

What if your partner rates an area differently than you? This is a chance to find your blind spots. What positive/negative area are you struggling to appreciate? What do they see that you can't see?

Set realistic expectations. Change is a process, and building intimacy in all areas is a lifelong (or eternal) process. Small changes now can become big changes later.

