

A LINE ON LIFE

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Ten Rules to Avoid Intimacy *

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When most people think of intimacy, they envision physical intimacy. However, in our relations with others, **psychological intimacy** is needed much more — but it is engaged in much less. People often confuse the physical with the psychological. Sometimes it helps more to tell people what *not* to do, so they can avoid common pitfalls. In this hope, here are **ten rules to avoid intimacy**. Psychologists have found these rules to be effective among men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children — even with close friends.



1. Don't talk. This is the basic rule for avoiding intimacy. If you follow this one rule, you will never have to be intimate again. If you are forced to talk, don't talk about anything meaningful. Talk about the weather, baseball, school, and the stock market — anything but your feelings.

2. Never show your feelings. Showing your feelings is almost as bad as talking, because your feelings are a way of communicating. If you cry or show anger, sadness or joy, you are giving yourself away. You might as well talk, and if you talk, you could become intimate. The best thing to do is remain expressionless. (Although this is still a form of communication, it only says that you don't want to be intimate.)

3. Always be pleasant. Always smile; always be friendly, especially if something is bothering you. You'll be surprised how effective that hiding your feelings from others is in preventing intimacy. It may even fool them into thinking that everything is okay in your relationships. Then you don't have to change anything or become intimate.

4. Always win. Never compromise; never admit that another's point of view may be as good as yours. If you compromise, that is an admission that you care about another person's feelings — which could lead to intimacy.

5. Always keep busy. If you keep busy with your work, you don't have to be intimate. Others will never figure out that you are using your work to avoid intimacy. Because our culture values hard work, they will feel unjustified in complaining. Likewise, devoting yourself to work will give others the feeling that they are not as important as your work. In this way, you can make others feel unimportant in your life without even talking!

6. Always be right. There is nothing worse than being wrong, because that is an indication that you are only human. If you admit that you are wrong, you might as well admit that others are right — and that will make them look as good as you. If they are as good as you, then you may have to consider the other person. Before you know it, you will be intimate!

7. Never argue. If you argue, you may discover that you and the other person are different. If you are different, you might have to talk about the differences to make adjustments. If you begin making adjustments, you may tell the other person who you *really* are, what you *really* feel. These revelations might lead to intimacy.

8. Make others guess what you want. Never tell others what you want. That way, when others try to guess and are wrong — as they often will be — you can tell them that they don't *really* understand or love you. If they did love you, they would know what you want without you telling them. Not only will this prevent intimacy, but it will drive the others crazy as well.

9. Always look out for number one. Remember, you are number one. All relationships exist to fulfill your needs, not anyone else's needs. Whatever you feel like doing is okay. You're okay — the other person is not okay. If others can't satisfy your needs, they only care about themselves. (After all you are the one making the sacrifices in the relationship.)

10. Keep the television on. Keep the TV turned on at all times — during dinner, while you are reading, when you're in bed and while you are talking — especially while you are talking about something important. This rule may seem petty when compared with the others, but it is a good preventative action. Watching TV keeps you and the other person from talking to each other. Best of all, it will keep both of you from even noticing that you don't communicate. If you are concerned and have to talk, you can both be distracted by a commercial, a seduction scene or the sound of gunfire. Wouldn't you rather be watching TV than talking to the other person anyway?

However, this is not a complete list. You may know several additional ways to avoid intimacy. They may be your own invention, or you may have learned them from your spouse, friends, siblings or parents. To round out my list, you might want to list your own rules for avoiding intimacy on another sheet of paper.

On the other hand, if you want to be intimate, the above rules — along with your own — can help you to avoid the pitfalls that trap many of us.

* Adapted from Strong, DeVault, Sayad and Yarber, *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*, 2002, McGraw-Hill, pages 262-263.