

A LINE ON LIFE

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Intimacy Quotient *

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We all need to belong and feel secure. To develop this, we need an intimate relationship with someone. What is intimacy? How do we know if we are in an intimate relationship?

Intimacy is a warm, trusting relationship with another person, characterized by a reciprocal, vulnerable sharing of each person's most private thoughts and feelings. Some of these terms are also associated with the physical act of sex. However, if sex is the main basis of the relationship, after sex is over, the partners might wonder what they saw in each other.

As part of intimacy, we need the closeness indicated by tender touching. The need for touching is so great that infants deprived of stroking can suffer from a "*failure to thrive*" syndrome. With everybody being so busy in our society, we often ignore our need to be touched. At least, sex can give us the desired touch.

**An intimate relationship may be sexual,
but a sexual relationship is not necessarily an intimate one.**

For true intimacy, we need more than touch. One necessary element is **communication**. Communication is accomplished by three major components – the words we use (7%), voice qualities other than the words (38%) and other nonverbal cues (55%). Just talking does not communicate intimacy, if the information from the voice and other nonverbal cues do not support what is being said. However, nonverbal cues are often ambiguous, so it helps when you clearly explain how you feel in words.

In addition, **listening** is necessary for good communication and intimacy. In contrast to talking – or impatiently waiting for your partner to stop speaking, so you can say something – do you *really* listen to your partner?

Developing an intimate relationship – and keeping one going – requires **time**. An intimate relationship does not just happen, it is built bit-by-bit over time. In the beginning of a relationship, there is often a strong sense of "*we-ness*." The couple is inseparable, and no commitments are made without consulting the partner. As the newness fades, complacency can set in, and the time together diminishes. One partner might finally say, "*We never have time together any more.*" If the other partner is really listening, both can begin to explore ways to make positive changes.

Intimacy needs **commitment** too. This means that – even though there are differences in temperament, obstacles or other difficulties – it is important to work to save the relationship. In our "*disposable*" society, we tend to replace equipment and appliances that do not meet our expectations. If we do the same with relationships, we will *never* find commitment or intimacy.

To deal with difficulties, we need to develop **flexibility**. Rather than trying to prove who is right or wrong, flexibility involves negotiating with your partner to deal with the problem. Rather than a weakness, negotiation is a strength – an acknowledgement that "*no one gets everything they want all the time.*" Essentially this indicates that the relationship is more important than having your way all the time. Some of the compromises achieved through negotiation are surprising and energizing.

Finally, to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously, we need a generous dose of **humor**. Laughing and smiling are good medicine. Joking about the constant, small frustrations in life make them easier to bear. A good laugh can immediately release tension in most situations. However, the humor is not at the expense of the partner, and it does not mean that everything is seen as a joke. We are merely indicating how prone we are to frailties and that every frustration is not the "*end of the world.*"

Relationships are always ongoing and constantly developing. We need to determine the mixture of components of intimacy in our relationships and make them work for us. To tell if we are capable of becoming intimate with others, there is a quick, short test that can give us some indication of our **intimacy quotient**.

For the following statements, answer **N** for "never," **S** for "sometimes," and **O** for "often" as each statement applies to you.

- _____ 1. I like to touch and be touched in affectionate ways.
- _____ 2. I spend time and energy cultivating and tending my friendships.
- _____ 3. I maintain friendships with members of the other sex with whom I am not romantically involved.
- _____ 4. I feel accepted, valued, cherished and understood by my family and friends.
- _____ 5. I feel naturally high either alone or in the company of others without needing the help of alcohol or drugs.
- _____ 6. I enjoy listening to other people's life stories and philosophies and trying to figure out what makes them tick.
- _____ 7. I express feelings of tenderness as well as anger and display grief as well as joy with those people who are closest to me.

_____ 8. Other people seem friendly and respond generously when I make an effort to show them I care.

_____ 9. I can often tell what other people are feeling and empathize with them.

_____ 10. I share my secret dreams and shames, my self-doubts and my cherished hopes with those people who are closest to me.

_____ 11. Sexual intimacy for me is a way of expressing and sharing my feelings of closeness to another person.

_____ 12. I enjoy solitude at times without feeling totally lonely, and I am comfortable with my different moods and feelings.

To find your score, give yourself 1 point for every **N**, 2 for every **S** and 3 for every **O**. Your intimacy quotient – your ability to share yourself with others – can range from a low of 12 to a high of 36. A score close to 24 is considered average. Where does your score fall – at the high or low end or close to average? To get another view of your intimacy level, ask the person with whom you are most intimate to score you on this quiz. Will that person perceive you to be as intimate as you think you are?

* Adapted from Wilma Kirk-Lee's "What's Your Intimacy Quotient?" *Sexuality and Health Forum*, Benjamin/Cummings Publishing, Spring, 1993, pages 5-7 and Jeffery Turner and Laura Robinson's *Contemporary Human Sexuality*, Prentice Hall Publishers, 1993, page 165.