

HEALTH & WELLNESS



Intimate moments

WE AIM TO HELP IN WHATEVER WAY WE CAN. And if by reading these five ways to increase intimacy without seeing a therapist then I'm doing myself out of a job, so be it!

In my work, I see many couples, with a variety of different problems. However, the one thing they usually have in common is lack of intimacy, and a level of closeness where they feel safe – a recognised connection together.

The key types of intimacy are emotional, physical, mental and spiritual. And couples who have an emotional connection are 70% more likely to stay together. Having a continuous connection can foster physical intimacy that strengthens the bond between two people.

Intimacy is the pivotal pillar of a healthy relationship; couples who are seeking therapy due to the lack of intimacy feel less significant.

When sex is going well, which means you're having it fairly consistently and not having any major problems, then it really only accounts for about 15-20% of relationship satisfaction. However, when intimacy is in place, this encourages emotional connection.

A relationship can sometimes go from stranger to friend to lover to stranger again. Yet you are not strangers: you have history, memories, investment. The longer you keep the separated

You are not strangers: you have history, memories, investment



with Lottie Passell-Syms

feelings, the more awkward it is to bring intimacy back. The experience of emotional intimacy plays a major role in maintaining sexual desire and helps to sustain romantic connection for longer. The top five things I recommend couples start implementing are:

APPRECIATE
Acknowledging your partner for something they did that made you feel significant. Sharing it with them will help you to establish a kindness and noticing of each other.

ADMIRE
Show awareness of behaviours which you identify as a character trait which you admire in your partner, and observe how it shows up and when. Admiration can increase closeness and a collegiate response. Usually, we notice but do not voice it. Validating the qualities most admired brings a sense of warmth.

ACCEPT NEGOTIATIONS
Negotiation is healthy. It is pivotal to not feeling lost or rejected. Allow yourself to actively listen to what is

being proposed, instead of pseudo-listening while planning your next sentence to get your needs met. Look for ways to negotiate with your partner so you both feel heard and acknowledged. Actively listen to your partner, negotiate solutions, and walk away with a plan.

APOLOGISE

“Sorry” is precious: make it count. It will go a long way. But overuse of saying sorry, combined with a continuation of the behaviour that has caused you to apologise in the first place, erodes the relationship and sets up a lack of trust and disconnection. “Sorry” recognises the hurt or triggers that form the wounds needing to be repaired.

BE CURIOUS

As we change and our mindsets evolve, don't make assumptions about your partner. Keep checking. Be curious. Build your knowledge about their world, and ask personalised, meaningful questions. Curiosity has an energy about it. Seek connection and closeness. Conclusions? The tips above may help to distill your thoughts, and decide on how you want to move forward. Stop reacting to your partner's reactivity. Not changing is still making a choice.

That said, there are some couples where one or both has not had the blueprint for intimacy, closeness or affection in their life. With a therapist, you can discuss this and make headway to become more connected, looking at behaviours when discussing intimacy, and the responses you get, and at how emotions and physical touch were first shown within your family and upbringing. It's not always your fault.

i

Our guest columnist this month, Lottie Passell-Syms (lottiepassellsyms.com), is a Hampshire-based psychosexual relationship coach and intimacy expert. Specialising in lack or loss of libido, painful sex, performance anxiety, relationship alignment, and sex and intimacy issues, she organises private face-to-face sessions, online therapy, intensives and couples' retreats.