

Are you running from Intimacy?

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

Intimacy is the hallmark of a healthy marriage or relationship. But there may be powerful, unconscious forces at work that prevent you from developing a deep and meaningful connection with your partner. Many couples seek out marriage help, relationship advice and/or couples counseling because of a breakdown in intimacy. It's important to identify the forces that block intimacy so that you can control how close you become with your partner.

Experiencing a deep, loving connection is one of the most meaningful aspects of a healthy relationship. But achieving and maintaining this connection isn't always easy. You (or your partner) can have a strong desire for closeness and yet inadvertently push each other away at times. This is actually more common than you might think. Let's see why this might be the case.

Relationship problems: Are you being held back by these 3 intimacy-blockers?:

1. Feeling unworthy of love

We all know the old adage: In order to love someone you have to love yourself first. I would add self-acceptance to the requirement for you and your partner to develop a *deep* and *fulfilling* emotional connection. When you feel unworthy of love, you have no choice but to close parts of yourself off to your partner. Intimacy is a two-way street that will suffer when one of you cannot give *and* receive love. Your rejection of love (and intimacy) may not be immediately apparent or it can be obvious--either way, your relationship will not reach its full potential.

Take a few moments to think about whether or not you feel truly worthy of love. If you do not, it may be helpful to begin to explore why you feel this way about yourself. Every one of us deserves love, and it's important for you and your relationship that you incorporate this truth into your life.

2. Losing yourself within the relationship

There are three parts to your relationship: You, your partner (each of you bring unique identities to the union), and the relationship itself (the "we" that intimacy and commitment create). For some, intimacy (and the responsibilities of a long-term committed relationship) can lead to a sense of feeling lost.

When you cannot hold onto the boundaries that define you, you will feel entangled in your partner's needs and unable to protect what's most important to you. It can feel like you're constantly sacrificing for the sake of the relationship--fighting to stay afloat in the undercurrents of the "we." A lack of confidence in your ability to set limits with your partner can add to your weakened sense of self.

Ultimately, you need to feel grounded within the walls of yourself, while experiencing a deep connection with your partner—not always an easy task. What steps can you take to nurture your own individuality while strengthening your commitment to the relationship?

3. Fear of loss

Often our greatest fears arise out of the *possibility* of losing what is most important to us. Some people never become completely open to the gift of intimacy because they are trapped by the fear that it can be taken away at any moment. Giving yourself permission to love and share all of yourself is the hallmark of a meaningful emotional connection.

When intimacy is funneled through the fear that your partner may abandon you unexpectedly, you will guard your deepest longings for connection--never allowing yourself the openness required for intimacy to grow.

Does it feel like you hold back because of a fear of loss? If so, what do you think accounts for this pattern? Once you become mindful of this pattern, bring your awareness to the aspects of your relationship that counter these fears.

Any one of these intimacy-blockers can have a profound impact on your marriage or relationship. Your first step is to note how you *feel* and *react* whenever your partner makes attempts to become emotionally closer to you. If you become uncomfortable or behave in ways that undermine intimacy, work toward becoming more mindful of your reactions.

Author Bio

Dr. Nicastro holds a Ph.D. in psychology and is a marriage and relationship expert. Over the past fifteen years he has helped hundreds build stronger, more fulfilling relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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