

# QUICKIES: intimacy

## a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Intimacy is about having some kind of closeness.

When we're being intimate with someone, we're letting them -- or they're letting us -- get closer by inviting and letting each other into vulnerable or private parts of ourselves; places we don't share with just anyone.

We can experience intimacy with someone we've known for all our lives, or with someone we just met. Two people *can* experience intimacy together, but so can three, four, five, ten, twenty or two hundred. People in support groups, jam sessions, families, poly relationships, intentional communities or in group events can also experience or build intimacy. Intimacy can also happen in all kinds of relationships and interactions: we can experience intimacy with friends, family, neighbors, caregivers, romantic or sexual partners or someone sitting next to us on the bus.

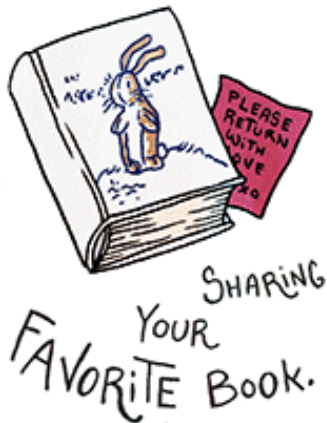
Intimacy can happen in a brief period of time and can be built over time and become deeper.

Intimacy requires at least some — and sometimes a lot of — trust and can help us build more trust with each other over time. Whether we can build more intimacy has a lot to do with how everyone involved is behaving, not just one person. We can't create or build intimacy with someone all by ourselves. Not everyone wants or is ready for intimacy at any given time or in any relationship. Some people behave in ways when sharing or when others are sharing with them that don't support intimacy: that make people want to shut down, not open up.

When some people say someone was intimate, they're talking about sex. **Sex is one way to be intimate, but sex isn't the only way to be intimate.** No one thing — including sex — feels intimate for everyone, or for anyone in every interaction or situation. What is and isn't intimate to people is personal and individual.

### Some ways of being intimate and building intimacy are:

- Sharing our feelings, including hard or uncomfortable feelings.
- Sharing our thoughts, dreams, goals or ideas.
- Sharing touch, or other ways of being physically close; sexual or not. Just letting someone into our physical space is an intimacy.
- Showing someone a part of ourselves -- like a body part, or a tricky part of our life history -- we do not feel proud of or think is awesome.
- Letting someone into something we consider a private or sacred experience, like a hike in our own secretly-discovered place, or meditating or praying together. Doing something in



front of someone else we usually only do alone, like going to the bathroom or dancing in our underpants.

- Sharing very meaningful or valuable things: like a song that makes us cry, a childhood toy, a journal or our lucky socks.
- Delegating or sharing responsibility with something valued, like letting someone care for a beloved pet, or doing a joint project about something you really care about.
- Showing someone our fumbles, faults or flaws.
- Asking for intimacy.
- Working on something broken in our relationship, or talking about our conflicts, fears or doubts.
- Helping someone, allowing ourselves to be helped ourselves or asking for help.

**Handle with care: Don't forget:** when we are being vulnerable together — or when one person is making themselves vulnerable to another — we need to treat each other with extra sensitivity, kindness and care. We're all more fragile when we're being intimate.

**Intimacy should never be forced: that isn't really intimacy, that's abuse.** When people are intimate with each other in a healthy way, everyone also always has and respects any limits and boundaries. There still needs to be room and space and focus on everyone as totally separate individuals. Everyone also gets to choose not to be intimate in any way, at any time. Healthy intimacy is consensual: there's only sharing if, when and how everyone wants to.

**Why would we want to be intimate?** Being intimate can increase our ability to be compassionate, sympathetic and empathic; more patient and forgiving with and of ourselves and others. It's one of the ways we can learn to love ourselves and others. Intimacy can let us feel free to be our whole selves. We can feel accepted and accept of others. It can help us grow and deepen as people and find out more about ourselves and others than we might otherwise. Healthy intimate relationships can feel like a good home: a place where we and others feel truly safe.

**This handout was prepared by Heather Corinna and is a summary of Intimacy: The Whys, Hows, How-Not's, and So-Not's ([https://www.scarleteen.com/article/politics/intimacy\\_the\\_whys\\_hows\\_hownots\\_and\\_sonots](https://www.scarleteen.com/article/politics/intimacy_the_whys_hows_hownots_and_sonots)) by Heather Corinna.**

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