



Creative Solutions

November 11, 2011

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE'S CHALLENGES

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Intimate Connections

by Donna Hunter, LCSW, CAP

When was the last time you had a heart to heart conversation with someone you love? When was the last time you gave of your time and received of their time freely, without interruption? If you are like many of us your time is scheduled. The pager is not far from your reach. The to-do list is never ending.

Intimacy in relationships has many shades. From connection to community, the compassion between friends, the familiarity between siblings to the passion between partners, intimacy glows from the brightest pink to the deepest red.

True intimacy is difficult and elusive. It is the journey we all take because we long for the bliss of the destination. On the way we can be disillusioned by the dead ends and one way streets. But to discontinue the journey means that we have given up on what our heart needs to

be fulfilled. To continue means that we are willing to risk our heart in hopes of finding that sense of oneness with another person.

Why do we yearn for something so indefinable? The search for intimacy may come from our human nature. We are social beings. Perhaps it is why we form social groups and possibly why we look for spiritual fulfillment. As humans we do not want to be alone.

We want to share our experiences with another. We need to see that our experiences can have a profound impact on another. This connection validates our existence.

This edition of "*Creative Solutions*", takes a look at the journey towards intimacy. We will explore the many forms of intimacy, its challenges, warning signs and benefits.



Thought for the day

"Love cannot survive if you just give it scraps of yourself, scraps of your time, scraps of your thoughts."

~ Mary O'Hara

author

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CHALLENGES TO INTIMACY

by Donna M. Hunter, LCSW, CAP

Pay attention to expectations-- most people overly romanticize relationships. Be aware of myths, stereotypes, media and literature, and family of origin influences. Most people expect too much from their partner and try to get from their partner what they didn't get from their parents.

Couples must learn to balance distance and closeness. A couple must establish how much time will be spent together. Each partner must take into account one another's preferences and personality (one may be a loner and the other a social butterfly). Both partners have to protect their time and energy from too many pulls and find an appropriate balance between work, family, friends, exercise, leisure activities, church, etc. There may be periods of loneliness in the relationship.

Sexuality is a big part of intimacy; therefore, couples need to find creative ways to "keep the fires burning". There will be times when you are bored or not as sexually excited as in the beginning. During this time, non-sexual ways of being intimate may be more appropriate. Couples should communicate about when, where, and how they would like to express their sexuality.



There should be a degree of personal awareness about one another's histories. Each partner must have some insight about themselves and their partner. They must be in touch with their feelings and be willing to talk about their experiences. Probably the most challenging of all is developing the ability and willingness to hear each other's truths. It is difficult to listen to your partner's truths without arguing, discounting, ignoring them, taking them personally, proving them wrong, or threatening to leave. Couples are expected to learn how to manage, express and contain feelings of affection and anger. Open communication is important as well as knowing when not to say anything at all. Pay attention to your communication, making sure you are showing respect for yourself and your partner.

QUESTIONS EVERY COUPLE SHOULD ASK

What are the strengths/weaknesses in our relationship?

Why do we have some of the problems we do and what can we do about them?

What is a compelling reason for us to be together?

What do you need to do to have love over the long term? What will keep me here and allow me to continue to grow?

"Maybe the greatest challenge now is to find a way to keep independence while also committing ourselves to the ties that bind people, families and ultimately societies together."

Jane O'Reilly, author

DIFFERENT FORMS OF INTIMACY

By: Donna M. Hunter, LCSW, CAP

There are many different forms of intimacy and each one is important and imperative to developing a healthy, close, loving relationship.

PHYSICAL INTIMACY: Spending time together and putting energy into the relationship. Make arrangements to meet or make a date if necessary. Physical intimacy doesn't necessarily mean touching.

AESTHETIC INTIMACY: Doing things that you both enjoy and is pleasurable and beautiful to both of you (movies, art, music, beach, nature).

RECREATIONAL INTIMACY: Having fun together (physical activities, sports, social engagements, games).

INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY: Sharing ideas, worldviews, thoughts, plans, etc. with one another.

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY: Discussing goals, visions, a future together. Make it clear what is the meaning and purpose of being together.

EMOTIONAL INTIMACY: Willingness to self-disclose, share feelings, take risks, be "in the moment" with one another.

SEXUAL INTIMACY: Taking time for sex (don't put it on the back burner). Sex should include mutuality, respect, equity, and a positive regard for one another. Talk about sexual needs, desires, likes, dislikes, fantasies, etc.



Health and Intimacy— The Connection

by Donna M. Hunter, LCSW, CAP

The healthy intimate relationship includes self-knowledge, communication, commitment, trust and the willingness to be vulnerable. Intimacy is reciprocal. A healthy intimate connection is one in which both partners know themselves and share in a sense of equality.

Establishing this level of intimacy goes along way towards enhancing your health. Physical health had long been linked to connection to others. As noted in *Love and Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy*, Dean Ornish M.D., love and intimacy are as important to healthy living as nutrition and exercise. Research shows:

- ✓ People in committed relationships live longer than people who are single.
- ✓ People who are socially isolated are 2-5 times more likely to die prematurely than those who have a sense of connection
- ✓ People with few relationships of any kind were 4 times as likely to develop a common cold as those who had more relationships.
- ✓ People with pets are healthier than people without them.
- ✓ Having a close and supportive relationship with

parents in our childhood leads to happier relationships in later life.

“If a new drug had the same impact, (as intimacy) virtually every doctor in the country would be recommending it for their patients.



Mental Health Reading list

NiCarthy, G (1997) Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life, WA: Seal Press

Goetting, A (2000) Getting out: Life Stories of Women Who Left Abusive Men NY Columbia University Press.

Jones, A. (2000) The Next Time She Will Be Dead Boston, MA Beacon Press

Walker, L. (2000) Battered Women New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.

DeLuca P. (2002) The Solo Partner Alexander Books, Alexander, North Carolina

Video Picks

Dolores Claiborne 1995

When Harry Met Sally 1989

Singles 1992

Steel Magnolias 1989

Waiting to Exhale 1995

Personal Best 1982

Warning Signs of an Abusive Relationship

by Donna M. Hunter, LCSW, CAP

About 50% of all women will experience physical abuse in an intimate relationship, and for about 25%-34% of these women, the abuse will be regular and ongoing. An abusive relationship occurs when one partner behaves in a manner that seeks to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation. It often includes the threat or use of violence. However, not all abuse is physical. Below are some of the warning signs of an abusive relationship.

DOES YOUR PARTNER.....

- Exhibit extreme jealousy and possessiveness.
- Embarrass you or put you down in front of friends and family.
- Make you feel you cannot make decisions
- Use intimidation or threats to gain compliance.
- Put down your accomplishments or goals.
- Treat you roughly—grab, push, pinch, choke, kick, shove, restrain or hit you.
- Call you repeatedly throughout the day or night or check up on you to make sure you are where you said you would be.
- Use drugs or alcohol as an excuse for saying hurtful things or abusing you.
- Blame you for how they feel or act.

- Becomes angry easily.
- Have rigid views on the roles of men women in relationships.
- Behave cruelly to children or animals.
- Pressure you sexually for things you are not ready for.
- Make you feel there is “no way out” of the relationship.
- Prevent you from doing things you want or seeing/talking to friends or family.
- Try to keep you from leaving after a fight or leave you somewhere after a fight to “teach you a lesson”.

DO YOU.....

- Feel scared of how your partner will act.
- Constantly make excuses to other people for your partner’s behavior.
- Believe you can help your partner change if only you changed something about yourself.
- Try not to do anything that would cause conflict or make your partner angry.
- Feel like no matter what you do, your partner is never happy with you.
- Always do what your partner wants you to do instead of what you want.
- Stay with your partner because you are afraid of what your partner would do if you broke up.

What You Can Do To Stay Safe.....

Try to leave before the violence occurs, preferably when your partner is not around.

If an argument is unavoidable, try to have it in a room or area that has access to an exit (not in a bathroom, kitchen or anywhere near weapons).

Teach your eldest or most responsible child to call the police and give your name and address if a violent incident is occurring.

If your partner gets violent, try to get in a room with a lock on the door and a telephone.

Know how and where to get out of your home safely—have escape routes planned.

Notify a neighbor to be alert to violence/ screaming etc. and to call the police if this occurs. Have a code word to use with neighbors, friends or family for when you need help.

Get rid of all weapons

Have some money hidden and enough for a motel room, telephone calls, gas and food.

Have two extra sets of keys made for your home and car. Keep one set in a safe place and give another set to a trusted friend.

Have a bag with extra clothing packed for you and your children.

Make arrangements with a trusted friend or friend of a friend that your partner doesn’t know to help keep you safe in the event you must leave your home.

For more information or help, call your local domestic violence shelter

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