

THE EIGHT STAGES OF INTIMACY™

BY LAURA DAWN LEWIS

Is your relationship everything you ever hoped for? Does it feel like something is missing or maybe it's just not quite what you are looking for? Do your romances crash and burn before six months?

The following illustrates the eight different stages of intimacy. With your life partner, achievement of at least seven of the eight leads to relationship success. With friends, coworkers and associates, you'll match in some, but not all.

TO ACHIEVE TRUE INTIMACY, TWO IDEAS MUST BE PRESENT:

SAFETY & CONNECTEDNESS



SAFETY means that as the relationship grows between two people. Should something frighten, upset or threaten you, your partner becomes the safe haven, the person you seek rather than avoid. Safety is something a person earns through trust and actions.

CONNECTEDNESS or more commonly chemistry is that feeling that you are in tune with the other person; you have enough common ground to feel comfortable yet enough differences to keep things interesting. True intimacy cannot be achieved without feelings of safety and feelings of connectedness.

Your relationship may be experiencing several of these stages and they may not necessarily fall in order. However, if you are starting out in a relationship with a new partner and you really are interested in the long-term, ***the stages are an accurate road map to achieving a fulfilling relationship.*** Too often, couples reach level three and skip all the way to number seven. Then they wonder why it never worked and they felt unfulfilled.

The longer you are together, ideally, the more of these you will attain. Use this information to evaluate your relationship and see if it is where you want to be. If areas are missing, explore those with your partner and see if your partner wants the same as you. You'll be surprised, especially if it seems that you never achieve the relationship want, how the stages illustrate what you can do to get there. If it does feel like something is missing, carefully read stages 4-6, (Intellectual, Spiritual & Emotional Intimacy). These

are the three areas most couples have problems in and the three areas most adults skip in order to reach level seven by the third or fifth date.

If you're just starting to date again, and are tired of unfulfilling relationships and short-term romances (less than six months), the eight stages will help you achieve a loving relationship by giving you a step by step guide to dating. Make a commitment to yourself to explore each stage in-depth with a potential mate before proceeding to the next. Most superficial relationships will fall apart during stages four through six, the very stages most people skip in order to experiment in seven. Then they wonder why the relationship didn't last! When you finish this article, you may be enlightened.

This is also an article you will want to print and think about. The questions should help you identify areas you may need to focus on in an effort to cultivate the type of relationship you deserve. It's also a good checklist for review if you and your partner seem estranged, but you're not sure why yet.

Each of the following 8 pages will give you an overview of the Eight Stages of Intimacy, questions to ask yourself if you're in a relationship to gauge if you've achieved this and questions at the end to ask people you are dating to identify compatibility and learn more about each other. At the bottom of each page we provided questions to ask if you are dating or in the first year of a relationship.

Couples Company is very excited to bring this breakthrough in relationship tools. Not only do the stages provide an excellent step by step plan for dating and finding true love, we believe these stages will also help you get to the root of many of the frustrations you may be experiencing in your current relationship.

STAGE ONE: PHYSICAL INTIMACY

Covering Looks, Etiquette and Charisma

Commonly referred to as infatuation or puppy love, physical intimacy occurs through information you acquire through observation, the way the person thinks, speaks, looks and interacts with their surroundings. Generally, if you are attracted to someone of the opposite sex, you share physical intimacy. You will also find most of your friends via physical intimacy, realizing that there is something about this person you like and you would like to get to know them better.

You & your partner have physically intimacy if you both can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. You like something about the way your partner looks, sounds and/or smells.
2. You are proud to be seen together or enjoy being together.
3. When you think about your partner or see a picture of him/her, you think or feel positively.

DATING TIP: PLAYING THE BACKGROUND GAME You know this game, people watching and making up stories about people you see around you based upon the way they look and act. It's a great way to find out what physical clues your partner pays attention to. Whether he or she focuses on negative aspects of what he or she sees more than positive is also a key clue to his/her self-esteem. The more someone criticizes others negatively, the less self-esteem that person generally has and the more judgmental they are in all areas of their lives. On the other hand, if all they mention is good (i.e.: if you see a man and woman fighting, your partner only notices how beautiful her hair is and how straight he stands), it could be you are dealing with someone blinded by a Pollyanna attitude who tends to not face reality.

Below are key questions to ask yourself about your partner. If you can answer all of these by knowing your partners responses, it means you've explored and established physical intimacy. These are also great questions for parties and gatherings when you want to learn about new people.

QUESTIONS TO DEFINE PHYSICAL INTIMACY

1, If you could be anyone in the world for a day, who would it be and why?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: This lets you know who he/she admires most, what type of lifestyle he/she dreams of and why and is a glimpse into his/her values.

2. What do you think is the hardest thing about meeting someone new?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you how long he/she has been dating and what he/she finds frustrating

3. Which public figure(s) do you admire most and why?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: This lets you know whom he/she admires most and is a glimpse into his/her values.

STAGE TWO

AESTHETIC INTIMACY

Covering Arts, Style, Culture & General Compatibility

Have you ever met a new friend and been amazed at all of the interests you have in common? This is aesthetic intimacy. To reach this level, you begin to get to know the other person's tastes in music, clothes, food, art and many other areas. If you ever want to find out if you are aesthetically compatible with a potential mate, go to a furniture store, art gallery or even a clothing store to find out what styles each of you like.

Aesthetic Intimacy is your first look into compatibility. For example, if nice furniture and quality goods are important to you, getting into a relationship with someone who doesn't care about appearances and considers cheap to be adequate is a recipe for trouble.

Other possible conflicts arise with tastes, like music. If she likes Rap and only listens to this type of music, and you can't stand it, but listen to everything else, you can read this as an opportunity to expand her horizons, a torture chamber for your ears or as an indication she is closed to new ideas and experiences.

You & your partner are aesthetically compatible if you both can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. Your choices in music, theater, art and home furnishings/decor though they may not be exactly the same, are tastes each of you can appreciate, live with and share together.
2. Your differences in nutritional preferences are politically and theologically compatible.
3. Your clothing styles, body ornamentation and jewelry choices are complimentary and do not cause embarrassment to each other. (i.e.: an attorney or business executive will have a difficult time taking a spouse to a function if he or she adorns with nose rings, visible tattoos or purple hair).

Below are key questions to ask yourself about your partner. If you can answer all of these by knowing your partners responses, it means you've explored and established aesthetic intimacy. These are also great questions for parties and gatherings when you want to learn about new people.

QUESTIONS FOR UNCOVERING AESTHETIC INTIMACY

1) What is your favorite type of food?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you if you'll enjoy eating with this person and also alerts you to possible problems. Example: Vegan's don't tend to do well with meat lovers.

2) Thinking about your home, would you describe yourself as:

- a. **A neat person**
- b. **A creatively organized but somewhat housekeeping-challenged person**
- c. **Your mother's worst nightmare?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Let's you decide if his/her lifestyle will be compatible with yours or if arguments about housekeeping will become a way of life.

3) Who is your favorite author and why?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you if he/she reads, what type of stories he/she likes and also gives you a glimpse into his/her educational background and lifestyle choices. I.E. *Likes DH Lawrence. He/she reads classic literature, is educated and enjoys foreplay, adventure and sensual sex*

4) Name your top 5 favorite Movies (play, painter etc) of All Time:

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you what type of stories he/she likes, gives you a glimpse into his/her educational background, morals and lifestyle choices.

5) If you had \$25,000 to furnish a home with, where would you shop?

- a. *Levitz, Ikea, Sears or comparable Store*
- b. *Through the want ads looking for Estate and Garage Sales*
- c. *Ethan Allen, Thomasville, Expressions or other comparable store*
- d. *Custom or unfinished furniture store*
- e. *Boutiques and Antique Shops*

What Your Partner's Answer Means: If he/she chooses

- a. Quantity of furnishings over quality. Budget minded and time constrained. Not big on decorating or status; prefers out of the box solutions. Middle class mindset.
- b. Bargain Hunter: Likes to find unique and eclectic items, enjoys the hunt and adventure. Never pays retail or full price. Adventurer mindset and crosses all socio-economic levels
- c. Quality and prestige are important, fewer pieces but better quality. Status important. Buys for the long term but still budget minded; upper middle class mindset.
- d. Likes unique & unusual. Wants items that reflect individuality or enjoys creating. Upper middle class mindset or consummate do-it-yourselfer
- e. Connoisseur. Looks for very high quality and legacy items. Would rather own one or two good pieces than a household. Upper middle class or prestige mindset.

STAGE THREE

RECREATIONAL INTIMACY

Covering Shared Interests, Sports & Hobbies

Many of your friends or close clients will reach this level. The people you spend time with, go to games with, to the movies, shopping or share common interests constitute recreational intimacy. For couples, both partners will have several common interests, while reserving others for themselves. But what happens if she is into extreme sports and he prefers to paint and read?

Having both common and separate activities is crucial to success. Even married couples need activities that they do by themselves or with friends that do not include the spouse. This helps each in the relationship to maintain his or her unique identity and provides a mini vacation from couplehood, even if that vacation is only an hour or two.

Likewise, having shared activities is one of the most wonderful things about being a couple. It means you almost always have someone to share activities with.

The objective of recreational intimacy is to find enough in common with the other person that you will enjoy your time together. This can be current activities or things you'd like to try.

You & your partner enjoy recreational intimacy if you both can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. You both enjoy spending time together and it really doesn't matter what you do.
2. You can name your partner's favorite sports, movies and leisure activities.
3. You both have activities you enjoy together and those you reserve for yourself and your friends.
4. You do not get upset if your partner spends occasional time without you pursuing his/her own interests.
5. You enjoy exploring new experiences with your partner.

Below are key questions to ask yourself about your partner. If you can answer all of these by knowing your partners responses, it means you've explored and established recreational intimacy. These are also great questions for parties and gatherings. People love to speak about what they are passionate about. Activities associated with recreational intimacy are often the very activities that a person loves and lives to do.

QUESTIONS TO ESTABLISH RECREATIONAL INTIMACY

1. What is the most extreme activity you have ever participated in?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you how much of a risk taker he or she is and whether you are compatible in this area of risk tolerance.

2. What is your fondest memory from childhood of your father?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Clues you into his/her relationship with his/her father and what activities hold a special sentiment for him/her.

3. Do you have any hobbies? What are they?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you identify if he or she has interests outside of work or if work is his/her primary means of fulfillment.

4. What would you like to do that you haven't done yet?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you understand if his/her dreams and goals are compatible with yours.

5. If you won the lottery tonight, what is the first fun activity you would do?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you understand if his/her dreams and goals are compatible with yours.

6. Who is your favorite athlete and why?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Identifies the type of spectator sports he/she enjoys but also gives you an insight into Stage 4, Intellectual Intimacy and what characteristics he/she admires.

STAGE FOUR

INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY

Covering: Hopes, Fears, Opinions & Beliefs

Reaching intellectual intimacy is the first true test of a relationship and where you first begin to trust your partner with your deeper self. This is where you share your hopes, fears, opinions and beliefs without fear of ridicule or chastising. It is within intellectual intimacy you learn how to mirror each other, validate the other's point of topic and engage in ideas.

Your closest friendships will also achieve this level of intimacy. Intellectual Intimacy doesn't really have a lot to do with IQ or relative education, though studies have shown in the majority of successful marriage, the man and the woman are within five IQ points of each other. Intellectual Intimacy is about the core motivations and character of an individual.

You and your partner have solid intellectual intimacy if you can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. Both your & your partner know what each of you are afraid of and you both make an effort to keep each other from those situations and stimuli.
2. Opinions, even those you don't agree on can be stated, argued and acknowledge without fear of ridicule, abandonment or abuse. Especially true for such heated issues as politics, religion, parenting and sexuality where you may strongly disagree.
3. Without realizing it, you and your partner often mirror each other's actions, gestures and speaking style.
4. You know what your partner's life goals, hopes & dreams are.

What about religion, which is part of Intellectual Intimacy? Seeking your spouse, it is perfectly acceptable to state, "I only date Jewish men" or "I only date Christians". This is not racist and you are not being prejudice; you're being practical. Relationships are hard enough without mixing in different theologies. If your beliefs are strong and your faith is a major center of your life, this is referred to as a "non-negotiable", a value or principle you require in a spouse. We recommend having 3-5 non-negotiables (more than five and you are too picky; less and you are too desperate), which anyone you date must have. For myself they were: 1) Christian, (Catholic or Protestant didn't matter as long as he is devote), 2) wants (more) children, 3) college educated or an entrepreneur and 4) highly intelligent. Everything else like height, income, likes, dislikes even race fell under preferences and if he had them, were bonuses. Same principle goes for race when we're talking about your life partner. There is nothing wrong with saying you want your spouse to be Asian, or white or black...this person will be your spouse and the parent of your children. You are entitled to be picky. If race is important to you in the conception of

children, then make it one of your non-negotiables; but remember you only get five so make them count.

Below are key questions to ask yourself about your partner. If you can answer all of these by knowing your partners responses, it means you've explored and established physical intimacy. Unlike the first 3 stages, questions pertaining to Intellectual Intimacy should be reserved for people you already know, rather than those you are meeting for the first time.

QUESTIONS TO UNLOCK INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY.

1. **What is the biggest misconception people have about you?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Allows you to understand him/her from the perception he/she believes others have of him/her.

2. **Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Clues you in to his/her aspirations, dreams, and goals. Also lets you know if this is a person who defines their destiny or lets others do it for him/her.

3. **What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Lets you find out what he/she thinks of as important and what his/her values are.

4. **How do you define success?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Lets you find out what he/she thinks of as important and what his/her values are.

5. **Can you define your principles...what do you stand for and why?**

What Your Partner's Answers Mean: Very few people can articulate their principles and these should be easy, off the top of your head in sixty-seconds or less. If he or she can, you are dealing with a person who is not easily manipulated, strong in conviction and thinks critically. Principles can change over time due to new information and experiences. They are dynamic rather than static, yet they remain the benchmark each of us measures our decisions against.

6. **Where do you stand on, (pick any hot topic from current events) and why is that your position?**

What Your Partner's Answers Mean: This will tell you if he or she thinks critically or if he or she simply parrots the pundits, whether he/she consults both sides of an argument, where his or her values lie and what he or she stands for.

This is the definition of a "loaded question". A well-informed person should be able to argue both sides of any topic effectively and then through an explanation of his or her principles explain with facts why he or she thinks that way. Someone who thinks critically will avoid propaganda techniques like name-calling/characterizations, speaking broadly with no verifiable facts, (a critical thinker will know where the facts came from though he or she may need to do some work

to provide them) and filibustering...talking over your points and not allowing you to justify your position.

By the way, an honest person with intellectual curiosity, should it be an issue he/she is not well versed in, (everyone has his/her areas of knowledge and unknowns) will state something along the lines of, "I don't know enough about that issue to give you an opinion at this time. Tell me what you think about it and why you choose that position." This also tells you the person is open minded and willing to learn, which is a good thing.

Pay close attention to the answers to these questions. Serious relationship problems begin with incompatibilities in Intellectual Intimacy. They will tell you more about the real person in front of you and give you a solid insight to the person behind the public image he or she portrays.

STAGE FIVE

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Covering: Morality, Ethics, Shared Existence & Shared Goals

This is where the relationship really begins. One of the toughest stages to accomplish, many married couples never achieve spiritual intimacy. A lack of it is a key reason many fail to survive.

When a couple progresses to this stage, there is a sense and meaning to the relationship. You share similar morals, values and ethics. Your futures are now inclusive in both the short term and the long term.

Before a couple can reach spiritual intimacy, each participant in the relationship must have already resolved the struggle with their own identity and defined who they are individually before the two can come together as a common entity. Spiritual Intimacy is where you and I become we. Siblings many times will be your first introduction to reaching this level.

You & your partner have achieved spiritual intimacy if you can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. When speaking to friends you no longer refer to you and your partner as individuals, you and he/she are *we*.
2. You introduce each other as boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife.
3. You both know who you are and have resolved any mental/psychological, addiction and relationship issues from the past. Codependency does not exist in your relationship.
4. You have short-term and long-term goals and objectives based upon your relationship.
5. Your morals and ethics have been articulated to each other and you are in agreement with each other regarding the basic principles that define each of you. These do not have to match perfectly, however those not in agreement must be tolerable to each partner.

Most people assume spiritual intimacy is about religious compatibility. Religion may play a small part because most religious teachings form our basic foundations of what is right and what is wrong. If you've found your relationships tend to break up before six months, it is likely you may never have experienced spiritual intimacy. It is a trust that takes time to both build and respect.

The following questions will allow you to explore spiritual intimacy with your partner.

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

1. **What is the toughest lesson you have learned in life the hard way?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Clues you into whether he/she reflects upon his/her mistakes and learns from them.

2. **Is your faith important to you?** Why or why not?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you if religion and spirituality are going to be an issue and if you both are compatible in morals and beliefs.

3. **Describe your ideal relationship.**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you understand his or her aspirations and expectations in a relationship.

4. **Have you ever had a partner try to change you? What did you do?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means:

- 1) Tells you if he/she is confident and likes him/herself
- 2) Tells you if he/she is able to recognize manipulation and effectively diffuse it.

5. **What does Marriage mean to you?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you understand his or her aspirations and expectations in a relationship and if his/her ideas are based on realistic achievements or fantasy.

6. **What is the longest period of time you've gone between romantic relationships? How did you cope with the ending?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Most adults have three serious romantic relationships, (six months or longer. Anything less than six months is dating and not considered serious) before marrying in Western cultures. Consider this the apprentice stage, or marriage on training wheels. You are learning what it means to love, be loved and work as a team. You're defining your preferences, dislikes, what you are willing to put up with and what is non-negotiable. Concurrently each person in the relationship is growing, learning and maturing. Red flags occur if the person you are dating never has more than a couple of months between serious relationships and major red flags if he/she always has his/her next relationship lined up before leaving the existing one. Unless you are looking for long-term misery, you do not want a serial relationship expert. Con artists fall in this category and also target others in this category. Generally this indicates a person who needs a relationship in order to feel validated; it is also a sign of co-dependency.

Emotionally and spiritually healthy people will take time to grieve the end of a relationship, learn from it and take steps to better themselves whether through self-help, classes or expanding their interests. They can articulate what was good about the relationship and why it didn't work out. Most importantly they take steps to not repeat the mistakes. They learn from them.

On the opposite end, people with three, five or ten years between relationships also put up red flags, though sometimes there are good reasons like the death of a spouse, the need to care for their children, starting a business or health concerns. Find out why. Once is normal for life to circumvent relations. More than once can mean you are dealing with someone jaded, who has given up, refuses to trust, has set his/her expectations too high and is overly critical or has difficulty with intimacy. Most adults will go one to two years between serious relationships. You owe it to yourself to explore your partners' past relationships. It is part of building trust.

STAGE SIX

EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

Covering Feelings, Trust, Security and Safety

Many couples never make it to emotional intimacy because it is in emotional intimacy where you must accept the person for whom he or she is without reservation, flaws, irrationality and all. At this level, you feel comfortable sharing yourself without fear of repercussions. On a daily basis, both parties feel comfortable to voice and share their anger, happiness, secrets, sensual side and sexual feelings. You know you are loved and love your partner no matter how either of you feel or act.

Here are some common questions to start with:

1. If your car breaks down, after AAA, whom do you call first?
2. If you were fired today, where or to whom would you go to find solace?
3. If you just got a promotion, with whom would you most want to celebrate?
4. If a close friend died, with whom would you first share your grief?

If your partner isn't the person you'd think of in any of the events first, chances are, you haven't quite reached emotional intimacy with him or her. It's about trust and letting another see us at our worst and our best...pretty scary stuff for most people, but critical to a long-term healthy relationship. Parents especially need to focus on nurturing emotional intimacy with their children.

You & your partner achieve emotional intimacy if you can answer *Yes* to all of these situations:

1. In a state of personal fear, uncertainty or danger, your partner is your first call or the person you turn to for comfort.
2. Crying, showing frustration or anger in front of your partner is okay. You know he/she will not see you as weak, psychotic, crazy or out of control.
3. You can speak about sex, secrets and your feelings without a fear of being betrayed, ridiculed, or compromised.
4. No matter what happens, you know your partner loves you and will not abandon you during a state of crisis, ill health or financial difficulty.
5. You show or tell each other often through words and actions that you love and respect each other.
6. Past wrongs are not dredged up in arguments to get even with each other. The past is discussed, forgiven and left there.
7. Passive aggressive behavior and name calling does not exist in your relationship.

So what do you do if your relationship isn't quite here yet? Most couples aren't, while others have achieved some parts of Emotional Intimacy but skirted around the others. Use this to identify areas you want to work on and discuss them with your partner.

QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

1. **TO A WOMAN: What does it take for you to feel safe in a relationship?**

TO A MAN: What does it take for you to want to grow within a relationship?

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Helps you identify the criteria that must be met in order for a relationship to grow.

2. **Would you prefer that a person respects and admires you, or would you prefer that a person listens to your feelings and cherishes you?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you who is the **masculine energy** and **who is the feminine energy** (does not relate to sexuality or sexual preference). In order for a romantic relationship to be successful, one person must be male energy (respect) and one must be female energy (cherish).

3. **Have you ever cried in front of a past partner? If you haven't, did you think if the situation became such where you wanted to cry you could do so without fearing he/she would lose her respect for you?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Clues you into his/her ability to create and cultivate intimacy on a deeper level and whether past relationships have reached this level of trust.

4. **What was the happiest moment in your life? What was the saddest?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Allows you to share in the telling of two pinnacle experiences of his/her life, which is emotional intimacy.

STAGE SEVEN

SEXUAL INTIMACY

Covering: Touching, Sexual Liberation, Physical Contact, Romance, Copulation and Procreation

Let's see those hands! How many of you are guilty of doing Stages 1,2,3 and jumping to 7? Us too. You're not alone. Sexual intimacy is about touch (which can be non-sexual like with friends and children) and in the dating and mating game it's part of the courtship and consummation. There is nothing wrong with doing the 1,2,3,7 dance, if a fast fling or an affair is all you are interested in. Unfortunately, for many adults it becomes the only way they know how to date and a main reason so many relationships crash and burn, especially in the first six months.

Often confused as true intimacy, sexual intimacy is the natural attainment for a couple, which has successfully navigated the first six stages. Anyone can have sex; it takes something special go from physical activity to intimacy. Sexual intimacy involves the full range of sensual perception including touch, kiss, looks, expressions of endearment, (the exchanging of gifts and favors for events and just because), communication, comments and of course, intercourse and orgasm. The key to sexual intimacy is sexual liberation, a state that takes time, patience and tremendous trust to reach.

Sexual liberation is the right to accept or decline advances without fear of ridicule, rape or coercion. If wife withholds sex regularly as a tool of manipulation, sexual liberation has not been achieved. If a man withholds sex due to physical problems without making his partner aware of these, such as embarrassment over erectile dysfunction or a lack of desire due to stress, sexual intimacy has not been achieved, (this also would fall under emotional intimacy). Likewise if a woman continually fakes orgasm and is afraid to talk with her partner about it and seek a solution together...you got it, she and her partner have not achieved sexual intimacy. With sexual liberation, even embarrassing subjects like the inability to orgasm, herpes, past rapes, not being a virgin or being a virgin, sexual fears or loss of function, though difficult to bring up, should never make you feel like you will lose your partner should these be disclosed. If you feel that telling this issue may cause him/her to leave, you don't have trust. Without trust, you do not have intimacy. This is also why waiting to delve into sexual intimacy is recommended until after you've achieved a majority of elements in the preceding six. Trust takes time, a lot of time, to develop.

You and your partner achieve sexual intimacy if you can answer *Yes* to all of these situations, (If not married, you do not have to go *all the way* to achieve sexual intimacy. This is why copulation is not included).

1. You've seen each other naked with the lights on and are comfortable being naked around each other.
2. Sexual activity includes kissing, hugging, touching and mutually pleasuring each other.

3. You share romantic gifts with each other just because.
4. Foreplay during copulation lasts more than 10 minutes most of the time, (quickies are okay given they are not the only MO)
5. You know several of your partner's fantasies, likes and dislikes as they pertain to sex.
6. You've discussed any past or current STD's with your partner that may affect their health.
7. You are not afraid to try new things, but your partner also respects a decline without repercussions, intimidation or ridicule.
8. You do not fear being raped, assaulted or maimed by your partner.

QUESTIONS OF RELATING TO SEXUAL INTIMACY

(We recommend these questions be reserved until the 2nd or 3rd date).

1. **Have you ever been to a masseuse? What did you like or not like about it?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means:

- 1) Tells you if he/she is comfortable enough with his/her body to allow a stranger to touch it
- 2) Illustrates a healthy desire for self-pampering and care.

2. **What is the most romantic thing someone has done for you?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Let's you know how well he/she has been treated by past relationships and what he/she considers romantic.

3. **What is your favorite sensual/erotic movie? (Ex: Last Tango in Paris, Henry & June, Lolita...)**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Speaks to his/her attitudes about sexuality, specifically his/her curiosity and openness.

STAGE EIGHT

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE***Covering Love & Support
without Strings, Expectations or Regrets***

Truly the most difficult level to attain, few couples experience unconditional love. It is the ultimate goal, similar to *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, unconditional love is the equivalent of self-actualization. Many people will come close to experiencing unconditional love with their children. Pets provide unconditional love for their owners, loving them regardless of who they are, how they act or what they think.

To love unconditionally means that no matter what someone does, says or is, you love him or her fully and without reservation, without ever expecting anything in return. However, it does not mean that you sacrifice yourself or your own values and morals. Sometimes the hardest part of unconditional love is allowing others to fail. Commonly we refer to this as "Tough Love". It is tough for a reason. It hurts as much to stand back and let the cards fall as it hurts to be the person triumphing through tribulation.

In the first edition of this article, I used extremes to illustrate how difficult it is to love unconditionally and how sanity requires conditions. The intention being that we all place conditions on our love, as instinct and self-preservation. These conditions help keep us out of danger and safe; unconditional is rather altruistic or utopian, not always wise. One of our readers wrote in with some excellent observations. This is the example I used:

Can you forgive, stand by and accept your partner, without reservation or regret if he/she:

- a. *Molested or stole your children*
- b. *Killed you, your family or someone you love*
- c. *Robbed you of everything you have or destroyed everything you have*
- d. *Decided to participate in a homosexual lifestyle*
- e. *Infected you with AIDS or any other chronic, terminal or fatal disease*
- f. *Committed adultery, arm robbery or any other moral/criminal transgression.*
- g. *Became a terrorist or spy against your country*
- h. *Became a vegetable, invalid or mentally ill*
- i. *Lost everything and became financially ruined*

Several readers became alarmed. My attempt to show how ridiculous unconditional can get, without realizing some people would take my tongue-and-cheek extremism as instruction does cause problems. What I was trying to do was show good reasons (illegal, abuse) to leave with the common reasons people leave (money, illness) to illustrate how ridiculous the common reasons were when compared with good reasons. I failed to do this effectively. The following is RM's response to the above question:

As a graduate of Social Welfare at Berkeley and a MFT candidate in graduate school, I disagree with some of your statements.

A. Social workers dread this mistake made by so many parents who are suppose to protect their children. Many women or men stand by their partners who have physically & mentally abused, burned, or tormented their children. A lot of abuse goes unreported because ignorant people want to stand by their loved one. When abuse is reported where social workers step in, it is sometimes too late. You have to understand that these kids grow up never forgetting or trusting people. It is all right to forgive someone who has hurt your children, but you have to move on. It is important to keep in mind, children depend on a parent or guardian to protect them at all costs and sacrifices. If that sacrifice happens to be being without a partner until you find a lucrative, safe, and healthy intimate relationship, then sacrifice!

B. If you stand by someone who has killed your loved one but has never suffered from schizophrenia, bi-polar disease or any other mental illness where they thought your loved one was the boogie-man, then YOU need to admit yourself to a mental institution.

C. Whether a stranger or a loved one robs you and destroys everything you have, it IS a crime, and one must pay for their actions. Material items can be replaced, but having fear and mistrust takes time. It is an invasion of privacy. People save up for their children's future college expenses, home repairs, etc. A loved one is suppose to support your dreams, not try to destroy them.

D. You probably could stand by your loved one if they became a terrorist or spy against your country, but the CIA would probably question you why. I hope you have a good answer for them. If you do not like the country that you live in or the political system they support, then it is better to leave, than to put loved ones around you at risk. IF the government thinks you are involved, it does not matter if you were not involved. You probably just threw some ideas out there, but most people do not question what is in print. Fortunately, we give thanks to God, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and whoever teaches us that you have to question what is wrong, right, smart, safe and conducive for all mankind.

Touché!

Below are several loaded questions and some of our favorites to throw out on a second or third date. Why? Because they break through the façade and demonstrate the level of tolerance a person has for others, especially when it comes to children. Knowing his or her threshold of acceptance and forgiveness early in the relationship gives you the opportunity to decide if you are willing to conform to his/her rules or not. The antithesis of unconditional love is narcissism.

QUESTIONS EXPLORING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

1. **Is there anything that a person can do that you will consider being unforgivable?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Tells you about his/her morality, values and what types of conditions he/she places on his/her love.

2. **Do you know any couples that seem to have achieved unconditional love?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Points out the type of relationship he/she aspires to and what about it he/she finds appealing.

3. **Do you think it is possible to love unconditionally?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means: Points out the type of relationship he/she aspires to and whether you will both be supportive of your children, regardless of whether they become Charles Manson or Mother Teresa.

4. **You and your family have been invited to the White House for dinner. Your teen-age son shows up with a nose ring, tattoo, and green hair. What will you do?**

What Your Partner's Answer Means:

- 1) Tells you about his/her morality, values and whether he/she places conditions on his/her love.
- 2) If he/she is willing to accept another for him/herself, regardless of what he/she thinks of the choices he/she makes.

CONCLUSION

The Stages of Intimacy are a guide. Relationships like most elements within each of our lives are dynamic. At times your relationship will have all or most of the stages present. At times one or several may fall to the wayside. The best way to use the stages is as a checklist for yourself. If your relationship seems to be faltering, stagnant or unfulfilling, reviewing the stages will help you pinpoint the problem. Once you identify the problem, you have the ability to solve it.

If you are dating and looking for Mr. or Mrs. Right, the stages are invaluable. First, they will make you postpone sexuality until you can satisfy your curiosity about a mate through 6 stages. Secondly, they will allow you to isolate poor relationships objectively as you venture into each new stage. Most divorces and poor relationships could have been avoided through the stages. What many find out about each other over years, a savvy dater can discover within six to seven months, well before I do becomes I don't. Through the stages, you can avoid heartache by helping yourself discover what is missing and what is causing problems. Stick with the stages and you will gain satisfaction, love and a close intimate relationship unlike anything you've ever experienced. **-END-**