

Are You Really Available?

One of the questions which often comes up in our relationship work involves how available people are for a healthy relationship. As someone recently cried out, "No one today has time for a relationship!" Singles often have a difficult time plugging into a new dating partner's busy lifestyle, and may see their dates as being essentially unavailable for creating a deep, intimate relationship. Couples in a committed relationship may complain that their partner is consumed and distracted by everything but their relationship: they may be around physically, but never seem to want to connect in any meaningful way. Indeed, in our crazy, driven, time-starved world, it often seems as if our adult relationships take the lowest priority.

There are various levels of availability for intimate connection. While physical availability is the most obvious one, being physically present is no guarantee of intimacy, as many married people will tell you. Being in the same house or room or even bed with someone else can still feel very lonely if the two people are not in sync and do not connect. Nonetheless, consistent physical availability is a necessary prerequisite for deeper levels of intimacy to occur.

After physical presence, the next level of availability is sporadic emotional availability. On this level, both partners are capable of being emotionally present with their own feelings, as well as with the feelings of their partner. The capacity to communicate to your partner what you are feeling is also present at this level. However, while the capacity for being emotionally available is present, the willingness to choose to do so on a consistent basis is limited. At this level, each person engages in some forms of withholding of parts of themselves which results in inconsistent availability. This withholding can manifest in any number of ways, such as inconsistent time schedules; shutting down or withdrawing emotionally; avoiding difficult topics; or numbing feelings through food, drugs, work or sex.

The deepest level of availability is what we call conscious emotional availability, where the capacity to be fully present and mindful of your own emotional process, as well as your partner's, is present most of the time. In this level, the capacity for being emotionally available is present, and there is a strong willingness to use that capacity. Authentic feelings are acknowledged and communicated on a consistent basis, whether they are positive or negative. Joy and bliss can comfortably co-exist with sadness and despair, for there is a commitment to sharing the truth of one's experiences with one's partner.

Why are so many of us unavailable for this deepest level of human connection? Isn't the need for bonding a fundamental human desire? Why do we create these complex, overextended busy lives, which Shakespeare aptly described as being "...full of sound and fury, signifying nothing", while our heart's deepest desires go unmet? This answer is clear: we are unavailable when we are afraid. We want true love but are terrified of how it may hurt us, how it may recreate some painful experience, how we may be abandoned

or smothered or lose our familiar identity. So we make sure that there is no room in our lives for genuine love to blossom. We stay in control, and keep the unpredictability and vulnerability of genuine intimacy at a safe distance.

Many people think they are available when they really are not. We have seen this demonstrated countless times in intensive work with singles and couples. When presented with all the tools, knowledge, support and guidance possible to create more intimacy in their lives, the fears take over and they sabotage, distance, avoid or deny.

How available are you? This is really the only question about availability you need to ask! If you are attracting unavailable partners, there is something unavailable in you. How available are you to yourself on a deep level? Our relationship with others is but a reflection of our relationship with our inner self. Reflect on what you may be running away from within yourself with your endless external activities.

How can you make yourself more available to present or future partners? Be gentle and compassionate with yourself and begin by becoming fully available to all aspects of who you are. Discover what your fears and barriers to intimacy are, and take steps to remove them. If you find yourself running away or afraid of certain aspects of intimacy, get some help from someone who has been down that path themselves. Strip away the barriers to availability and notice what comes up for me, mindfully, consciously, and lovingly. For when you are fully available for conscious emotional connection with yourself, you will attract the same energy into your life from others. Creating and maintaining a healthy relationship is quite similar to creating and maintaining a beautiful garden. If the gardener is unavailable to tend the garden, the consequences are quickly revealed. Similarly, relationships need time and open communication to weed the inevitable hurts and resentments that occur. Consistent time to bond on a physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual level is necessary to water the roots of your love. Like a plant, your love is a living, breathing, organic process that will get stagnant or eventually wither away and even die if both of you are not consistently available to keep it healthy.

Authentic, genuine love is safe. Not loving is far riskier to human life and health than opening yourself to love. So cancel some of those appointments in your Day-Timer. Delete those lines on your To-Do List in your Palm Pilot. Take a deep breath and make room in your life and in your heart for more love to come in: what better use of your time and your life could there possibly be other than giving and receiving deeper, more authentic love?

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