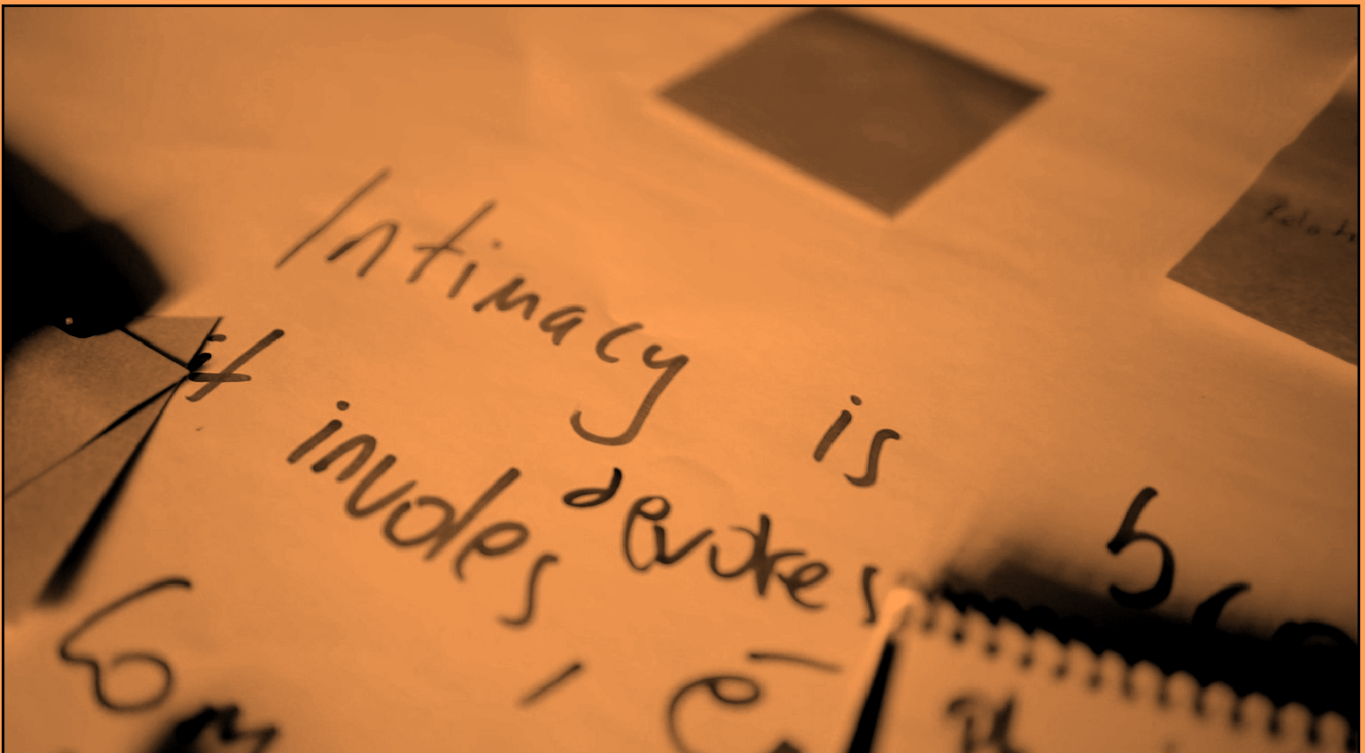


DISORDERS OF INTIMACY

○ *By Élan Interculturel (Lune, Éloïse)²¹*



This activity invites participants to learn more about their own relationship to intimacy. What is intimacy for them? Is it the same for their partner? The activity underlines that the relationship to intimacy varies from person to person, depending on their background, education, culture and personality. Thus, a situation or behaviour interpreted as intimate by them may not be so for another person, which can be a source of misunderstanding in intimate and sexual life. The point here is to highlight the importance of questioning oneself in order to better understand one's relationship to intimacy. This is in order to be able to set up a sincere communication towards their partner(s) which allows them not to cross their limits or to project false intentions on them.

²¹ _ Cette activité est basée sur le document "Comprendre le consentement" des Alberta Health Services : <https://teachingsexualhealth.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2017-CALM-Consent-1-French.pdf>

Duration 1h 30 to 2h

Participants 6 to 20

- Objectives**
- To define what loving/sexual/erotic intimacy is;
 - To deepen the knowledge of oneself and one's relationship to intimacy;
 - To become aware that everyone has their own interpretation of intimacy according to their personality, education and background;
 - To become more accepting of differences in the area of intimacy, to encourage dialogue and a better understanding of each other.

- Material**
- Coloured Post-it sheets
 - Sheet of paperboard
 - Pencils
 - Intimacy cards
 - Sheets of paper and pens
 - Radio equipment (at least one recorder and two microphones per group)

Preparation Prepare about 20 cards (or strips of paper) to be your "intimacy cards" (for durable cards, use laminated paper or laminate the cards). On each card, write an action related to intimacy. The suggestions can be adapted to the context of your intervention:

- Holding hands in a public place
- Introduce partner(s) to parents
- Introduce partner(s) to friends
- Hugging partner(s)
- Kissing partner(s)
- Talking about painful life events to their partner(s)
- Being seen in your underwear by your partner(s)
- Being vulnerable in front of partner(s)
- Arguing with partner(s)
- Talking during sex (saying what you like, what you don't like, what you would like)
- Talking "roughly" during sex

- Having sex
- Sending erotic messages
- Writing to partner(s) every day
- Talking about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) with partner(s)
- Talking about contraception with their partner(s)
- Talking about discrimination with your partner(s)
- Talking about parents and family with their partner(s)
- Sharing your feelings with your partner(s)
- Sharing your dreams with your partner(s)
- Sharing needs with partner(s)
- Talking politics with your partner(s)
- Talking about your sexual fantasies with your partner(s)



Prepare as many tables as there are sub-groups. Put a sheet of flipchart paper on each table and draw a line on it. Place a "+" and a "-" sign at each end and a small divider in the middle. This is the intimacy thermometer, where the "+" represents very intimate situations, the "-" not so intimate and the small line in the middle represents neutrality.



Instructions

STEP 1

CREATE A DEFINITION OF LOVE/EROTIC/SEXUAL INTIMACY

① Form sub-groups of 4-6 people. Invite them to sit around the tables and hand out Post-it notes. Each person writes down the first words that come to mind when they think of romantic/sexual/erotic intimacy (one word per sheet). For example: softness, tenderness, touch, trust, etc. Then each person in turn shares the words they have written and explains their choice.



② Together, people group words with similar ideas to create larger categories.

③ Then they collectively write a definition of what intimacy is. This definition can be subjective, poetic or abstract. It may contain contradictions and nuances. Reassure people that this is not about creating a restrictive definition or getting everyone to agree on what intimacy is.

STEP 2**THE INTIMACY THERMOMETER**

- ① Distribute the "intimacy cards" to each subgroup. These should not be visible. Place them on the reverse side or in an envelope.
- ② Each participant writes their first name on a Post-it sheet.
- ③ Introduce the intimacy thermometer drawn on the flipchart paper to the participants.
- ④ One person from each subgroup picks an intimacy card and reads it to their peers. For example "Fighting with your partner(s)". People reflect and place their names on the thermometer according to the degree of intimacy this situation represents for them.
- ⑤ In turn, people explain their answer. When the



round is over, they can draw another card.

- ⑥ Let each subgroup exchange for about 20 minutes.

STEP 3**INTIMACY AT THE MICROPHONE**

① Once the discussion is over, invite people to write individually:

- A positive memory about intimacy;
- A time when they encountered difficulties because they did not have the same understanding of intimacy as their partners.
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② Give them some guidelines:

- The writing style should be simple, without any attempt at stylistic effect;
- The text must be written in the present tense;
- Each sentence should have only one idea;
- Avoid the words "Indeed", "Therefore", "First", etc., which sound too formal;
- Write in your own style, close to the way you express yourself orally.
- The text should not exceed half a page;
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③ Distribute the recording material to everyone. At the microphone, people first read out the definition of intimacy that they have agreed upon. Then they read out their positive memories and/or the moment in which they encountered difficulties.



Variants

When the group has shared and looked through all the cards, they choose three topics that they liked, debated or want to explore further on the microphone. Tell them to create a 15-20 minute radio programme, the group starts by reading out their definition of intimacy and then discusses the three topics chosen.

Tips for facilitators

Explain that this activity is not about convincing others, but about sharing one's own experience and point of view. It is very important to speak in "I" terms. Warn participants that they are not obliged to share and can remain silent.

This activity can be intimidating for people who do not have much experience. Reassure them that all experiences are valid and that if they have never been in a relationship, they can imagine what would be intimate for them or not.

This activity may not be suitable for aromantic or asexual people. You can then adapt it to friendship. However, we advise you to do this activity when registration is open (not imposed) and when people know what the topic of discussion is.

Invite participants to place themselves on the thermometer according to what they really think, without taking into account what others might say or what is socially expected.

Remind them at the beginning that this is an activity about love/sexual/erotic intimacy. It is not about intimacy with friends, family, etc.

Debriefing

The idea is to show the different degrees of intimacy, the different zones or comfort levels of each person in relation to various intimate activities. The idea is to show that what may appeal to one person may not appeal to all. And that what one person considers a "harmless gesture with no intimate connotations" may be experienced as very "intimate"

by others. The aim here is to show what can lead to misunderstandings in emotional and sexual life.

Emphasise that people may have varying levels of comfort with different types of intimate activities. It is important for partners to discuss what they consider intimate and what they feel comfortable doing. Conversations such as these are essential elements of consent to sexual activity and should take place on a regular and ongoing basis.

You can also point out that some people associate feeling in love with sex, while for others this is not the case at all. Thus, a sexual act or expression of desire may be interpreted as a sign of commitment for one person, while for the other it has no other meaning.

You can ask the following questions:

How did you feel during the activity?

Did you discover anything about yourself? Things that surprised you?

Have you ever encountered difficulties in your intimate life because you misinterpreted something your partner(s) did? And vice versa?