

Step 1

Personal Enrichment Long Term Intimacy Course



Step 1: Personal Enrichment

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, in this first step we're going to be focusing on you as individuals, not you as a couple. All too often, people forget that any marriage or relationship is actually comprised of two individuals. Indeed, magazines and TV shows and all kinds of modern media are keen to tell us that we should be absolutely one and the same with our romantic partner. The closer you are to being one unified being, society tells us, the happier you will be.

As lovely as idea as that is, it often results in individuals putting all their energy into maintaining *the relationship* while forgetting to maintain *themselves*.

You can hear this in the way that many people talk. How often have you heard people say things like, "they are such a great couple" or "they have such a great relationship". Though these phrases are fundamentally compliments, they're actually compliments that focus on the relationship as an entity separate from the two people involved.

The danger behind this way of thinking is that it becomes all too easy to forget about one's own needs and desires. When a relationship is on the rocks, people will often pour a great deal of energy into trying to salvage it, to recapture what they once had. What they forget to do, however, is spend some time on themselves and ensure that they are in a happy and contented place. And if they're not in a happy place, there may be very little that they'll be able to bring to the relationship.

Think of it this way: you need to nurture yourself before you can focus on nurturing the bond between you and your partner. It's similar to how a doctor is only able to help make people well when they themselves are not incapacitated by illness. If you're trying to build or reinforce a relationship when you are not happy in your own individual life, then that's exactly what you're trying to do: build something between you and your partner, when really you should be building yourself.

It might seem difficult, if you've been in a relationship for a while, to remember exactly how to focus on yourself. Married life in particular can be a thing of routine. Sometimes couples are so busy that things like hobbies, interests and other activities automatically get forgotten and left by the wayside.

Similarly, if you're at the beginning of a new relationship it can be equally difficult to take time to focus on yourself. After all, you are with someone new and exciting – someone who commands (quite rightly) the majority of your attention. There's an old, often-quoted statistic that says that when a new romantic partner enters your life, at least two friends are consequently "squeezed out" of it. While this may not always be mathematically true, it's a good illustration of how a relationship can lead to you neglecting yourself.

So how best to go about dedicating some time to yourself? The first thing to know and accept is that doing things apart from one another does not mean that you are in any way weakened as a couple. Eating out with separate groups of friends, going to the cinema to



see different films, or spending time in separate rooms in the house are all completely normal and healthy things to do.

The very fact that a partner might have other interests can also sometimes be a challenge to some couples. Although a hobby is not a threat in the same way as another lover might be, it is something that takes up some of your partner's valuable attention – and as such it can sometimes be hard to accept. Remember, however, that it is not a rejection. A lot of the time, the reason that your partner is taking time to themselves is to strengthen and grow your relationship. Although you may be physically apart, you are romantically and spiritually still very much together – and the stronger for it.

With those caveats in mind, let's take a look at some practical things you can do in order to build yourself, strengthen your identity, safeguard your own happiness, and make sure that you are completely ready to forge a strong, healthy and active relationship.

Don't worry, we'll get to the more "intimate" parts in the next step. In the meantime, don't be overwhelmed by this list. Remember that if just ONE of these tips resonates with you and helps you gain more time for yourself, build confidence or to feel good about yourself, then it's worth at least considering.

Get Engaged in Work or A Hobby

Whether or not you enjoy your job, work can be a source of many important things. For most adults, the workplace is like a second family – it is a place where they belong and where they can find friendship, a sense of community, and a sense of purpose. The last of these is perhaps the most important of all – but don't fret even if you absolutely hate your job. It's still an important element of your welfare. Even in a job you dislike or that you find unfulfilling, you can still take steps to make sure that you're comfortable, well-supported and not too stressed. It may just need some thought and creativity.

Hobbies, on the other hand are almost always going to be things that you enjoy doing. It may be that you already have one – in which case, consider dedicating a little bit more time and energy to it, and giving it a little more importance in your life. If you don't have a hobby, it's simple enough to find one: sit down and think about what it is you enjoy doing, and what you are skilled or good at. This can be an excellent activity to undertake with your partner. If you struggle to see your own strengths, perhaps your partner will be able to help by pointing out something unique that you excel at.

Build Positive Links with Friends and Family

The relationships you hold with friends and family are just as important as the relationship you hold with your romantic partner. Take some time to think about how you can improve them. Make a conscious effort to stay in touch with family, and go out of your way to extend care, interest and attention to your friends. The simple act of caring about them is almost guaranteed to make you feel better about yourself. And, if at all possible, make sure you don't have too many negative people in your life. It can be difficult, but if someone only ever criticises or talks you down, you might be better off spending less time with them.



Take Care of Yourself

Just as important as our mental health and support network is our physical body. People often underestimate just how much of a bearing our health has on our wellbeing. If we eat badly, don't get much exercise and don't get a sufficient quantity of sleep then not only will we feel bad physically, but it will impact on our emotional health as well. Take a look at your routine, your diet, and your physical activity. Is there an area that can be improved? This can be as simple as going to bed an hour earlier, or as complicated as a whole new diet or workout routine. It's up to you – everyone is different, and will have different needs. Work out what yours are, and then make sure they're being met. Exercise is often the biggest one. You may not feel as though you have time to get to the gym every day, but even a ten-minute run in the morning can help boost your mood exponentially.

Set Yourself a Goal

Having a goal or purpose in life, and even in your day to day activities, can be immensely satisfying. Consider setting yourself a personal goal; something that you want to do entirely for yourself. This could be losing a certain amount of weight, completing a record collection, reading a list of classic novels or anything else that takes your fancy. The sense of satisfaction you gain from completing a task that you have set yourself is an essential ingredient of high self-esteem and general happiness.

The good news about this one? You're most likely already doing it! By working through this step-by-step program you are, in fact, setting and achieving a series of small personal goals. What could be easier?

Think Positive – Particularly About Yourself

Negative thinking is a trap that plenty of people fall into. The simple fact is that it's far easier to think negatively than it is to think positively. Indeed, the human brain is wired to consider the worst outcome of any scenario. We are, by our nature, paranoid – and it can take a great deal of effort to overcome that. The first step is to recognise when you are having negative thoughts. Perhaps you're organising a party, but you're afraid that nobody will come. You might worry that none of your friends really like you, or that if they do come they're only doing so to be nice. These are all negative thoughts. When they float into your head, do your best to dismiss them and replace them with more positive ones. Think about the number of people who have responded enthusiastically to your invite. Think about all the times they've enjoyed your company before – and you theirs. Replace your negative thoughts with positive ones, and you'll see not only a broad change in your mood, but also a noticeable change in your behaviour around others as well.

If you particularly struggle when it comes to positive thinking, it can be helpful to make a list. Sit down with a pen and piece of paper and write down all of the things that you are good at, that you like about yourself, or that other people have complimented you on. Consider even keeping a journal of positive things or praise – although it may seem a little conceited, it's one of the best things you can do for your own mental health and wellbeing. Remember – positive thoughts are much harder to hold on to than negative ones, so it's worth expending a little effort in retaining them.



