

# Step 4

## Building Trust & Intimacy

Long Term Intimacy Course



## Step 4: Building Trust & Intimacy

You won't find many people who are willing to question the importance of trust in a relationship. Every relationship guide, every advice column, and every article about relationships will at some point mention trust, intimacy and the importance of maintaining them both. They are, if you like, the foundation of all the best relationships.

But what does it mean to trust someone? Or to be intimate with them? By their very definition relationships are a process of opening yourself up to someone. As you get to know them better you reveal more and more information about yourself, and you peel away more and more protective layers. By being in a relationship with another person, you are making yourself vulnerable, and giving them the opportunity to hurt you. Trust is simply what we call the confidence to know that they will not.

This may be an odd way to think about a relationship. You may not think that you have given your partner the ability to hurt you in any way. But in almost all relationships this is in fact the case. Simply being comfortable around someone presupposes a number of different things. We trust that they are not going to physically harm us. We trust that they are not going to hurt our feelings or embarrass us if they can avoid it. We even trust them with parts of our life and secrets that we reveal to nobody else. Even sex is a trusting act; you are allowing your partner to see and access you when you are physically vulnerable, and to know some of your most intimate secrets.

You may also feel as though you're not exactly lacking in trust. As a society we have a preconceived notion of what a lack of trust looks like, and it is one that only very few people fit into. For example, we might think that checking your partner's phone or not allowing them to go for a night out with their friends indicates a lack of trust. And this would very certainly be the case – but there are many other less extreme examples that we can focus on as well. Not talking about something that is bothering you can be one way in which a lack of trust manifests itself. The reason behind your reluctance to speak to your partner could be that you simply don't trust them to handle the issues sensitively or seriously enough.

In this way a lack of trust – even if it's not a glaringly obvious one – can eat away at a relationship and cause it to weaken. Even if you have no issues that you can trace back to a lack of trust, building trust can still be an immensely helpful exercise, and you'll find that doing so brings you closer together as a couple. More than that though, it can be a lot of fun. Similarly, as your level of intimacy grows and develops, you'll find yourself able to explore new territory that you were previously completely unaware of. You may well find that your sex life takes a huge turn for the better.

Surprised by that last one? Well, we've already seen that sex is intimately tied to trust. Increasing the level of trust in a relationship (even when the level of trust is already fairly healthy) can be a massive boon for sexual relations. However long you've known your partner, there is almost certainly some aspect of their sexual life that is as yet unknown to you –



something you have still to discover. Perhaps, once you reach a certain level of intimacy and trust, this new vista will be one that you can then explore together.

So, for all sorts of reasons, we can see that trust and intimacy are crucial to a healthy, lasting and exciting relationship. But how do we go about building these things? At the moment they may seem like mere abstract concepts, but read on for some ideas about how to bring them to the front and center of your life as a couple.

### Play Games Together

That's right – games! I don't mean computer games, or a nice rousing round of Scrabble (although these can both be great ways to spend time together and grow closer). Instead I'm talking about relationship-based games. I'll give some examples below, but really you're free – indeed, encouraged – to invent your own. By coming up with a game that is just for you two, not only will you have more fun, but you'll be developing your intimacy by sharing something unique and secret.

Games can, if you wish, be all about fun and play. You might develop a habit of playing hangman on the fridge using magnetic letters. Or you might start sending each other stickers, or hiding things for the other to find. If you're the type of couple who enjoys a prank, then a prank war can be a great way of feeling closer to one another, and sharing laughter and happiness between yourselves. If that's not your style though, even a simple game of I-Spy can work wonders.

Games can also be used to explore the sexual side of your relationship. This is especially true if you normally find the sexual or physical aspect of your pairing difficult to talk about. If it's in the context of a game of "Never Have I Ever" or "Truth Or Dare" it suddenly becomes a lot easier to talk about your sexual proclivities – and you might be surprised by what ends up coming out. Sex dice are another popular option. While the activities that you come up with by rolling the dice may seem a little stupid, sharing in them will bring you closer together and help you feel comfortable in one another's presence. While you're picking up your sex dice, have a look on the internet for other sexual, sensual or romantic games: there's a wealth to choose from.

Physical games can also be immensely enjoyable. If you're a sporty couple, why not enter a race together, or take part in a team sport. Even if you don't normally enjoy physical exercise, facing off for a game of badminton every now and then is rarely too strenuous, and adds another dimension to your relationship. Physical games really take off, though, when you have to work together. One of my favorite games involves blindfolding your partner, then guiding them around the room using voice commands alone. Not only is this great fun, but it will build an unbelievable amount of trust between the two of you.

### Staring is Caring

It's always surprising to discover just how many couples have never stared into one another's eyes for an extended period of time. As the old saying goes: the eyes are the window to the soul. Staring into them can have some startling emotional effects, including making you feel closer to your partner and increasing the level of empathy that you share. Not only that, but to do so has a powerful effect on our caveperson brains. A gaze is an intimate thing, and it is something that we



usually flinch away from. When we instead insist on maintaining it for an almost impossibly long period of time, it can open us up in ways the power and scope of which might be surprising. The best way to test out the validity of this particular exercise is simply to try it. Sit down somewhere comfortable, facing one another, and lock eyes. Now don't look away – hold each other's gaze for a minute, two minutes, maybe even ten if you can handle it. Blinking is, of course, permitted – it's not a staring contest! The main thing is simply to maintain your gaze, and allow the pair of you to occupy that space together.

### Travel Together

Another fantastic way of building trust and intimacy with your partner is to travel with them. Don't worry if budgetary concerns or a need to work prohibit you from making any grand trips. You don't need to raft down the Grand Canyon or hike through the rainforest in order to enjoy the bonding and trust-building effects of travel. Quite the contrary, in fact. Travelling with a partner can be as simple as taking a road trip together, or going to visit family. The point is to break your normal daily routine, and do something together that might challenge the both of you, or that might take you outside of your collective comfort zones.

You can think of trust a little bit like a muscle. How do you build muscle? The best way to do so is by exercising it! In the course of exercising your muscles you may cause them to break down, to feel weak. You may have to push yourself, and do things that make you uncomfortable. The end result, however, is that you will be stronger, tougher and more well-equipped for the future because of this. Travel is an excellent form of exercise for trust and intimacy in your relationship. Because it is stressful in a fun and interesting way, travelling together can be one of the very best ways to build the strength of the bond between you.

### Mean What You Say

It's also important, when building trust in a relationship, to consider the impact of everything you say. Make sure that when you say something you really do mean it. If, deep down, you don't mean it – don't say it. It's as simple as that. Why is this so important? Well, it has to do with internal consistency. Our partner needs to be someone who we trust and cherish, and if we're lying to them on a regular basis – even in ways that might seem small or harmless – it will do untold harm to the way in which we think about them. If you say you're looking forward to something, or that you like spending time with your partner's family it better be because you mean those things – not because you're simply trying to say the right thing or make everybody happy.

On the other side of the coin, it's also important to speak up when we do have something to say. If you can think of something nice to say to your partner – why not say it? Don't bottle it up. Giving voice to positive things you want to say – or even bringing up issues you want to discuss with your partner – is an extension of telling them the truth. It is easy to lie by omission – to neglect to say things that are complimentary or important simply because it's easier not to. Doing so can be every bit as harmful as saying things you don't really mean, so avoid it if at all possible.



## Stick to Your Schedule

Schedules are tricky things. Some people stick to them rigidly and are always on time. Some people seem to be perpetually five minutes late, always running to catch up. Whichever of these you are, sticking to your schedule and respecting the schedule of your partner is vitally important. We all live quite busy lives nowadays, and most of us have a lot on our plate. That means that it can be stressful and tiring sometimes trying to get things done. Whenever you are making arrangements with your partner, do your best to be realistic about the times and dates when you'll get things done. Give yourself plenty of time to arrive or be ready if you need to – and make sure that you don't take on more than you can realistically handle.

This is important not only because sticking to your schedule shows that you respect your partner, but because it creates dependability. If your partner knows that they can rely on you to be where you say you will be, when you say you will be, they're far more likely to trust and treasure you when the pressure (or heat?) is on. If, on the other hand, you constantly say you will do things, then never do, how can your partner trust you when it comes to important relationship-related or sexual-related things?

Even if your timekeeping isn't as strong as it could be, don't despair. You can still respect a schedule even if you're always running late. The trick is to keep everyone informed. If you're going to be late to pick up your partner from work, for example, just send them a quick text to let them know. Nobody is going to blame you for being human, or for being late – but it means a lot when you're able to keep your partner in the loop. It means that you respect them.

## Deal with Arguments Amicably

Every couple has the occasional arguments. In fact, it's only in movies that things run completely smoothly. There will almost certainly be times when things are rough between you, and when you have to have deep and awkward conversations. When you inevitably do, there's one crucial thing you must remember: *don't walk out*.

It's tempting, of course. When you're exchanging heated words with someone you love you might want nothing more than to get yourself out of there. Perhaps you'd much rather take a long drive or walk by yourself. Perhaps you'd rather just spend a couple of days apart from your lover to let things cool down. All of these are healthy, understandable impulses – but it's very important that you finish talking before you isolate yourself. You should make it your goal never to interrupt an argument by storming out.

You may, of course, wish to bring a discussion to a halt sometimes. If you do this, however, make sure you do it with the consent of your partner. If necessary, the two of you can agree on a time in the future to continue discussing the matter – or you can simply agree to let it drop until you're both feeling calmer. The important point is that you agree on a course of action.

When you walk out of an argument, you're cutting off any chance of resolution, and denying you and your partner the chance to wrap things up neatly and amiably. If you can control your temper, stay until the end of the discussion and round things off neatly. You will have proved to



your partner that you're willing to tackle disagreements as a team, and that you can be depended on through thick and thin.

### **Share Something Deeper**

I mentioned previously that sharing secrets is one of the keys to building trust. Of course, some secrets you may not yet feel ready to share with your partner – or vice versa. If this is the case, you must respect each other's wishes. As much as you might wish to know everything there is to know about your partner, some things take a little time. It's important to give each other space, and allow yourselves to reveal the more private parts of your lives at a natural rate.

That said, however, sharing secrets is an excellent way to bond with your partner – and it shows that you trust them as well. When you feel ready to do so, consider divulging something you'd previously kept secret to your partner. This can be as dark and private as a sexual fetish you've always wanted to explore – or as light and easy as the name of a celebrity you've always had a crush on. Whatever it is, make sure your partner knows that you're divulging it to them in confidence.

As you get to know one another and share more secrets you'll find that not only do you feel closer, but you trust one another more, and can enjoy a greater atmosphere of intimacy and respect in your relationship.

### **Trust Your Partner, And Show It**

You may trust your partner completely, but do you show them that? There are dozens of little ways to show that you trust a person. These range from deciding that you don't need to double check whether they've done something you asked them to do, to allowing them to go out with their friends no questions asked. Something that a lot of couples really benefit from, is allowing each other an area of personal space. This could be a desk or a whole room – whatever it is, it belongs solely to one partner, and must not be entered, searched or examined by the other. By demonstrating to your partner that you trust them, you build a powerful bridge between the two of you, and ensure that they feel comfortable and happy trusting you in return.

### **Let Go of Your Desire to Monitor Your Partner**

It can be tempting to sneak a peek over your partner's shoulder to see what they're doing on their computer – or else to pick up their phone and have a browse through their text messages. Quite often these kinds of investigations are the result of simple curiosity – it's not that you distrust your partner; you're simply dying of curiosity, and want to know a little more about what's going on in their life.

The bottom line, however, is this: it is not okay in any kind of healthy relationship to look through your partner's private communications – unless they've agreed that it's something they want you to do. Respecting their privacy is one of the greatest and most important ways you can show that you trust them... while failing to do so is an indication that there really is no trust at all between you.

Accept on a basic level that your partner will have secrets from you, and that you will not know everything that is going on in their life. Accept that you do not need to know, and show them



the respect and courtesy of leaving their communications – emails, texts, letters, and private memos – to be read and responded to solely by them.

### **Realize the Difficult Conversations Happen for A Reason**

A lot of couples are quite upset when they have any kind of argument at all. The first argument between a couple that has otherwise been entirely happy is a particularly tough milestone. The important thing to realize, however, is that arguments are normal. Indeed, the fact that you're arguing at all means that – on some level – you wish to resolve a problem between you.

Arguments may not seem pleasant, but they happen for a good reason. The alternative is to simply ignore any problems that you're having until they grow, fester, and become completely out of control. This is not a productive route to follow.

When you realize that arguments are important to the health of a relationship, you realize that they are not ultimately as negative as they might seem. Knowing this can help you approach any disagreements you have with your partner in a mature and measured way, ensuring that you resolve them as positively as possible. While arguments will almost never feel pleasant, it is possible to make them feel less bad by simply understanding why they are sometimes necessary.

### **Have A Weekly Meeting**

If you're a particularly busy couple, you might find it useful to take a little time aside each week to check in with one another, chat over anything new in your lives, examine the health of your relationship, and talk about anything that is bothering either one of you. It may seem odd to schedule this time just as you would a work-related meeting, but doing so really is the most efficient way to ensure such a meeting happens.

This is a good all-round piece of advice for relationship health. Having a designated time to talk about issues that either partner is having is an excellent way to ensure that things aren't forgotten or filed away and allowed to fester. On top of that, having the time in your diaries ensures that both of you know you will have a chance to discuss anything that's making you uncomfortable – thus giving you more confidence and more trust in the relationship you've built.

These are just some of the things you can incorporate into your relationship over time. Start with one, see how it feels and feel how your bond develops.

Now, remember to [download the Exercise for Step 4](#).

