Intimacy, Entry #1 of 4

Caring and sharing the NA way is the ultimate weapon against our alienating, isolating, destructive disease (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Relationships”).

Experiencing loneliness is an inevitable part of the human condition. For many addicts, this loneliness is amplified by how different we’ve felt from our peers. We’ve had trouble fitting in, or we’re just plain weird. We needed too much attention and alienated others in our efforts to get it. Or we wanted none of that; instead, we stayed silent and hoped that others wouldn’t notice us.

Drugs helped us deal with those feelings and experiences. Initially, using made us feel more “normal,” more comfortable in our own skin. It allowed us to be more social, and, most importantly, created a buffer to keep us safe from intimacy and vulnerability.

Early in recovery, we learn that our disease is fueled not only by getting loaded—but by keeping us isolated from others and from ourselves. When we first get clean and we don’t have drugs as that extra layer of defense, we are raw as hell.

Narcotics Anonymous provides us with opportunities to heal that rawness—through intimate relationships with other addicts. Allowing ourselves to share fearlessly with another addict is truly the salve for our isolation. Even with years clean, a voice in our heads will tell us that we are better off dealing with (or not dealing with) our problems alone. However, we know that the act of revealing ourselves and being present for others is the most powerful antidote to our very human state of loneliness—and to our default addict state of believing we are just too weird.

*Even though sharing may be uncomfortable, I will take a risk and allow myself to be seen by another addict. I will choose connection over isolation.*
Intimacy, Entry #2 of 4

Intimacy is conscious contact with another human being. We connect. As we get close to others we see the divine in them, and we see it in ourselves as well (Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”).

Few of us come to NA with mountains of success practicing intimacy. Often we hear our fellow addicts grumble, “I hate people.” Before getting clean, family life was often dysfunctional, to say the least. The deeper we were in our addiction, the shallower our friendships and romantic relationships became. Our drug use, ego, and denial were a trio of airtight barriers that prevented us from connecting with those closest to us. We lacked trust in others and avoided being vulnerable at all costs. The idea of truly being seen by another person was unbearable, even absurd.

Upon getting clean, we may not initially be conscious of a desire for connection with our fellow addicts. We resist the idea of exposing our true selves, but intimacy isn’t just about sharing the details of our lives. It can be abandoning our old ideas about people and relationships, even letting go of our definition of what’s safe. It can be taking emotional risks when we don’t know the outcome. It can be saying what we want from a relationship—to the other person in it with us. It can be tolerating feedback from our loved ones and growing from it. It can be sitting in meetings with a group of recovering addicts, hearing each other’s gripes, pleas, desires, and strides. It can be witnessing what makes us human and worthy of love and connection, over and over again. Intimacy is the result of all this.

Intimacy is nothing less than letting go of everything that stops us from being ourselves in front of another person. What’s divine in us is what’s genuine.

Today, I will consciously seek opportunities where I can get closer to my true self with another human being I trust.
Intimacy, Entry #3 of 4

Having honest, open dialogue with our sponsor brings us to a new level of trust. As we experience intimacy in that relationship, our ability to be intimate with our partners and with others increases as well (*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”).

It’s impossible to paint all recovering addicts with the same brush when it comes to our experiences with relationships. To state that we are all permanently damaged, have never had a healthy relationship, or experienced intimacy is an overstatement. What we can say is that most of us are shut down when we get to NA. We bear scars from unhealthy relationships. Many of us are certain that sustaining a romantic partnership—or being the parent our kids deserve (and vice-versa)—is an impossibility, considering the injury and chaos we’ve caused. We don’t want to get too close to anyone for fear of rejection. Trusting people? Being honest about our feelings? *No way*.

If intimacy is a spiritual principle we value and a quality we want to bring to our relationships, then we need to practice it. We must surrender to learning new skills and refining existing ones: being honest, sharing feelings, owning our part, listening to and integrating feedback into our behavior, and accepting where our partner is in *their* growth. Ideally, the relationships we forge in NA allow us to explore intimacy in a safer environment than what we’re used to—with other recovering addicts who are striving to do the same.

For many of us, it’s the relationship with a sponsor guiding us through the Steps that inspires us to know ourselves more intimately and to experience intimacy with others in new ways. However, this role isn’t limited to our sponsor. As we start to open up, we may find multiple members we can learn to trust.

We addicts may bear the scars from previous attempts at trusting others, but not all scars are permanent.

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*I will make today a day of healing from my past relationships. I will do this by being willing to share intimately with someone I can trust.*
**Intimacy, Entry #4 of 4**

For those of us who used sex as a way to move through the world, it may take quite some time to figure out the difference between being sexual and being intimate (*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”).

“Wait, so…sex and intimacy are not the same thing?” This is news to many of us.

What isn’t news is the complex and often contradictory relationship at play when it comes to our sexual behavior, our addiction, and our capacity for intimacy. For many of us, sex has been a useful tool, a bargaining chip. We’ve used it as a shield to deflect intimacy, rather than to experience it.

Sex can be so intricately entwined with our use of substances that we may need to learn how to have sex without using. Will we be able to perform? Will we even enjoy it? How can we fulfill our sexual desires without taking advantage of others or putting ourselves at risk for the same?

Learning how to have sex clean is one thing. Being intimate with others in a non-sexual context is another. True intimacy requires mutual honesty and willingness from all involved parties. Quite literally, baring our souls instead of baring our bodies.

How in the hell do we approach this? It’s overwhelming, and who says we even want intimacy anyway? Is that a requirement for staying clean?

We approach this jumbled human mess with patience for ourselves, no matter how long we have clean. We approach it with some resolve to understand and communicate our desires and our truths. And, if possible, we approach it with the understanding that our relationship to sex and intimacy will continue to evolve as we stay clean—and get older...

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*Intimacy is complicated, and I can’t possibly figure it out today. Instead, I will focus on getting to know myself and being considerate of others. I’ll aim to practice spiritual principles in my sexual affairs, too.*