



Fear of Intimacy

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By Dr. Margaret Paul

We all desire the deeply fulfilling experience of intimacy, yet many people have two fears in the way of intimacy. Discover what these fears are and how to heal them.

Emotional intimacy is one of the most wonderful experiences we ever have. Nothing else really comes close to the experience of sharing our deepest thoughts and feelings with another, of being deeply seen and known, of sharing love, passion, creativity, laughter and joy. The experience of intimacy fills our souls and takes away our loneliness.

Why, then, would someone be afraid of intimacy?

It is not actually the intimacy itself that people fear. If people could be guaranteed that intimacy would continue to be a positive experience, they would have no fear of it. What they fear is the possibility of getting hurt as a result of being intimate with another.

The Two Fears Underlying the Fear of Intimacy

Many people have two major fears that may cause them to avoid intimacy: the fear of rejection - of losing the other person, and the fear of engulfment - of being invaded, controlled, and losing oneself.

Because many of us have learned to react to conflict with various controlling behaviors - from anger and blame to compliance, withdrawal, and resistance - every relationship presents us with these issues of rejection and engulfment. If one person gets angry, the other may feel rejected or controlled and get angry back, give themselves up, withdraw or resist. If one person shuts down, the other may feel rejected and become judgmental, which may trigger the other's fears of engulfment, and so on. These protective circles exist in one form or another in most relationships. When the fears of rejection and engulfment become too great, a person may decide that it is just too painful to be in a relationship, and they avoid intimacy altogether.

Yet avoiding relationships leads to loneliness and lack of emotional and spiritual growth. Relationships offer us the most powerful arena for personal growth, if we accept this challenge. So what moves us beyond the fear of intimacy?

Healing the Fear of Intimacy

The fear exists, not because of the experience itself, but because you don't know how to handle the situations of being rejected or controlled. The secret of moving beyond the fear of intimacy lies in developing a powerful loving adult part of you that learns how to not take rejection personally, and learns to set appropriate limits against engulfment.

When you learn how to take personal responsibility for defining your own worth, instead of making others' love and approval responsible for your feelings of worth, you will no longer take rejection personally. This does not mean that you will ever like rejection - it means you will no longer be afraid of it or have a need to avoid it.

When you learn how to speak up for yourself and not allow others to invade, smother, dominate and control you, you will no longer fear losing yourself in a relationship. Many people, terrified of losing the other person, will give themselves up in the hope of controlling how the other person feels about them. They believe that if they comply with another's demands, the other will love them. Yet losing oneself is terrifying, so many people stay out of relationships due to this fear. If they were to learn to define their own worth and stand up for themselves, the fear would disappear.

The Inner Bonding process is designed to create a powerful inner adult self, capable of not taking rejection personally and of setting limits against loss of self. Anyone can learn this six-step process and, with practice, heal fears of intimacy. Through practicing the Inner Bonding process, you learn to value and cherish who you really are, and take full responsibility for your own feelings of worth, lovability, safety, security, pain and joy. When you deeply value yourself, you do not take rejection personally and you become non-reactive to rejection. When you value yourself, you will not give yourself up to try to control another's feelings about you. *When you value yourself, you are willing to lose another rather than lose yourself.*

Start to learn Inner Bonding now! Moving beyond your fears of intimacy will open you to the deep personal and spiritual growth that relationships can provide, and the profound fulfillment and joy that loving relationships can offer.

The Fear of Engulfment Hides a Fear of Rejection

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Do you find yourself giving yourself up in a relationship and then resenting the other person? Do you fear being controlled in a relationship? Discover the underlying cause of these issues and what to do about it.

Jim was attending his first five-day Inner Bonding Intensive because he could not seem to commit to a relationship. He was lonely and wanted to be in a relationship, and he had no trouble meeting women he was attracted to, but as soon as he started to really like someone, he would find any number of reasons to back out. In his early 40's, he was tired of this, but couldn't seem to break out of the pattern.

It soon became apparent that Jim was terrified of losing himself in a relationship. He was a very kind-hearted man and enjoyed giving, but invariably he found himself giving too much - giving himself up. In time he would feel controlled, engulfed, smothered in the relationship. He would start to feel resentful about giving more than he was receiving and would end the relationship. This same pattern happened over and over.

Jim was very aware of the fact that he kept giving himself up in relationships, but he believed it was because he was attracted to strong, controlling women. He never found himself attracted to timid women who gave themselves up. So he felt stuck.

He was stuck because he was operating out of a false belief that he was giving himself up because the woman was controlling. In fact, her behavior had NOTHING to do with Jim giving himself up.

Jim gave himself up because underneath his fear of engulfment was a deeper fear - a fear of rejection. He feared that if he did not give himself up and do what a woman wanted him to do, she would reject him. His intent in giving himself up was to have control over the woman not rejecting him. But in giving himself up, he was rejecting himself, so he would always end up feeling resentful and rejecting the woman.

This pattern would start as soon as a woman became important to him. As soon as he started to really like her, he would begin to fear losing her. In order to have control over not losing her, he was willing

to lose himself. But once he started to lose himself, he stopped feeling attracted to her.

The underlying issue was that Jim had never learned to handle the loneliness and heartbreak of rejection. Having experienced rejection early in his life from his parents, he was terrified of it.

As children, none of us can handle rejection well. All of us had to learn protective ways of handling the pain of rejection. We learned to comply, resist, get angry, shut down or withdraw in response to rejection. We then carried these protections into adulthood, never learning healthy ways of managing the pain of rejection.

Jim was invariably attracted to women who used anger as their way to protect against rejection, while Jim continued to use compliance and withdrawal as his protections.

In order for Jim to sustain a healthy relationship, he needed to learn to manage the pain of rejection. We all need to learn to manage the loneliness and heartache of rejection in order to stay open in a relationship. No matter how good a relationship, there is always going to be rejection. There is no such thing as a relationship where you never feel rejected.

In order to learn to manage the pain of rejection so that he would no longer give himself up, Jim needed to practice Inner Bonding so that he would stop abandoning himself in the face of his fear of rejection. He needed to develop a loving Adult who could speak up for him and help him to not take rejection personally, as well as who could bring in Spirit to comfort the heartache. Jim needed to practice Inner Bonding until he was strong enough to love, which means strong enough to keep his heart open in the face of rejection, and strong enough to be willing to lose the other person rather than lose himself.

Jim did practice Inner Bonding on a daily basis and he gradually learned to speak up for himself and not take rejection personally. As a result, his fear of rejection diminished to the point where he was no longer willing to give himself up or withdraw in the face of a woman's controlling, rejecting behavior. Jim is now happily married and looking forward to starting the family he always wanted.

Overcoming Fears of Intimacy

By Dr. Margaret Paul

The fear of intimacy is based on the false belief of not being good enough. Believing this leads to fears of rejection and engulfment, which then cause the fear of intimacy.

Sam, age 42, had never been married. It's not that Sam had never fallen in love. But every time a relationship had started to move toward commitment, Sam ran.

When Sam's loneliness became overwhelming to him, he called me for help.

"I want to be in a relationship, yet every time I get close to someone, I run away. I'm not even sure what I'm so afraid of, but I must be terrified of something!"

"Sam, what happens inside you when you like someone?" The following answer and resulting dialogue came out over time, but I've condensed it here.

"I think that if this person really knew me, she wouldn't like me. I do all kinds of nice things for her so she will like me. Then, after a while, I start to feel trapped and I pull back. She gets upset about my pulling back and I then feel even more trapped. Once she gets mad at me, I stop feeling in love with her. That's when I decide she is not the right one for me. This has happened over and over."

"So the first problem is that you believe that she won't like you when she gets to know you. Out of your fear of rejection, you try to control how she feels about you by doing nice things for her. But then you feel trapped and your fear of engulfment - of being controlled by her and losing yourself in the relationship - kicks in. Then you run. It sounds like your underlying fears of rejection and engulfment are controlling your life and not letting you share love."

"That's exactly right! So what do I do about this?"

Sam was operating from core shame - the false belief that there was something basically wrong with him. As long as he believed that he was inherently flawed and unlovable, he would fear rejection. Out of

his fear of rejection, he would give himself up until he felt trapped, and then he would run.

The part of Sam that believed that he wasn't good enough is his wounded self. The basis of the wounded self in all of us is our core shame false belief - the belief that we are inherently flawed. Our wounded self does not know that we are a perfect child of God, an individual expression of the Divine. Because the wounded self operates out of false beliefs, rather than from the truth of who we really are, it wants to control how people feel about us. Sam needed to develop a loving Adult part of himself - a part of himself connected to a spiritual Source of love and truth - in order to heal his core shame.

The six-step Inner Bonding process is a profound process for developing the loving Adult and for healing the fears and limiting beliefs of the wounded self. As Sam started to practice Inner Bonding, he slowly developed an Adult self who loved and valued his core Self, his true essence. As he developed this inner sense of personal power, he lost his fear of rejection. He saw that if a woman rejected him, it was because of her fears rather than because of his inadequacy or unlovability. Because he stopped taking rejection personally, he stopped fearing it.

Once he stopped fearing rejection, he stopped giving himself up in his attempt to control how a woman felt about him. Once he stopped giving himself up, he stopped feeling trapped and engulfed in a relationship.

Over time, by consistently practicing the Six Steps of Inner Bonding, Sam developed a powerful inner loving Adult self and healed his fears of rejection and engulfment. Sam is now happily married with a child on the way.

This did not happen quickly. It took Sam time to heal his false beliefs about his own adequacy and lovability. It took time to develop a personal relationship with a spiritual Source of love and truth. It took time to be in truth with a woman rather than being "nice" to try to control how she felt about him. It took time for him to feel safe in being himself. It took a couple of years of devoted Inner Bonding work.

But if you were to ask Sam whether all the time it took was worth it, he would look at you with shining eyes and a huge grin and you would

feel the joy within him. You would have no doubt that it was worth whatever time it took.