

LIFE COACHING

EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT? YOU GOT THIS!

**IF YOUR
RELATIONSHIPS
ARE CRUISING ON
AUTOPILOT, IT'S
TIME TO PUSH THE
RESTART BUTTON.
LIFE COACHING
CAN HELP YOU
GET STARTED.**

JUNE ALLAN CORRIGAN



Ideally, we all have someone in this world—maybe even two or three—with whom we feel secure enough to share our deepest thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or criticism. That’s emotional intimacy in a nutshell. It could be a need to vent or cry or get something off your chest, but it could also just as easily be the hesitant sharing of some lifelong dream you’ve always had. Or simply some rambling thoughts you wouldn’t want anyone to hold against you later. The point is, the person listening to your words, does precisely that. Listens.

“I think the deepest connection occurs when another person can acknowledge what you’re saying and validate it without coming up with a solution,” says Kathy Dawson, a relationship coach in Cleveland, Ohio and author of *Diagnosis: Married*. “Just kind of meeting the person where they’re at and saying, ‘Wow! So this is what’s going on for you!’ Even if, deep inside, you don’t agree, or you wouldn’t have felt the same way in the same situation, you set your own feelings aside and you’re just there for the person so that they walk away confident they’ve been heard.”

When emotional intimacy is absent

And if emotional intimacy isn’t present? Dawson likens it to having a hard-wired alarm in your body go off. Insecurity mounts and you feel the need to protect yourself. There’s no sense your intended confidante has your back or that they’re really going to hear you and not judge you. Trust—a word that belongs in the same breath as emotional intimacy—is nonexistent.

Unfortunately, today’s social media-driven world can often preclude emotional intimacy even among people who have an established trust. We’ve all seen couples in restaurants staring at their phones instead of engaging in conversation—it’s not a good formula for staying connected and it certainly doesn’t give a new relationship a chance to blossom. Dawson recommends people set boundaries around their technology, perhaps even designate two gadget-free nights a week. Dinner time should be an obvious no-go zone for phones and the car might be another. Consider how many opportunities for intimate discussion are lost when one person drives but their passenger is engrossed in their phone.

Be emotionally

invested

olidays, no matter if they're for a family reunion or Christmas, can be a double-edged sword for emotional intimacy. On the one hand, there's solid opportunity for moments of connection to occur, whether it's heart-to-heart conversations over food preparation and clean-up or fondly shared reminiscences about times past. On the other hand, real danger lies in getting sucked into the vortex of planning or executing the perfect party to the degree where it gets in the way of being in the moment with someone you really care about. Being physically present but mentally elsewhere really drains emotional intimacy from a

relationship. The better alternative is to view the event as a bridge to connecting with the people in your life. Don't sweat the details and instead savor the many little conversations and outbursts of laughter that occur in the midst of all the hubbub.

Special gatherings aside,

it's important to integrate opportunities to strengthen and maintain emotional intimacy into everyday life. One tool that Dawson recommends to her clients is to institute a high-low discussion around the dinner table. As in, ask what was each person's high point and each person's low point that day. The person whose turn it is to answer gets everyone's undivided attention and then other family members acknowledge what they've heard by repeating it back in their own words. Another good practice to establish is to take note of things people in your life do right, rather than the opposite, which is more often the norm.

This can apply to new relationships as well as old. Rather than remark on someone's penchant for always being five minutes late, instead comment on something they're doing well. "Building someone up rather than tearing them down is another way to build emotional intimacy," says Dawson. Frequently it's small moments rather than grand gestures that forge the best path to a close bond.

Freelance writer **June Allan Corrigan** addresses a wide range of topics including business, medicine, lifestyle, parenting and education. Visit her website at junecorrigan.com.