

Expert Relationship Advice: First Comes Love – Now What? Creating Intimacy Without Intercourse



By [Amy Osmond Cook](#)

The power of love can never be underestimated, but it is also often misunderstood. As one of the leading Google search topics, the matter of love and how it pairs with sex is on most people's minds. It's possible to have sex without love, but can love survive without sex?

Most people say yes. A [study](#) conducted at San Diego State University reported that couples who reported having a

satisfying relationship also reported having less sex as the relationship progressed. In an era where sex is used to sell everything from perfume to bathroom cleaner, this study shows that people may be buying it, but they aren't necessarily "doing it."

Relationship Advice on How Sex Relates to Love

"Despite their reputation for hooking up, Millennials and the generation after them (known as iGen or Generation Z) are actually having sex less often than their parents and grandparents did when they were young," says Jean M. Twenge, the study's lead author and professor of psychology at San Diego State University.

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Recognizing that romantic love and intercourse can be mutually exclusive is encouraging news for millions of people who are unable to "seal the deal." Whether limited by emotional challenges or physical obstacles, these champions of celibacy are coming forward with candid conversations, new desires, and innovative ways to create satisfying relationships beyond the bedroom.

"While these people are unable to have intercourse, they still crave intimacy but are unable to open up about it," says Laura Brashier, founder of RomanceOnly.com, a site that promotes and supports those seeking intercourse-free relationships for "whatever" reason. "I've discovered that people facing difficulties with sexual intercourse still want to show love and be loved in return."

1. Connection: Successful connection requires recognizing the difference between love and erotic love. "Love proper is to do

with the other person,” says [Olivia Fane](#), [relationship author](#) and sex therapist. “It is about the care, respect, and understanding of that human other. Love like this grows; it cannot help it. The more of yourself you invest in another person, the more you receive.” This connection unites two beings into one unit; their pain is your pain, and their joy is yours too.

2. Unconditional Caring: An authentic love says I care how you feel. But loving unconditionally doesn’t mean you have the responsibility to deliver everything the other person wants. “When we love people unconditionally, we accept them as they are and how they aren’t and contribute to their happiness as wisely as we can,” says Greg Baer, MD., author of *Real Love: The Truth about Finding Unconditional Love & Fulfilling Relationships*. Connection happens when we genuinely care about the happiness of the person with whom we share our lives.

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3. Communication: It’s one of the most common pieces of [expert relationship advice](#): Honest and open communication is an integral part of a healthy, loving relationship. For people struggling with sexual intercourse, the anxiety that accompanies being honest about their inability is hard to express. “Knowing what each party brings into a relationship and being able to own and acknowledge this can often provide a basis from which a couple can grow and improve together,” says psychotherapist [Michael Betts, MSc, MBACP](#). Rather than viewing sexual intercourse as a deficit, people can emphasize other qualities that they can contribute to a relationship.

4. Intimacy: As noted earlier, intercourse does not equate to meaningful intimacy. In fact, in many cases, it is the total opposite. “Our cultural talent for commercialization has separated out sex from intimacy,” says [Lori H. Gordon](#). “In fact, intimacy involves both emotional and physical closeness and openness. But we wind up confusing the two and end up

feeling betrayed or used when, as often happens, we fail to satisfy our need for closeness in sex.” Sharing time and experiences, engaging in meaningful conversation, being responsive to needs, cuddling, and enjoying non-sexual physical contact help a couple feel valued, cared for, and safe. And all of these factors contribute to feelings of intimacy.

To paraphrase lyricist [Jackie DeShannon](#), what the world needs now is not more sex, but love, sweet love. And not just for some but for everyone. For those suffering from sexual challenges—as well as those who don’t—physical gratification outside of intercourse, within a loving relationship, is an intimacy in a league of its own where both sides win.

For more information about and articles by our relationship expert Dr. Amy Osmond Cook, click [here](#).