

# Experiments in Enlightening Relationships

From  
**Centering & The Art Of Intimacy**

Gay Hendricks, Ph.D.,  
and Kathlyn Hendricks, Ph.D.

This chapter contains movement experiments and communication activities that illustrate the major principles and issues discussed in this book. In order to enlighten a relationship, it is essential to experience the concepts as well as to understand them intellectually.

Each activity has an introduction that explains its purpose. The instructions are designed to be read and followed directly from the book. Choose a comfortable time and place to explore these activities. You can choose between long experiments or short, those that are playful or those that are more deeply revealing. Feel free to expand and adapt these structures to your relationship and your needs. We have had a great deal of enlightening fun with these activities and hope you will too.

## **PARTNER STRETCHING**

In this activity you can support your partner's expansion and growth. You can also learn new ways to directly support each other.

### **Directions**

Face each other and stand with your legs about hip-width apart. Hold your partner's wrists firmly with your hands in the same way that trapeze artists do. Begin very gently and slowly to lean back from each other and feel where that stretches you. Then come back to supporting your own weight. Lean away again in a different direction, keeping your knees soft. Then come back to center.

Now experiment for several minutes using each other's weight to stretch your own body. You can turn your body and stand more on one leg to reach different areas, such as your sides. Then return to standing supporting your own weight, gently release wrists, and shake out your body.

## **BEING CLOSE—GETTING SEPARATE**

One of the major dynamic issues in relationships is how comfortable we are with the cycle of getting close to another person and seeking individual space. This activity will give you a framework in which to explore body cues and nonverbal communication with your partner that may show you your preferences and your blind spots in the space dance of relationship. This activity explores the fundamental pulsation in relationships — getting close and getting separate. If you have time to do only one activity in this section, we recommend that this be the one. You can do this experiment in pairs or in larger groups. You will have more movement possibilities in an open space.

### **Directions**

Begin by paying close attention to yourself as you move about the room. Each of you should keep moving as fast or slowly as you wish, noticing that your preference may change. Let yourself move as close to your partner as you wish, then begin moving away as far as you want to before you start coming close again. Continue this spacial yo-yo for a few minutes. Observe how you see your partner, any internal tugs or pressures as you move closer or further away, and your connection with yourself.

Now take a few minutes to share your experience with your partner. Stick to "I" statements; for example, "I felt a tightening in my chest when you turned away." Let each of you have time to speak and to listen. Give yourself permission to be surprised.

The next part of this activity has a mover and a responder. Decide who will take which part first. Now, responder, you are going to stand in one spot and use your hands to signal the mover. Mover, you are going to resume moving closer to and further away from the responder. When the mover is as close as you want, responder, raise your hands, and at that signal, mover, you will start walking further away. When the mover is as far away as you wish at that moment, responder, raise your hands again to signal the mover to come closer again.

The mover will keep moving without pausing. Start very slowly so you will have an opportunity to sense all the levels of response in yourself. After a few minutes, mover, experiment with different speeds, levels in space, and directions that you move.

Take five or ten minutes for this part. At the end of this time exchange roles and begin again very slowly. Recognize that each pulsation of closer and further away may be different.

When each of you has experimented with both roles, take some time to talk about your experience and your discoveries. You may have uncovered some patterns you had not noticed before. You may have a request for your partner or something you realize you need to explore further. Risk taking the attitude that this activity was an unopened treasure chest full of jewels that will enhance your relating. Note down any agreements you make. Then take a moment to nonverbally acknowledge your partner.

## **POWER POLARITIES**

Power struggles have to have opposites. If there is a winner, there must be a loser. In relationships that are based on the win-lose belief, scarcity is the force that drives us to outmaneuver our partner. There is only so much space, love, or freedom, and we need to get ours! This activity will give you the opportunity to take a reading of your current investment in power struggles with your partner. The structures are very simple, so experiment with any variations that occur to you.

## **Directions**

Begin by facing each other, and move in the following way: when one of you comes forward, the other must back up. Conversely, if one of you retreats, the other must move forward. Keep moving without stopping for a few minutes.

Now change the structure to the vertical dimension. If one of you is high in space, the other must go low to the same degree. If you lie on the floor, for example, your partner should stretch up to the ceiling.

As in the last part, keep moving for a few minutes.

This polarity is about how much psychic space you allow yourself and your partner. If one of you is feeling GREAT, does the other become depressed or try to depress the first one? If one of you feels low energy, does that pull on the other or create a sense of guilt in either of you? The previous experiments gave you some information about how attached you are to your partner moving about in the world. Spend a few minutes now talking about anything you discovered.

Now we will extend these activities a little by playing follow-the-leader. One of you be in charge first, and play with leading your partner around the room with different contact points: hold their hand, push their shoulders, drape an arm around their shoulders, grip an elbow, hold an ear. Create as many contact spots as you can imagine. Follower, at first be very cooperative. Just go anywhere they lead you as fast or slow as they wish. After a few minutes let yourself get in touch with the part of you that DOESN'T WANT TO GO. Start resisting with the intention of discovering how you react to pressure. Just a minute or so of this part seems sufficient. Don't be surprised if you feel tired; resistance takes lots of energy.

Now switch roles; follower become leader. Begin by experimenting with many points of contact and lots of cooperation. Allow this time to be different, to develop in its own direction. After a few minutes, follower, it is your turn to resist. Open up to explore your style of not wanting to go. Some people go rigid, others collapse, some squirm and wiggle away, others go on the offensive. What is your individual style?

When we become aware of our internal preferences we can recognize them before they start taking over in patterns that become power struggles. Take time to share your experiences in these activities.

## **EXPLORING INTENTIONS**

Intentions are like the foundation for a building. They determine what can be built, how high it can go, and how strong the structure of your relationships can be. Whatever we communicate to our partner reflects our intention. Our ability to solve problems is especially sensitive to underlying intentions. This activity can be used to explore different intentions and their impact on the quality of your relating. You may decide to focus on one of the following intentions or explore the whole series.

## **Directions**

Face your partner, either sitting or standing, and choose a leader. Follower, you are going to move exactly as the leader does, as if you were looking in a mirror. Leader, begin moving slowly to allow the follower time to match your unique style. When you feel yourselves moving together, the leader will begin to explore different intentions. You won't need to do anything differently; just actively think the intention as you move. Exchange roles after each intention, so you will remain parallel in your exploration.

- Start with the intention to do it perfectly. Intend to mirror your partner with no mistakes, to do it just right. Continue with this intention for a few minutes, noticing how you feel in your body and how you experience your partner.
- Mirror now with the intention of getting your partner's approval. Let your movement flow out of the intention to get a seal of approval that only your partner can supply.
- Let your intention shift to being right, knowing better. See if your intention results in any subtly critical or disapproving behavior. Invite any patterns into awareness.
- Let the intention to be fully present flood your body as you move. Intend to be here with all of you.
- Both of you move with the intention of being with your partner. Loosen any holding onto doing exactly the same movement and let your intention shape your movement. Verbally explore the effect of your different intentions on what you experienced.

## **OK—NOT OK**

In this activity you will get a chance to clean out the closet. The debris consists of old roles and behaviors that may be spilling out into your relationship. This activity can also increase your listening and observing potential.

### **Directions**

Take turns letting your whole body try on messages you received as a child about what behavior was OK. Some familiar messages are: stand up straight; keep your belly in; be still; look pleasant; stand tall; be graceful; etc. Repeat those familiar messages to yourself and see how your body carries them. Partner, watch and help your partner notice if those messages, that way of moving the body, is familiar. You may be behaving as if those instructions still have power and may have forgotten that you have choice about your relationship to your body. When you have both tried on several OK messages and gotten a chance to notice whether you are choosing them or doing them automatically, shake your arms and legs for a moment.

Then take turns sharing the ways your body carries not-OK messages. Some familiar not-OK messages are: don't slouch; take that sulking to your room; that's not ladylike; don't sprawl all over the place; don't be a sissy; etc. Explore your past for messages about behaviors that were not OK, and try on the forbidden action. How does that feel to your body? What does your partner notice when you let your body move in ways you learned were not all right? Take turns, and be sure to observe with love.

After exchanging body positions, you may decide that some behaviors are archaic and best changed or dropped. Talk to your partner about ways you can support each other in renewing your relationship with your body and staying in touch with your changing needs.

## **ENLIVENING**

Nothing seems to deaden the joyful spark in relationship faster than repetition. The choice to settle for security and sameness often leads to boredom. Enlivening at all levels comes from variety, doing

it differently. Experiment with this activity with the intention of changing your perspective, opening yourself to other possibilities.

### **Directions**

Put on some music you enjoy. One partner will move any way he or she likes, on the floor stretching, sitting or standing, swinging, rolling, or just shuffling around. The other partner's task is to notice when the mover begins repeating, either in the quality of the movement or the pattern. When the noticer observes repetition, interrupt the mover. Try both verbal and nonverbal methods. Explore lots of ways of interrupting him or her, including changing your own attitudes as you observe. After several minutes switch roles. When you have both experienced moving and enlivening, share your responses to the experiment. Allow for frustration and annoyance, as well as for excitement, because we can be cranky when someone awakens us from a nap.

As a variation to this activity, you may experiment with some routine you have in your relationship and change some aspect of it. For example, if you always sleep on the same side of the bed, change sides. If you always drive the car, let your partner. If dinner is always at 6:00 P.M. sharp, try a different schedule. Looking for ways to open new pathways in our relationships supports growth and generates sparks.

## **PAIRED WALKING**

We have used this simple activity a great deal to help partners get in touch with and share their preferred rhythms, their relationship to time and everything that follow time: decision-making, recreation and vacation choices, daily cycles of rest and activity, etc. Give yourself permission to move with your partner as if you had just met. It is especially fun to do paired walking outside.

### **Directions**

One of you begin walking in your most familiar style. Do not try to have perfect posture or adjust for your partner; just walk along, changing direction as you desire. Partner, you are going to follow behind. Take as much time as you need to match your partner's walk exactly. Notice how they hold their head, how they swing their arms, in what direction they swivel their hips and place their feet. Let your body take on the whole body-sense of their walk. Continue for several minutes, and then exchange roles.

Once you have exchanged roles, you might try several variations:

- Walk beside your partner, and try to match his or her walk without turning your head to notice.
- Leader, try changing your speed after your partner is matching you.
- Once the follower has matched your walk, leader, move aside and let him or her continue walking as you do. What do you notice?
- When your walking matches, leader, try thinking about something that is troubling you without telling your partner. Notice if your partner comments on any changes in your walk. Try on different feelings, such as Irritation, sadness, and excitement, and see if your partner notices any alteration or any change in his or her feelings.

## MOVEMENT CONVERSATIONS

This activity can help you notice how comfortable you are with the male and female aspects of yourself. As you exchange movement statements with your partner, you may begin to enjoy altering and expanding your expression.

### Directions

Begin sitting facing your partner. When you start this activity, take turns "speaking" with your gestures while your partner watches. Later on you may find your conversation overlapping.

Start by letting just your hands and arms speak for you. Take turns letting your hands be:

- shy
- silly
- irritated
- excited
- depressed
- strong and forceful
- seductive
- just the way you feel right now

Now let your hands rest while you take turns making faces at each other. Pull from your memory of being a kid, and try on the most outrageous faces you can. Add sounds.

Stand up now, and let as much of your whole body as you wish participate in movement and gesture exchanges that are:

- huge, giant-sized
- teeny-tiny
- only sharp angles and straight lines
- curved lines in space
- like moving underwater
- like feathers floating on the breeze
- zinging and flashing

Now exchange movements that express your ideas of masculinity and femininity. Feel free to exaggerate your gestures, to surprise yourself.

Save time when you finish to talk over your experiences.

## **BELLY DANCE**

This activity explores the question: Can I be all of me and still be fully in touch with my partner? Use some lively music that you enjoy as background to this activity.

### **Directions**

Stand belly to belly with your partner, arms outstretched, legs well balanced under you. Each of you move with the intention of taking up your full space, being as big as you are. Let your out-breath flow through your partner out into the universe. Play with touching the whole world through your partner. Continue for several minutes, then draw apart from each other and bounce up and down for a minute or so to ground yourself at this new energy level.

## **MOLDING**

This activity is a variation of the statues game you may have played as children. It will give you a chance to explore attitudes about role behavior that we usually take for granted. Let yourself question the source of your attitudes and your assumptions.

### **Directions**

Take turns molding each other's bodies as if they were clay you are shaping. Form your partner's body into your ideal male or female. Remember as your ideas change that clay can be remolded easily. After your partner is molded, have him or her begin to walk and make any additional suggestions to help him or her fit that mold. Give feedback about how you feel standing and moving in that role.

## **TAMING THE UPPER-LIMITS DRAGON**

When we understand that the only problem we really have in relationship is the upper-limits problem, getting more love than we know how to handle, we can ride the upper-limits dragon more easily. We can begin to notice our unique thoughts and behavior that signal an upper-limits issue. This activity can assist you in developing the skill to stay conscious longer before an old pattern takes over. Eventually, upperlimits issues can be noticed, acknowledged, and resolved quickly and with love. You can practice this skill with a partner or alone at any time in any setting.

### **Directions**

Review in your mind the most recent positive experience you had in your relationship. As you

review let one part of your mind notice any fleeting negative thoughts. They may be disguised as worry thoughts, such as something going wrong (rain, car breaking down), something going to happen before we get there (where your mind leaves the present moment), someone going to get hurt (the plane is going to crash), etc. By reviewing positive experiences you can become aware of your most common upper limits thoughts and images.

It is important to remember that these mental images occur *before* an actual obstacle appears, such as stubbing your toe, having an argument out of the blue, missing an appointment. So another kind of review is to remember the last accident or illness you experienced and recall what was going on in your life and relationship just before the obstacle appeared. The chapter on upper limits gives many examples of this phenomenon.

With these reviews fresh in your mind, you can practice taking a thought or image and asking yourself, "How am I experiencing this in my body?" Pause after asking this question and notice any changes in your breath, pains or pressures anywhere in your body, strange sensations, tightness. Take the most noticeable body phenomenon and breathe into it (even if it is in your big toe). Do not analyze or ask what to do about it, just be there. After a bit you will probably notice that the experience shifts in some way, and you may get a sudden idea of what this is about in your life. When your experience shifts, take a few deep breaths and stretch your body, especially your neck and torso. You can repeat this sequence as often as you wish, going back to thoughts, tracing them to their experience in your body, loving them, watching them dissolve.

## POSITIONS

Fear of letting go is one of the big problems we face in life and in our relationships. Loss of control, fear of catastrophe, lead us to protect ourselves from the unknown by taking positions about life. Here are some common positions we have heard:

- "I have to do it right."
- "I don't have time."
- "I have to keep it together."
- "I'll show you."
- "It's not fair."

Positions cause difficulty because they are red lights; we perceive them as a danger signal and shut down, decrease our aliveness. Each mental position we take has a direct physical correlate. We sculpt our bodies and our possibilities by the attitudes we adopt. This experiment is designed to explore positions and their effect on our interactions and perceptions. Another aspect of this experiment is to experience directly the vitality and connection to life that blossom when we dissolve old attitudes about life.

### Directions

Brainstorm with your partner for a few minutes and write down familiar thoughts and expressions, phrases you each find yourselves repeating internally or out loud. From that list choose a phrase to try on with your whole body. One partner repeat your phrase out loud several times while gesturing

simultaneously. The other partner will encourage you to exaggerate your tone of voice and your movements. It is like opera; you will play to the back row with larger-than-life mannerisms. When you both feel and see that the voice and gestures match in intensity, hold that position for a minute or so. Feel its effects on your sense of yourself, the way you experience your partner, what you see around you. Notice your breath and the particular tension of this position. After a minute or two, both of you begin to actively love that position about life. Breathe into it, make space around it, love whatever created the need for that position. Allow your love to dissolve the position in whatever way feels best, be it abrupt or melting. Then switch roles and let the reflector take a position to explore.

As a variation, the reflector can mirror the partner taking the position. As you try on your partner's position with your own body, you can experience his or her attitudes more deeply. You can also add to the innovative possibilities in the dissolving phase.

## SETTING INTENTIONS

This communication activity uses the intentions listed in Chapter Six in a structure that allows you to explore your communication style with each other.

### Directions

Stand facing each other, with the speaker holding the book open to the list of intentions. Let one of you go through all seven intentions before you switch roles. Speaker, say each intention out loud to your partner, then pause for ten to fifteen seconds afterward to notice any thoughts, feelings, or images that arise in your mind. Listener, you have two major tasks. First, listen with your whole body as your partner says an intention. Do you have any internal responses to that intention? If so, notice and acknowledge them. Second, notice how the speaker delivers the communication. Is his or her body aligned, or does some body part list or slump? Listen to the tone of voice; watch for mannerisms or gestures that detract from the direct communication of the intention. Give the speaker feedback about what you notice.

Repeat each intention until the listener feels, "Yes, I got it, that's clear. I hear you." Let your overall intention in this activity be to communicate directly and truthfully. When one partner has completed the list, switch roles.

### *LIST OF INTENTIONS*

- I am willing to be totally independent and totally close.
- I am willing to have my relationships be a force that takes me to full enlightenment.
- I am willing to clear up anything in the way of my full enlightenment and ability to be close.
- I am willing to have other people be fully empowered in my presence.
- I am willing to transform myself in whatever ways are necessary to serve my highest evolution and have the highest quality relationships with others.
- I am willing to take space as often as necessary to nurture myself and the relationship.
- I am willing to have our relationship be about giving and receiving maximum positive energy.

## INCREASING LOVE

One of our biggest issues as humans is acknowledging our innate lovableness. Each of us has pockets of experience and feeling that we just know are not lovable. Our relationships are hampered by this fundamental illusion, as we try to hide our unlovable places, improve them, or make Up for them. The purpose of this communication activity is to discover that all of you is totally lovable.

### Directions

Sit cross-legged facing each other (or sit in chairs), and hold hands lightly. Continue looking at each other as you repeat this phrase silently, "You are totally lovable." Pause after each repetition for several seconds, and notice any internal response.

Now take turns repeating this phrase out loud, again pausing between repetitions. Then take time to share memories or issues that may have arisen. You can add another round of exchange here in which you say, "I am totally lovable," until you feel the truth of that phrase deeply.

Now each of you identify a place in your body that feels unlovable. One at a time, tell your partner where you feel unlovable, and let them actively love that part of you until you feel directly in touch with its lovableness. The partner who is loving can let love stream from his or her eyes and hands and do whatever seems necessary to communicate the other partner's total lovableness. You can repeat this phrase with other parts of you until you feel filled with love.

You might find you have lots of energy following this activity, and you might want to find a new way to share that love with each other.

## FEEDBACK

Communication has many levels. To enrich your relationship, this activity expands the routes that we generally travel in our interactions. It is designed to increase your awareness of the subtle cues to which you respond. When we unconsciously respond to nonverbal signals, mixed messages, and crossed communication can begin to impede the flow of relating.

### Directions

Take turns completing the following two sentences, giving your partner a chance to respond.

1. "I notice [a body gesture or expression], and I wonder what that means." Example: I notice that you stopped breathing just then, and I wonder what that means.
2. I notice [a body gesture or expression], and I am afraid that it means \_\_\_\_\_.  
Example: I notice that your forehead furrowed and I am afraid it means you are angry at me.

Take time to clear up any ambiguity, to talk about what you meant to communicate, and to acknowledge any intentions you or your partner developed from this activity.

## EXPRESSION CYCLES

This communication activity is designed to help you learn how you know what you want and how to express your desires clearly. We often hear, especially from women, "I don't KNOW what I want! I've never thought about it!" Learning that we are equals involves opening up to our deepest needs and wishes, noticing and dissolving whatever blocks their expression.

### Directions

*Part 1:* Take turns completing the phrase, "Right now I feel \_\_\_\_\_" Before you say the phrase, take several deep breaths, stretch your body, and notice the tinglings, pressures, and other internal sensations. Take turns repeating this phrase several times, then use movement or a gesture to complete the sentence for several more repetitions.

*Part 2:* Stand facing your partner. One person will be the speaker and the other will be the listener. Speaker, repeat the phrase, "I want," as many times as you need to until you feel the phrase in your body. Listener, give your partner feedback about the tone of their voice, whether they keep eye contact, how they hold their body as they speak. Also notice your own experience. Then exchange roles.

*Part 3:* Take turns completing the phrase, "Right now I feel \_\_\_\_\_, and I want \_\_\_\_\_" For example, "Right now I feel irritable, and I want to take a walk." Or, "Right now I feel excited, and I want to be close to you."

## COMPLETING FEELING CYCLES

This communication activity is about expanding your perception of the way energy moves in the body. It is structured to allow you and your partner to experience deep and complete feeling cycles. You may want to take two separate times to complete this activity, as it is longer and more intense than other experiments in this chapter.

### Directions

One of you, the feeler, will lie down in a warm, comfortable place. Your partner, the toucher, will sit facing you at your side.

Toucher, place one hand gently on your partner's throat. Let your other hand skim over his or her torso until you click into the "anger spot." Then let your hand come to rest on that place.

Feeler, let that anger center begin to speak inside you. Let those feelings come up and begin to form in your mind. Then let the feelings turn into words; let yourself say, "I'm angry." Toucher, catch the pulsation of anger and feel it in your own body. Breathe into those feelings, and love yourself and love your partner for every ounce of anger he or she feels. When the anger subsides, toucher, tell your partner, "I love you for everything."

Now, toucher, allow the hand that was on the anger center to begin a float above your partner's torso again until you find the fear spot. Let your touch invite your partner's deepest fear right up to the top. See if you can also let that fear through your own body. Feeler, allow the fear to rise in your body until the words form, "I'm afraid." Toucher, catch each wave of fear and give it back to your partner with love. After the fear feels complete, toucher, focus on loving your partner

deeply, loving your way through the fear until the connection between your hands feels clear.

Now, toucher, move the hand that was over the fear center around until you find and touch the place that says, "I'm glad to be alive," the place that shouts out the most liveliness and joy. Toucher, it is your job to let your partner know that there is no limit to positive feelings. Let your touch take the lid off. Feeler, find a phrase that best expresses your relationship to life and let that resonate in your being. Begin to ride that feeling up into words. Toucher, love that connection with life your partner has inside, and when the communication subsides, love your partner for BEING. Love him or her not for what he or she is going to do, but just for being him or herself.

Toucher, now place one hand on your partner's forehead and one on the pelvis. Imagine that a long, slender balloon that is filled with love runs up the core of his or her body. Let love gently ripple up and down the body between your hands.

Then gently separate hand contact, and take whatever time and touch you need to complete this communication. Make eye contact, hug, be with, talk.

## **UNDERTONES**

This communication activity is about secrets we do not suspect we have. The exercise focuses on the quality of voice in conversation and the subtle shadings that flesh out the words we use. In relationship it is not so much what we say as how we say it. In this activity you will have a chance to explore these nuances.

### **Directions**

Using a cassette deck to record your conversation, tell your partner something about your relationship you had previously withheld. Each of you take a turn. Then replay the entire conversation, listening for the undertones in your voices as you spoke. See if you can discern your intentions and your motivations in the tone of your conversation. Did you say what you really meant to say? Do you hear any unexpressed emotion? Were you justifying or blaming? Let your partner give you feedback about the things he or she heard as you spoke.

Then talk to each other about the same issue, with the intention of telling the deepest truth of your experience. Focus on just that, and notice how your communication emerges. After each of you has had a turn, listen to the tape again.