



The Intimacy Factor: The Ground Rules for Overcoming the Obstacles to Truth, Respect, and Lasting Love

Pia Mellody, Lawrence S. Freundlich

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In her first book in over 10 years, Pia Mellody—author of the groundbreaking bestsellers *Facing Codependence* and *Facing Love Addiction*—shares her profound wisdom on what it takes to sustain true intimacy and trusting love in our most vital relationships.

Drawing on more than 20 years' experience as a counsellor at the renowned Meadows Treatment Centre in Arizona, Mellody now shares what she has learned about why intimate relationships falter—and what makes them work. Using the most up-to-date research and real-life examples, including her own compelling personal journey, Mellody provides readers with profoundly insightful and practical ground rules for relationships that achieve and maintain joyous intimacy.

This invaluable resource helps diagnose the causes of faulty relationships—many of them rooted in childhood—and provides tools for readers to heal themselves, enabling them to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

The Intimacy Factor: The Ground Rules for Overcoming the Obstacles to Truth, Respect, and Lasting Love Details

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From Reader Review The Intimacy Factor: The Ground Rules for Overcoming the Obstacles to Truth, Respect, and Lasting Love for online ebook

Gary says

Pia Mellody is Senior Clinical Advisor for The Meadows, one of the top addiction treatment centers in the country, and a respected therapist and author of books on codependency and sexual addiction. The Intimacy Factor explores family of origin dysfunction that is the root cause of many of our unhealthy adult behaviors, especially addictions. This book should be required reading for all married couples who want to become parents.

Shannon says

I'm going to need to pick through this a few times to be ready to apply it. The language was off-putting at times (too psych-y for me). But I think there are techniques here that will be helpful in dealing with my past and making space for relationships in the present.

Tamara says

The first half of the book is a condensed version of "Breaking Free" which was good if you have no background in codependency but I didn't enjoy the lengthy review. The second part is the meat, real excellent instructions about communication and boundaries. The case studies at the end could have been condensed.

Libbet Bradstreet says

A lot of great information presented in a gentle and concise way. The introductory chapters feel a bit rudimentary if you're already familiar with books regarding boundaries and trauma. The meat of the book is really the central portion where Mellody presents concepts related to the "talking boundary" and "listening boundaries". To me, this felt like a fairly new and ingenious way to think about the issue of personal boundaries. Some of the case examples were repetitive, but I think they were needed for those of us who think less abstractly.

Ginaschuchman says

I've trained with Pia and love her model. Facing Codependency is by far her best book and I use it with clients every day to work through issues.

This book is a good companion piece because it goes more into detail about boundaries in relationships and

how to speak and listen using boundaries. My women's group has been very positively impacted by it.

Jonathan Karmel says

Many of us are walking around with “toxic” shame, which is baggage that we’re carrying from our childhood. This book is about getting rid of that baggage so that you can develop fully as a human. A fully developed human acts with humility, aka “healthy” shame. A fully functional adult has enough self-esteem to maintain the boundaries that are necessary to have a healthy intimate relationship with another person.

A functional adult feels and can express healthy shame. When a functional adult acts imperfectly, the person feels vulnerable, embarrassed and humble. They have a sense of humility. The person thinks: Well, no one’s perfect. I’m human. I forgive myself, and I still love myself. They have faith in themselves. If they are religious, they might try to let the grace of God be with them, to accept a higher power or tell themselves: God doesn’t make mistakes, this is how they were meant to be. Functional adults in some way seek the serenity to accept the things they cannot change, the courage to change the things they can change and the wisdom to know the difference.

The dysfunctional adult does not feel and express healthy shame, but rather tends to act in the extreme as a result of “toxic” shame. They wobble back and forth between thinking that they are either (1) worthless (less than human) or (2) grandiose (better than human), between feeling (1) too vulnerable or (2) invulnerable (aka narcissistic, entitled, exploitative, arrogant). They (1) feel bad about themselves to the point of self-detestation or, (2) through the delusion of perfectionism, believe they can always be “good,” can always do what they “should” do. They may be (1) too dependent on others, or (2) not able to recognize or admit that they have any needs at all. They may (1) spew out thoughts and emotions or (2) be walled in and unable to express their intimate thoughts. They may be (1) childish and immature or (2) overly mature, rigid and controlling. As explained below, this is because they were (1) a *wounded child* until about age 5, and then they became (2) an *adapted wounded child* after age 5, and they continue as adults to be guided by their “inner child.”

Healthy, authentic children display the following attributes: (1) vulnerability, (2) nascent reason—seeking to understand reality with intelligence, honesty and curiosity, (3) dependence, (4) age-appropriate immaturity and (5) exuberant energy. Adults are often dysfunctional because these attributes were squelched when they were children. This may happen because the child was disempowered or falsely empowered.

Disempowerment can result from overt or covert shame. An example of overt shame is a parent who always gives his children from a very early age a message something like: “What’s wrong with you? Stop crying, be quiet, take care of yourself, why can’t you just grow up and behave?” Covert shame is a parent who doesn’t explicitly say any of these things, but subtly nudges a child toward believing these kinds of things through “positive” reinforcement when a child does what the child “should” be doing. False empowerment can come from a parent who is too dependent on a child, and the parent and child become enmeshed in a co-dependent relationship; or a child who needs to rebel and get in trouble in order to get attention from the parents.

Dysfunctional adults don’t know how to feel and express all their emotions, so feelings of sadness, fear, guilt and shame, may just come out as anger or contempt. The dysfunctional couple constantly bickers, but the things they are bickering about are not the true source of their feelings. These fights get triggered by one partner doing something that makes the other partner feel the toxic shame that the other partner felt as a child. It triggers the feelings that the other felt as a child because as a child the other partner was not able to be a healthy, authentic child. Intimacy is going to trigger feelings of toxic shame.

A dysfunctional adult does not have proper boundaries in relationships with other people.

A person with talking boundaries is able to express what they think and feel in a healthy way. They are able to state objective facts. They can express how they feel. Examples: “I am angry at you because . . ., I am afraid that . . ., I feel lonely, I want to tell you how grateful I am that you . . ., I am excited about . . ., I love you, I am embarrassed that I . . ., I regret that . . .”

A person without talking boundaries acts angrily (which is different from saying “I am angry at you because . . .”), and they express sarcasm, judgment, blame and contempt. They try to manipulate instead of stating directly what they want. They don’t take responsibility for their own feelings, but rather begin sentences with the phrase, “You’re making me feel . . .” Rather than expressing how they feel, they might say “You just don’t understand me” (which implies that the person can never understand them). Note that people should have values, and it is appropriate to be “judgmental” towards a person who is clearly doing something immoral; however, people who act judgmental all the time have a value system that is “too big.” They may think they have “good values,” but what they really have is no close family members or friends.

A person with listening boundaries can hear criticism and evaluate whether the criticism is true, false or questionable. If true, the person may immediately express sincere embarrassment or contrition and ask for forgiveness. If questionable, the person will try to understand the criticism to understand if there really is something true about that criticism. The listener is focused on trying to understand what is true about what the talker is saying—if nothing else, why the talker feels the way the talker feels. The listener might feel shame, but it is healthy shame, the feeling of being human; and the listener is still okay with being the human being that they are, even if they have done something that is a reason for being criticized.

A person without listening boundaries does not react with a healthy sense of shame. Instead, they act less than human or more than human. The less than human reaction is to “feel like shit,” to feel completely worthless, to feel like any criticism is an attack on the entirety of your being, to feel completely over-exposed. The more than human reaction is to put up a wall and act defensively, to refuse to consider the possibility that the criticism has any merit whatsoever and to try to deflect the criticism back on the talker.

When you have inherited from childhood feelings of toxic shame, you need to give it back to your parents rather than continuing to carry their shame. When we experience our own shame, we believe that someone has seen us as we really are—human and imperfect. When you can feel your own shame, you know that you are not a god. It keeps you from being judgmental toward your partner and helps you speak with humility. It keeps you the size you really are. Humility is recognizing both our weaknesses and our strengths. It is not about denying our values.

On the other hand, a person needs to feel perfectly imperfect. This means that even though you act imperfectly, you have faith that you still are perfect just the way you are. Some people just have faith in themselves, while others would say that they believe in God and that they are the way God made them. To believe that you are *perfectly* imperfect is to have self-esteem. If we believe we are worthless, nobody is going to be able to convince us that we are lovable and have inherent worth, because what another would tell us is in too great conflict with the bad stuff we believe about ourselves. But if we have self-esteem, we can have healthy, intimate relationships in which both partners are able to express love and feel loved.

Evan Anderson says

An honest, clear and immensely helpful book, which really helped ground me while going through a difficult patch in relationship. "Supportive" is a key word here, which is exactly what one wants and needs while looking for perspective while navigating the fast-changing seas of intimacy.

Antonina Cappello says

Excellent personal and professional resource on the use of boundaries in improving our relationships.

Ro says

it is written at a high level - like a text book and I find myself having to go over pages twice, BUT it is really really useful for understanding dysfunctional people's reactions to certain discussions and the way they talk. I am finding it highly useful and too bad I didn't read it 20 yrs ago!

If you have dysfunctional family members, this is a must read.

After having finished it, it does have value, but I can't give it more than 3 stars due to its reading like a textbook.

Rachel says

Well written and quite informative. A guide for partners and parents to read about self love, boundaries and listening.

Bholdsworth7 says

The core message from the book and the key to intimacy is acknowledging the truth of who we are and respecting the truth of others. By establishing effective boundaries, we learn to maintain our inherent worth, express our truth, and are open to hearing and respecting others. The book delves into a deep examination of the childhood traumas that we bring forward into adulthood and constrict our ability to establish solid relationships. It takes time and effort to work thru boundaries with your partner. This book has a number of exercises to help establish effective patterns of talking and listening. I especially liked her discussion about truth. Different from honesty - your truth is about communicating what you saw, felt, heard with no adjectives - just speak so that you are known without controlling or manipulating. Our truth is our perception but is the best method to communicate our thoughts and emotions. The ability to talk and listen without interference from our trauma, our attachments and our projections is fundamental to a successful relationship.

Roberta Hill says

Excellent

Very helpful insight into why we do what we do. A must read for anyone who grew up in a dysfunctional family and has no idea how to navigate in relationships.

Carla says

Love Pia Melody, especially if you are working with couples (therapy) or with a client who is a love “addict or avoidant”. Pia is amazing in her work and theories. If you are in the helping profession any of Apia’s books are a must read.

Vladimir says

I found some useful examples in this book like healthy functional boundaries including both listening and speaking boundaries.

I can't praise this book because the psychological approach suggested is questionable, but overall it was worth time spent to analyze some of the issues many of us struggle with.

ck says

Geared more toward the professional, but provides a clear window into how her therapy works to overcome life long obstacles in relationships. Offers insightful suggestions in how to decipher truth about self and respect the truth of others... the portals through which true intimacy and spirituality enter.
