

36 Questions for Intimacy

The Research-Backed Path to Deep Connection

Overview

The 36 Questions for Intimacy, developed by psychologist Dr. Arthur Aron at SUNY Stony Brook, is one of the most scientifically validated exercises for creating closeness between people. Originally designed to study the formation of intimate relationships in the lab, these questions have been used by thousands of couples to deepen their connection. The exercise takes 45-60 minutes and progressively moves from surface-level to deeply vulnerable sharing.

The Science Behind the Questions

- **Gradual Vulnerability:** Questions are ordered to slowly increase self-disclosure, building trust stepwise
- **Reciprocal Self-Disclosure:** Taking turns creates balance and prevents one person from dominating
- **Sustained Attention:** An hour of focused conversation signals that you prioritize knowing each other
- **Novel Information:** Even long-term couples discover new things, reigniting curiosity and interest
- **Creates Emotional Safety:** The structure provides permission to share things you might not spontaneously bring up

How to Use This Exercise

Setup: Find 60 uninterrupted minutes. Turn off devices. Sit comfortably facing each other. Keep water nearby - deep conversation is work!

Taking Turns: One person asks a question, the other answers. Then the asker answers the same question. Move to the next question. No skipping allowed - every question matters.

Pace: Don't rush. Some questions merit 2-3 minutes each. It's fine if you don't finish all 36 in one session.

Listening: When your partner shares, just listen. Don't judge, problem-solve, or interrupt. Ask follow-up questions if they invite it.

Set I: Building Foundation (Questions 1-12)

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

Set II: Deepening Connection (Questions 13-24)

13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?
14. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?

18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

Set III: Maximum Vulnerability (Questions 25-36)

These final questions require the deepest vulnerability. By now, you've built trust. Lean into the discomfort - that's where real intimacy lives.

25. Make three true "we" statements each. For instance, "We are both in this room feeling..."
26. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share..."
27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for them to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how they might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

After the Questions

Dr. Aron's original study included a final step: four minutes of sustained eye contact. After the emotional vulnerability of the questions, this silent connection often feels profound. Many couples report feeling closer than they have in years.

Important Notes

- **Emotional Intensity:** Don't be surprised if tears come up. Vulnerability is emotional. Have tissues ready.
- **Not a One-Time Thing:** Couples benefit from returning to these questions annually as you both evolve
- **Privacy Matters:** What's shared stays between you. This builds trust for future vulnerability.
- **No Right Answers:** The goal is honest sharing, not impressing each other with perfect responses.
- **Follow-Up Conversations:** Themes will emerge that merit deeper discussion later. Note them.