

11 Characteristics That Will Destroy the Marital Intimacy You Crave

The following are 11 specific characteristics of intimacy anorexia. As you read through this, if you are the anorexic, try to keep your heart and mind open. If you're not sure if one applies to you, ask your spouse. He or she would most likely be able to give you a clear picture from their perspective.

Busy

The first characteristic of an intimacy anorexic is *being so busy you have little time for the spouse*. Let's start with inside the house. An intimacy anorexic keeps so busy that they have little time for their spouse. This may include: doing homework together with a child (without the spouse), playing with the children and excluding the spouse or working on solo projects around the house.

Technology is a dream come true for many intimacy anorexics, since it can feel as if they are actually doing something or relating to the images on some type of screen. The computer, and especially the internet, is the greatest avoidant strategy of our day.

Some intimacy anorexics have busy avoidant strategies outside of the home to actively withhold intimacy from their spouse. These activities can be positive and easily justified by the intimacy anorexic. The person who volunteers to avoid intimacy has a cause they are helping and can justify their absences. The religious person is saving the world, but intentionally withholding from their spouse.

Blame

Blame, as an anorexic characteristic, is almost universal. Blame comes to life *when an issue or problem comes up in the marriage and the anorexic blames or puts responsibility on the spouse for the issue, instead of acknowledging their contribution to the problem or issue.* As you understand anorexia better and how an intimacy anorexic wants to be in the “good box” all the time, you will see that it makes being flawed (irresponsible, thoughtless, careless, bad and so on) unacceptable to discuss (if you are the anorexic). Blaming is almost reflexive for many anorexics.

Withholding Love

The anorexic often has a difficult time perceiving the intangible nature of withholding love. To withhold love is *to not give love to your spouse the way you know how to, or how they have asked to be loved.* Each one of us wants to be loved, and yet we all experience being loved in many different ways. Spouses may want emotional sharing, long walks, a thoughtful note or gift that says, “I was thinking of you.” Some just want help around the house or with the children. Each spouse needs to be shown love, and the anorexic already knows how the spouse wants to be loved.

If you go back to dating, what meant a lot to him or her? If your life was dependent on your answer, could you say how your spouse feels your love the most? If you’re the intimacy anorexic, and you agree now that you know how your spouse receives love, then why are they doing without it? If you don’t have a clear rational reason, without blaming, let me suggest that you are actively, intentionally, withholding love from your spouse.

Withholding Praise

The withholding of praise is also a significantly recurring behavior for intimacy anorexics. To withhold praise is *to not share with your spouse about their positive qualities as a*

person and their positive impact on your life. Let's go back to "if your life depended on it...". If you had to write 10 things that are amazing and positive about your spouse or how he or she is impacting your life in a positive way, my bet is, again, you could make a list, and pretty quickly. Think about the last week or month, and how frequently you intentionally praised your spouse. How often are you praising your spouse in front of his or her family, your friends or even the children?

Withholding Sex

By far, of all the behaviors that are characteristics of intimacy anorexia, withholding of sex is probably the easiest to measure, and at the very least, most obvious. *Withholding sex from your spouse is avoiding having sex, sabotaging sexual encounters or not connecting emotionally during sex.* You can tell whether you are the spouse or the anorexic by observing the last time you had sex.

Withholding Spiritually

The characteristic of withholding spiritually is also only noticed by the spouse. Withholding spiritually is *withholding spiritual connectedness from your spouse.* This means regardless of faith practices or lack thereof, there is no real spiritual connecting behavior with the spouse. The anorexic might be religious to the hilt, but lacks spiritual authenticity in the presence of their spouse.

I've heard countless excuses, especially from the religious (regardless of faith) anorexic. *I do this just by myself. It's not my personality. My spouse is too spiritual (or not spiritual enough) so I don't connect with him or her spiritually.* Regardless of the rationalization, there is an absence of spiritual connecting between the intimacy anorexic and their spouse.

Feelings

This characteristic can be described as *being unwilling or unable to share feelings with their spouse*. Having difficulty sharing feelings is a universal characteristic of the intimacy anorexic. The sharing of feelings is an act of authenticity that can be scary, difficult or both for the intimacy anorexic. Their unwillingness or inability to share feelings can be intentional, so as to not give you love the way they know you like it. There is a time when it could legitimately be a skill deficit; in that case, when he or she does the Feelings Exercise with you, you will both experience real effort and connecting.

Criticism

Having ongoing or ungrounded criticism that leads to distance in the marriage is the seventh characteristic of intimacy anorexia. This can be the low-grade put-downs toward the spouse, noticing what they do wrong or just regularly pointing out their bad ideas.

The ungrounded criticism has little to do with reality. That strategy may be to push the spouse away or throw them off the trail of something; either way, it is intentionally creating distance.

Criticism in this category does not need to be spoken. Many spouses have told me that their husband or wife doesn't actually speak their criticism, but they can feel it constantly.

Anger or Silence

My experience with intimacy anorexics is that not all use silence or anger as a characteristic of their intimacy anorexia. However, those who use anger or silence as a characteristic use it with a vengeance. This intimacy anorexia characteristic can be described as *any use of anger or silence to push away, punish or control the spouse*.

If the intimacy anorexic uses anger or silence as a tool in their anorexia, you can expect it often. If the intimacy anorexic chooses to pursue recovery, this behavior will need consequences and boundaries to conquer. This characteristic is best explained by real-life examples such as those listed below from intimacy anorexics and their spouses.

Money

The characteristic of *controlling or shaming the spouse about money issues* is probably the least common among intimacy anorexics. Those who employ it use it with an iron fist. Most of the anorexics who control or shame with money do so by keeping the spouse ignorant of the finances, giving their spouse an allowance, making the spouse ask for money or not allowing the spouse to have a credit card or checkbook.

There is another side of controlling through money as well. I call it controlling through abundance. This spouse, male or female, has substantial money, but controls with it. Their attitude is, "I buy you everything, so don't complain about a lack of intimacy, love or sex." This type of controlling by money isn't as obvious as those who control by not giving.

Roommate

The characteristic I have seen in a vast majority of intimacy anorexics' marriage relationships can be summed up with the keyword "roommate." *The spouse of the anorexic feels like, or has started feeling like, a roommate.* I have heard this same comment so many times from spouses that I often add it to the end of my assessment of clients for anorexia.

If you have five or more "yes" responses to these characteristics, I would encourage you to read the book, *Intimacy Anorexia: Healing the Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage*. Be encouraged, there is always hope for change to those who are willing and able to apply the effort to change.

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books including, *Intimacy Anorexia: Healing the Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage*. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, or on his Facebook, by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.