

Share Witholds

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY ***

Sit together with your intimate partner or a close friend.

Decide who will be partner A, and who will be B.

Partner A, you are going to share five witholds:

Something significant and relevant to your relationship

That has not been said.

This could be a judgment, it could be something that happened,

Or it could be something you have been thinking or planning.

Keep your witholds short: no more than a sentence or two.

Partner B, after each withhold, just say "thank you."

Do not respond or react in any other way.

After five witholds, close your eyes and sit together for a few minutes,

Then switch roles.

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Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks talk about relationship like a dance floor. You are moving together, coming very close and then moving away for a moment, moving fast and then slow. Your relationship is set to different kinds of music with different tempos, and the tempo can change at any time. At any moment, you both need to be ready and available to respond to the change in the rhythm or the speed of the dance. They describe withheld communication as globs of chewing gum on the dance floor, where your shoes get stuck. The dance can no longer flow.

We may have all kinds of motivations in our life to be honest or dishonest. Here, we are using it as a practice not for the usual moral or strategic reasons, but to create more space for the dance to flow. When we share and dissolve our withholds in this way, we let go of the boundaries that keep us separate.

This practice is less about the exchange of information than it is about a spirit of self-effacing disclosure. The withholds you share may seem very significant and important: “I’m considering moving to Canada.” “I slept with your sister.” “Yesterday when you said what you did in the restaurant, I felt really hurt.” Or they might seem quite petty and mundane, not even worth mentioning: “I don’t like the color of your socks.” “Your stories bore me.” “I had a cigarette yesterday, after I said I had quit.” Keep them very short: label and move on. We are not psychologically processing here, but letting go of what gets in the way. Once it has been said, it is done.

When you are the one listening, it is important not to react in any way. Just listen and breathe and let go. Don’t throw things back in your partner’s face by making one of your withholds be a reaction to what was just said. After you are both done, there should be no postmortem, no discussion of what was said. This may sound difficult, but it doesn’t take long to recognize the great value of this of this practice.

When we tell the truth about something, we open the door to a deeper intimacy with the other person. We create and share more space. Share your withholds often, so they do not build up.

Enjoy the greater space you open between you, and within you.