



## Curating Intimacy

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As a therapist there are certain things expected of you: problem-solving, being comforting in a crisis, and generally being an agent of wisdom to those who seek it. There are cultural themes one begins to notice – trends that bleed into our lives, creating sophisticated changes in how we see the world and our lives within that world. One such change is evidenced by a question I am often asked as a specialist in Adolescent behavior. Parents, teachers and even my own acquaintances ask whether I have difficulty holding the attention of my clients and keeping it away from their phones.

My answer surprises them: “Almost never.” Early on, I was also surprised by this seemingly counter developmental trend. It has continued, and I have asked client after client what it is about coming into my office that commands such seemingly respectful behavior. Consistently they answer, “You listen to me.”

I have come to believe over these last years that our culture is having an intimacy crisis. By intimacy I mean: a close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship. Recently I asked a client, “Who checks on you at home?” He matter-of-factly reported his mother texted him each night before bed. Thinking she had gotten a different job or was out of town, I asked where she was when she was texting. He looked at me strangely and said, “In the living room.” Through the rest of the conversation I came to realize I was the only person that this young man had eye contact with on a regular basis. At this moment I was haunted by a joke I had recently heard about recognizing people only by the top of their heads in the future.

We all know that infants suffer in their development when they do not get enough face time from parents. What few know is that we are raising a generation of adolescents suffering from the same problem. Teens learn emotional control, behavioral control, delayed gratification and anger management all from watching and interacting with adults. If a child is not getting enough “eyeball time” as I call it, they will experience a poverty of emotional skills that create anxious, depressed, self-injuring and hurting young people.

How do we combat this? I believe we must become curators of intimacy. In his book *Ways of Curating*, world famous curator Hans Olrich Obrist states, “At its most basic, curating is simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other. The task of curating is to make junctions to allow different elements to touch.” In the context of relational intimacy, I believe this means creating times and places for eyes, hearts and hands to touch. Tech-free times, family dinners, time at the park. We cannot do this passively; it must be intentional. That means discerning what matters and choosing what belongs in which environment, all the while aiming at an overarching goal of curating moments.