

Slowly eroding away

Many partners struggle with a deep and painful sense of loss of who they are, a sense of self. We talk about it in our group meetings and in our other conversations. It is a thread I also constantly note in my counselling with partners.

Notice it's a "sense of loss" which means it's something we once had, and now don't.

What is happening?

Perhaps it's helpful to think about some of the key things that help us gain a strong sense of who we are? Good bonding and attachment in our early lives of course is crucial, then as we grow older, being accepted for who we are, being genuinely loved, having our feelings validated and our views respected, having our qualities reflected back to us by others who matter, being able to achieve and succeed in a range of tasks and activities, having our love received and enjoyed by the ones we love. I'm just thinking of these as I write, but have you noticed something? Apart from the ability to learn and master tasks and competencies, most of these things I've listed take place in relationship.

Do they take place in your significant relationship?

Perhaps you know you're genuinely loved in a "different" sort of way, but do you feel accepted for who you are? Are your feelings validated? Are your views respected? Are your personal qualities and positive characteristics noticed and reflected back to you with affirming words? Are your tasks and contributions within your family setting being valued? Is your love received and enjoyed by the one you love?

If you are not experiencing these crucial things in your relationship, then you have a reason for why your sense of self is slowly eroding away. We can have all the confidence in the world within certain contexts such as work, family of origin, other community involvements, etc, but we have a natural and essential need to be in relationship where we can love and be loved, intentionally and purposefully.

Carol Grigg, September 2015