

12 Stages of Intimacy

Tim Isbell, 8/2011, revised 4/2023

I believe these stages were initially described by Desmond Morris when researching why some married couples stay together and others divorce. He found that those who stayed together had extended courtships where they sequentially worked their way through this series of 12 stages.

Dr. Dobson (a very conservative Christian, more so than I) suggests that these stages are good for couples in the dating/courtship process. His advice: don't rush courtship. Proceed through the first nine stages one at a time and in the order indicated. Stages 10, 11, and 12 are best reserved for marriage.

Following these stages is good advice both in the long view (the entire courtship process) and the short view (when they come together to spend an evening). In this latter case, for example, it is usually unwise to meet your date after work or school and move immediately to stage 8. It is wiser to move through the stages sequentially over a few minutes or hours.

1. Eye to body
2. Eye to head
3. Voice to voice
4. Hand to hand
5. Hand/arm to shoulder
6. Hand/arm to waist
7. Face to face (kissing)
8. Hand to head
9. Hand to body (above waist)
10. Mouth to breast
11. Touching below the waist
12. Sexual intercourse

Here's a link that details each step: [Twelve Steps to Intimacy](#).

The sermon provides more detail on each stage, and it also includes minor edits to some of the stages. The preacher is one stage more conservative than I indicated above; he recommends reserving 9-12 for marriage. It's worth reading.

If you google "stages of intimacy," you'll find several other postings, many from secular sources. This concept seems well accepted in the dating/courtship/marriage area, whether Christian or not. You'll find other numbers of stages – up to at least 14.

In the final analysis, this 12-step list is good for Christians, and so is going slow.

(For related material on romantic relationship resources, see [Advice for Couples](#).)