# How to Be Vulnerable

Without vulnerability in relationships there isn't true connection — and without connection there isn't much room for meaningful exchange. When we avoid vulnerability, we tend to interact from our masks and coping mechanisms instead of from our authentic selves. That might keep us safe in the short term, but it keeps us lonely in the long term.

"Vulnerability" has become a bit of a buzzword lately, and different people mean very different things when they use it. You may have heard vulnerability described as weakness, neediness, authenticity, emotional exposure, or "oversharing."

Here's the truth:
 Vulnerability is **not** weakness. It is the experience of emotional risk — and it's the birthplace of closeness.

Researcher Brené Brown defines vulnerability as "**uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure**" and finds that it is essential for intimacy, trust, creativity, and love. In her studies, people who reported the strongest sense of belonging and connection were the ones **willing to be seen, even when there were no guarantees of the outcome.**

People who see vulnerability as weakness often approach vulnerable moments with defensiveness, sarcasm, shutting down, or staying "in control." People who view vulnerability as courage are more willing to engage honestly, even when it's uncomfortable.

Vulnerability isn't an adjective — it's a verb.
 It is an **act of courage**, and it requires showing up without certainty about how things will go.

Simply put:
 Vulnerability invites vulnerability. When one person leads with honesty, it creates safety for others to meet them there.
**A helpful indicator**: if you are being vulnerable, you will usually feel at least slightly uncomfortable.

 If what you're sharing feels completely easy, polished, or "safe," you are most likely still guarding. Go one layer deeper toward what is most true right now.

## What does vulnerability actually look like?

Vulnerability isn't saying everything you've ever felt or thought. It's not trauma-dumping or pouring out every detail of your history to someone who didn't consent to hold it.

Instead, vulnerability is sharing what is **real for you in this moment** — with intention, self-awareness, and care for the relationship.

It often looks like:

- saying "I'm hurt," instead of getting angry
- saying "I'm scared I don't matter," instead of shutting down
- saying "I need reassurance," instead of testing your partner
- saying "I don't know," instead of performing competence
- saying "I care about you," without waiting to see if they say it first

It's the moment you risk being seen — on purpose.


## What do you actually DO to be vulnerable?

Here are steps you can practice:

- **Get present**

Notice your body. Slow your breathing. Let go of preparing your comeback, collecting evidence, or rehearsing your points.

Try: "Right now, the most honest thing is that I feel…"

- **Notice your protections**

Become aware of your masks and coping strategies: fixing, blaming, joking, intellectualizing, withdrawing, people-pleasing, freezing, or arguing your case like a lawyer.

Ask yourself: "What am I doing right now to avoid being seen?"

- **Name the real, current emotion**

Vulnerability is speaking from what is alive right now — not the five-page backstory.

Example: "Underneath the frustration, I feel really sad and afraid of losing you."

- **Lean into the discomfort**

Expect it to feel edgy. That sensation isn't a sign you're doing something wrong — it's a sign you're being real.

Try: "This is hard to say, and it's important to me."

- **Hold onto what matters most**

Usually what you care about is connection, closeness, repair, or being understood. Say that out loud.

Example: "I'm sharing this because our relationship really matters to me."

- **Let go of the outcome**

You can choose honesty — you cannot control the response. Vulnerability is about how you show up, not forcing the other person to react a certain way.