

# Growing Our Unity

## 19 Vital Practices for a Thriving Relationship

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## Unifier 4: Establishing Our Friendship

*“A happy spouse looks at the other person as their best and closest friend—a friend they want to stay close to no matter what.”*  
Shaunti Feldhahn

**Focus Statement:** We consider each other a close friend, valuing our sincere loyalty, open communication, shared laughter, and mutual support.

### Deeper Learning:

A deep friendship is essential to a high-quality, thriving, and lasting relationship. Therefore, we are committed to the belief that friendship is a key contributor to our unity. Using our Honor guides us to keep our friendship strong and healthy.

Sharing many experiences and activities and having forged a high-quality connection between us demonstrates that we are friends. Our friendship and intimacy deepen and strengthen over time, forming a lasting foundation for us as a couple.

Being friends means connecting, sharing, and caring about one another. We are in each other’s corner, looking out for each other, and sharing most aspects of our lives. We feel safe together, so we can use our Trust to be vulnerable with each other. We are in one long conversation as close friends and companions. We share positive experiences that create lasting memories. We increase intimacy as we connect body, mind, heart, and soul.

**Sharing from Experience:** *“Friendship and liking each other set the foundation for us to enjoy each other. Friendship helps us communicate and feel drawn to spend time together. We enjoy practicing Service with each other and others around us, and we work toward common goals. We honestly share what we are thinking and feeling. We laugh and have fun together. Our shared history as friends helps us feel connected.”*

Scientific studies support the emphasis on being close friends:

“... [H]appy marriages are based on a deep friendship. By this I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other’s company. These couples tend to know each other intimately—they are well versed in each other’s likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes, and dreams. They have an abiding regard for each other and express this fondness not just in the big ways but through small gestures day in and day out. ... Friendship fuels the flames of romance because it offers the best protection against feeling adversarial toward your spouse. ... In the strongest marriages, husband and wife share a deep sense of meaning. They don’t just ‘get along’—they also support each other’s hopes and aspirations and build a sense of purpose into their lives together.”<sup>i</sup> John M. Gottman and Nan Silver

“It turns out, happy couples hang out. Either consciously or subconsciously, they work to maintain their friendship rather than take it for granted. And the most important way they do that is to spend time together. They are in proximity to each other a lot. ... A happy spouse looks at the other person

as their best and closest friend—a friend they want to stay close to no matter what.”<sup>ii</sup> Shaunti Feldhahn

Maintaining our friendship isn’t always easy—it takes commitment, time, attention, and love. Being a steadfast and loyal friend to one another requires patience and the ability to understand, forgive, and move past unpleasantness or disagreements. It also acknowledges that friendships and relationships go through ups and downs, so there’s not just one way for us to interact.

Being friends is one of the best ways for us to feel a strong connection with each other. Consider these perspectives:

“A simple way to understand connection is to think of it as two people sharing an experience. You touch me, I feel your touch. You talk, I listen, and vice versa. Individuals make connection by paying attention and tuning in to one another—as well as what they are doing. It’s as if for a moment there are no barriers between you. Each has access to the other’s energy, which creates synergy and intensifies the experience.”<sup>iii</sup> Patricia Love

“We discovered that when we help couples change their interactive behaviors—rather than how they feel, think, or remember—they feel connected and begin to have new thoughts and create new memories.”<sup>iv</sup> Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly

**Sharing from Experience:** *“Being friends provides a mindset that enables us to cultivate well-being and form a defense against the harshness in the world around us. We are a safe space for each other to relax.”*

#### **Examples:**

- Excitedly share about a work accomplishment and respond with enthusiasm.
- Encourage and celebrate each other’s progress on difficult tasks.
- Cook a meal while the other is visiting a sick relative, so it’s ready when they come home.
- Bring home a book or story that the other would find interesting.
- Share an inspirational video or article.
- Talk about a hope, wish, or dream we have and make plans to achieve it.

#### **Applying Virtues:**

*Below are some practical ways to incorporate virtues into daily practices with the theme of this chapter.*

##### ***Politeness and Sociability***

- Enjoy time together doing nothing and everything, including relaxation time in the mix.
- Use courteous manners with one another, remembering to use words such as “please” and “thank you”.
- Greet each other with warm and welcoming smiles and hugs.

##### ***Honor***

- Hold strongly to loyalty in words and actions.
- Look for and appreciate the best in each other.

- Believe in each other's goodwill and integrity.

### **Trust**

- Count on each other to respond when needed.
- Believe we are demonstrating Truthfulness with our words and actions.
- Accompany each other through good times and difficult ones.

### **Learning Activities:**

1. Reflect and consult on our strengths and areas for growth to maintain the quality of our friendship. Consider some of these aspects:
  - a. Carrying out kind and honest communications
  - b. Enjoying quiet, peaceful time together
  - c. Engaging in play, fun, and laughter
  - d. Feeling free to be ourselves
  - e. Learning about each other
  - f. Enthusiastically supporting what is best for each other
  - g. Encouraging each other
  - h. Staying loyal
  - i. Maintaining Trust and Dependability
  - j. Sharing interests
  - k. Creating common experiences and positive memories
2. Each of us shares a brief story about how a friendship has positively contributed to our lives as individuals or how a friend is currently benefiting our shared life.
3. Create a new relaxation activity that encourages us to feel at home and peaceful with one another.

### **Couple Reflection and Consultation:**

*Throughout this couple guide, there are invitations to practice the virtue of Reflection about your interactions and connection. This practice gives you opportunities to celebrate progress and consult to address issues.*

1. What indicates that we are both friends and partners?
2. How does being friends assist us through difficulties?
3. What encourages us to relax with each other?
4. How do we feel and respond when we are in an activity that prompts laughter and enjoyment?
5. What prompts each of us to laugh?
6. How do we feel about having fun?
7. How does being friends positively influence our relationships with others?
8. What could enhance our friendship?

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<sup>i</sup> John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 2nd ed., pp. 21-22; 28

<sup>ii</sup> Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*, pp. 146-147

<sup>iii</sup> Patricia Love, *Truth About Love*, pp. 166-167

<sup>iv</sup> Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt, *Getting the Love You Want*, 3rd ed., Preface, p. xx