



# SHARE



## Developing and Maintaining Friendships to Strengthen Relationships

### Introduction

The dimension of *Share* embraces the idea that the trust, friendship, and love shared by two people are at the heart of meaningful, enduring couple relationships. *Share* is about who a couple becomes together and how the two individuals grow in love together. In an increasingly individualistic age, *Share* emphasizes what couples can do together to promote couple well-being.



While couples can interact in a variety of ways, there are a few processes that seem fundamental to forging healthy relationships over the long term. Feelings of romance or passion may grow or diminish at different times throughout a relationship. However, having a strong friendship provides couples with an enduring and stable foundation over time, regardless of the waxing and waning of romance and passion. Understanding the practices that develop a close, enduring friendship and making a point to incorporate them into the relationship can assist couples in nurturing a healthy and lasting relationship. The *Share* dimension emphasizes three general practices: (1) spending meaningful time together that builds the relationship, (2) fostering a shared sense of couple identity or “we-ness,” and (3) nurturing continuing, positive interactions with one’s partner.

### Spend Meaningful Time Together

The daily stressors that individuals experience can impinge on a couple’s ability to spend time together doing activities that deepen their mutual trust and intimacy. However, there are a few practices that can help couples give quality attention and care to their relationships each day.

- **Engage in and support each other in common interests and activities.**

Research shows that couples who regularly participate in activities and projects together tend to be happier in their relationships. Couples also benefit from each person supporting the other in his or her interests, even when not actually doing the activity together (e.g., one spouse stays home with children so the other can go spend time with a friend). The most important aspect of this concept is being positive and supportive of each other and each other’s interests.

#### What “Share” Looks Like

- Scheduling meaningful time together
- Finding common interests and activities
- Creating couple traditions and rituals
- Working towards common goals
- Nurturing positive interactions
- Sending clear and positive messages
- Turning toward partner’s bids for connection
- Envisioning yourselves as a “team”

- **Spend time together that builds intimacy and trust as partners.** When couples make the effort to set aside substantial amounts of quality time together, they tend to build greater trust and intimacy in the relationship. Couples should aim to find moments when they can plan enjoyable and interactive activities, such as having a daily conversation over breakfast, or planning a “date night” once a week.

- **Participate in couple traditions that strengthen the relationship.** Couples benefit as they establish and participate in traditions that add meaning to their relationship. Routines and rituals can be a way for couples to intentionally grow their friendship, and develop greater relationship satisfaction. *Couple routines* represent re-occurring activities or daily habits between two individuals. For example, couples may make a point to kiss each other hello and goodbye. These instances help remind individuals that they are valued and appreciated, and allow for greater intimacy, trust, and connection between partners. *Couple rituals* represent more formal ceremonies or occasions that couples celebrate or engage in on a regular basis, and these rituals are positively linked with relationship satisfaction. These rituals can be connected to past events in the relationship (e.g., anniversaries), each individual’s life (e.g., getting a raise at work), or national or religious holidays.



### ***Integrating “Share” into Child Welfare Services***

- Ask your clients to describe a close friendship and what that relationship is like (e.g., What made you want to be friends with the person to begin with? Why do you remain friends with that person? What have you done together that has made you closer and strengthened the friendship?). After hearing about the friendship, ask your client how they could incorporate those same characteristics/factors into their romantic relationship.
- Ask couples to identify a time or day of the year that they both value (e.g., birthdays, a special holiday, an anniversary). If they do not already regularly celebrate that event, talk about how they can create a family ritual and celebrate that time together each year. Invite them to identify ways to spend that time building their relationship. If they do regularly celebrate certain events and holidays, have them talk about how those celebrations affect their relationship.
- Have couples talk about characteristics they value in their partner – for example, maybe one partner has had tough relationships in the past but feels comfortable and genuinely trusts the current partner. Encourage them to talk about things they like doing together and how it affects their relationship – or things one enjoys that the other could try as well.

## Why “Share” Matters to Child Welfare Services

- Engaging in shared rituals and routines can help children feel a sense of normalcy, even during stressful times. For example, taking time to celebrate a birthday or holiday can give children a break from otherwise stressful times. In addition, such celebrations can help foster parents bond with their children and create positive memories of their own.
- When parents decide to introduce children to a new partner, they can also help to foster a strong bond between them by creating rituals within that relationship that are special to the child(ren) and partner.
- A cooperative co-parenting relationship – even if parents are no longer together – is beneficial to the safety and health of children.
- Helping parents feel supported and fostering open and positive communications can assist co-parents in working together as a team to meet their child’s needs.

### Foster a Shared Sense of Couple Identity

In forming a couple identity, two partners establish who they are as a couple and what defines their relationship. In addition, each individual develops a strong sense of “we-ness” and is motivated to think about what is best for *us* and not merely what is preferable for *me* (see *Care*). Couples who are able to move from “you and I” to a sense of “us” benefit from the shared unity this provides for their relationship.

- **Identify shared values and goals to direct the relationship.** Identifying shared values and goals acts as unifying forces in a relationship; it helps to bind couples together and focus their relationship in a common direction. Goals that a couple might establish and share include deciding to save together to purchase a new home or particular values they want to pass on to their children.
- **Engage together in common purposes.** Common purposes help to establish common ground in the relationship. In addition, this can provide the couple with a mutual sense that they are working together at something larger than themselves. This activity builds couple identity by deepening the friendship between partners as well as providing opportunities to act on the shared goals held by the couple. Couples in healthy relationships have goals and ideals that give their relationship purpose and meaning (see *Connect*.).
- **Protect the relationship from negative or disruptive influences.** A healthy couple relationship is defined not only by what couples do together, but also the limits they place around the relationship. By avoiding certain thoughts, threats, and interactions with others, partners demonstrate that they are loyal to each other and the relationship, sending a message that their couple “we-ness” is central in their lives.



## Nurture Positive Interactions as Partners

Partners who develop patterns of positive engagement with each other over time benefit from greater closeness, trust, and resiliency in times of relationship difficulties. This aspect illustrates the application of constructs previously discussed in other dimensions, such as *Choose* (e.g., demonstrating commitment; focusing on strengths) and *Care* (e.g., taking a positive orientation). Both partners in a relationship commit to establishing continual patterns of positive interactions and developing supportive exchanges of affection and intimacy. Inherent to these interactions are good communication skills.

- **Talk with each other and learn to communicate in supportive ways.** Communication is central to our interactions with others, and is the lifeblood of a meaningful and close relationship. However, it is not the quantity of talking that strengthens the relationship, but whether each person is satisfied with his/her own and his/her partner's level of communication.
- **Cultivate and express appreciation for each other in the relationship.** Trust is established and maintained as partners feel respect and appreciation. Couples can cultivate and express appreciation for each other by (1) looking for and expressing positive qualities in their partner, and (2) maintaining a positive view of their partner when challenges occur. It is important to “think positive,” since how individuals think about their partner can dramatically affect how they feel about and interact with their partner.
- **Develop positive and mutual exchanges of love and affection.** Positive exchanges are essential to developing a successful relationship. Research shows that in stable relationships there tend to be four or five positive exchanges for every negative interaction. By focusing on fostering positive interactions with a partner, relationships can be nourished to better endure hardships.

## Summary

A stable and lasting friendship is central to how most couples define what kind of relationship they want and why the relationship is valued. Friendship is not simply about love for one another, but about liking and trusting each other. Couples can share the richness of a deep and loving relationship as they develop a close friendship, nurture positive interactions with each other, build a meaningful sense of couple identity, and spend meaningful time together. It is what a couple *shares* – of themselves, with each other, and together – that largely defines the quality and value of their relationship as a couple.

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HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIP  
& MARRIAGE  
EDUCATION  
TRAINING

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## Communication Notes

- **Non-verbal communication is as important as what is said.** Both positive and negative communication patterns, which can be shared via verbal and non-verbal cues, and our actions, such as a wink or a smile, combine with our words to create meaning when we communicate. Sending clear, not mixed, messages is important to communicating properly.
- **Filters can affect the way we communicate.** Partners should be careful how their mood affects how they receive communication. Having a bad day, or being frustrated, can cause an individual to take any kind of message the wrong way.
- **Share helpful messages.** Supportive communication comes about through acknowledgment and validation of a person's feelings. In contrast, a lack of understanding may come about when one partner shares feelings and the other attempts to give advice, talks about his or her own feelings/experiences, or dismisses the partner.