

Couple Vitality

Connecting with Character

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Welcome!

Creating a couple relationship can be the most wonderful and the most challenging experience you both undertake in your lives. It has highs, lows, and moments when you are stuck in problems. Maintaining a relationship is a dynamic process of growth, and you will need to persevere with consistent effort over time. You can do it, and we are here to guide you.

As character and relationship professionals, we bring together for you some of the most important insights from science, stories from couples, personal experiences, and our own professional observations. We integrate the most powerful and dynamic aspect of your interactions that connect you as a couple: your characters. We will share with you how to use Character Qualities as a new “language” of connection between you.

What is Couple Vitality?

Vitality means that your couple relationship is alive, growing, and energizing for both of you. You appreciate being together, and the flow of energy between you is strong and positive. You can accomplish many aspects of life together that would be more difficult as individuals. There is a powerful unity and connection between you. Couple vitality strengthens as you consistently apply the Core Elements and Vitalizers in this book.

“... [I]t is only in the context of connection with others that our deepest needs can be met. Whether we like it or not, each of us has an unshakable dependence on others. ... We need camaraderie, affection, love. These are not options in life, or sentimental trimmings; they are part of our species’ survival kit. We *need* to belong.”ⁱ Les and Leslie Parrott

Healthy couples make and keep a commitment to be together. Couple vitality builds when two healthy individuals strive to be excellent partners to one another. They consciously act in relationship-enhancing ways from the beginning of their connection. They also choose to apply Character Qualities to move their words and actions in a positive direction toward each other. They strive each day for new levels of growth and connection.

Vitality, Character, and Becoming “Us”

This guide is full of science-based tools and information to assist you with improving the quality of your relationship. As a couple, you will be full of vitality—the power to live and grow. The earlier you learn and apply character-based habits, behavior patterns, and ways of interacting, the happier and more vibrant your relationship will be. You will be less likely to inflict damaging wounds on each other.

Every couple is unique, and you will develop your view of what couple vitality looks and feels like for you. Below is one person’s view.

“[Couples] ...have an intimate connection. They make joint decisions about life, talk about things before decisions are made, communicate love and respect to each other on a daily basis, and are able to talk about anything without fear of judgment, put-downs, or criticism. They have an intimate emotional connection. They could be away from each other for weeks due to work and come back

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and pick up a conversation right where they left off. They have a healthy and satisfying sex life. Their time together is as comfortable as their feet in a favorite pair of slippers on a cold winter night. They curl up in each other's arms, knowing they are loved, cared for, respected, appreciated, and listened to. Words don't even need to be exchanged all the time, because both husband and wife understand each other."ii Kevin Leman

Does this describe "couple vitality" to you? Or would you want to create something different? Here are some of the key concepts in this guide to accompany you with creating your couple vitality:

- Two individuals come together and commit to creating a unified and interdependent partnership, which is a third entity, more than the sum of the two individuals. It includes their stories, histories, experiences, and creative outcomes (such as children!), all of which stand together and cannot be separated.
- The two individuals become unified as they become part of something larger and integrate their individual needs with their partnership. They use words like "we", "us", and "ours" instead of "I", "me", and "mine".
- Each partner has character strengths and growth areas that dynamically affect the quality of a couple's interactions.
- As a couple reflects, consults, and interacts in character-based ways, they build their unity and develop shared values and a vision for their relationship.
- Through developing and integrating Character Qualities with specific actions, a couple creates vitality in their relationship.
- They both strengthen the Character Quality of Unity, which empowers them to contribute to one another, their couple vitality, and to others.
- A couple continually reflects, consults, interacts, builds connection, and increases commitment, all of which create vitality.
- As they encourage each other and grow as a couple, they use Character Quality of Creativity to celebrate together. Throughout their relationship-building process, the partners develop their characters and increase their connection and vitality.

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Note: There are 22 Character Qualities focused on in *Couple Vitality*. These 22 are listed below and defined in “Core Element C: Character Growth”. You might have noticed that “Creativity” and “Unity” were capitalized above. Throughout the book, when the 22 Character Qualities appear, they are Capitalized to draw your attention to them and to differentiate them from other uses of the words.

1. Adherence
2. Compassion
3. Creativity
4. Dependability
5. Excellence
6. Flexibility
7. Friendliness
8. Honor
9. Humility
10. Justice
11. Moderation
12. Orderliness
13. Perseverance
14. Positive Spirit
15. Purposefulness
16. Reflection
17. Respect
18. Self-Discipline
19. Service
20. Trust
21. Truthfulness
22. Unity

These Character Qualities are derived from the Character Foundations Assessment™, a validated instrument developed by author W. Grant Peirce IV. Taking this assessment may assist you in understanding your orientation toward each Character Quality and subsequently with implementing the content of this book. You can contact either of the authors to take the assessment and receive an accompanying insights session with either of them or with another certified practitioner. See “About the Authors and Our Contact Information” at the end of the book.

Customize Your Approach

It’s best if you take the content of this guide, pay close attention to the principles and their application, and then customize your approach to create the couple relationship full of vitality that works for the two of you. Some suggestions are provided in the next section. You may also seek other sources of information or spend time working with a professional.

In this guide, we illuminate the path to healthy relationships and shine a light on the importance of including character-based words and actions at all stages in your journey. We have seen the benefit with our own marriage partners and also in our clients’ relationships, and we are confident that this is the way to a better future for you.

Welcome to *Couple Vitality*!

Susanne M. Alexander and W. Grant Peirce IV

Vitalizer 1: Prioritizing Our Relationship

*“Successful couples are on each other’s side.
They view themselves as allies, not adversaries.”*

Susan Page

Focus Statement: We make it a high priority to arrange for regular time together as a couple, giving one another our full attention and strengthening our connection and unity.

Deeper Learning:

We are faced with many choices of what to do with our time. It’s our unified well-being that we realize we must place at the heart of our agreed-upon choices, and this contributes to our couple vitality. We protect the harmony in our couple relationship as we consistently consider how our choices will affect each other and then choose what is best for us both. If instead we focus only on our self-interests, we can put a wedge between us.

If we become overly involved in activities and commitments that take us away from each other, we can begin to lose a feeling of connection, and disunity and distance can arise. This is especially true if we don’t come back to each other and talk about our experiences. It’s wise to consult periodically about what we are involved in to see if it’s wise to apply Moderation to our time and activity choices, so we have more time together. This assessment can include where our time and skills are most needed and what brings us happiness.

A Couple Shares Their Experience: *“We were asked to do ‘one more thing’ to benefit our community, and we knew if we said ‘yes’, it would be too much. We both spent time using Reflection and writing down all we were doing and our motivations for being involved. We looked at the time we were spending at work and looking after our home. We assessed the effect of our time choices on our couple relationship and our family, and we began to see that we were rarely spending quality time together. We looked at the overall situation, and we determined to make “us” much more of a priority. This detailed process helped us feel more in control of our time and choices. We were able to say ‘no’ to some things, ‘yes’ to others, and modify yet others. We committed to time together. What a relief!”*

On the other hand, sometimes we enjoy watching each other immerse in an activity, or we enjoy hearing the stories afterward. When we experience our partner feeling fulfilled and satisfied, it can also bring us happiness. For example, one of us might create art, participate in a team sport, or act in community theater. The other could watch or enjoy the outcome.

Harmonious couple time is a gift to us and those around us, as it contributes to our happiness and love. It’s wise to consult and clarify between us what we mean by “couple time”. For example, one might think that consulting about a child’s needs is couple time. The other might think it’s only when we do a social date away from home. The actual activity is less important than whether the time together strengthens our feelings of connection to one another.

Relationship author Susan Page identified the vital practice of couples demonstrating “goodwill partnership”—a consistent way of positively influencing their relationship. She writes:

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“I interviewed thirty-five couples who described themselves as ‘thriving.’ I thought I might find that they all came from happy, functional families, or that they had unusual degrees of compatibility, or that their problems were relatively minor compared with other couples—none of that was true. Some of them had rotten childhoods and enormous challenges. But there was a quality I found in all of these thriving couples that I find is usually missing in more troubled relationships. I now believe that quality is a deeper key to happiness than even good communication or mutual respect.

“It’s a quality I call a spirit of goodwill. Successful couples are on each other’s side. They view themselves as allies, not adversaries. They want to be happy together, and together they make this happen. In a spirit of goodwill, they accept the traits in their partner that they wish were different. They have given up trying to change each other. When they argue, they understand that a different point of view may be valid. Because they want to experience their love all the time, they would rather work toward a solution than hang on stubbornly to their own ‘right’ point of view.”ⁱⁱⁱ Susan Page

Ahead in “Vitalizer 3: Where Are We Going?”, we will create a vision for our relationship, and we will recognize that achieving our goals will take a significant investment of time. The world is a busy place with many demands on our time. Parenting adds another strong pull on our attention and resources. Distractions and interruptions are common. However, prioritizing couple time is a vital support for our well-being as individuals and our relationship.

When we are unified and happy as a couple, it contributes security and love to our children and enables them to grow, learn, and develop in healthy ways. We are also more prepared to be involved in our work and our community service. Our unity builds, and we feel more alive and connected.

Examples:

- Have a weekly or monthly date night. [See “Vitalizer 11: Enjoying Social Time”.]
- Enjoy cuddle time on the couch with dessert.
- Train children to allow a few minutes of mom and dad time each day without interruption.
- Organize an outing in nature with cooperative challenges.
- Text when away from home with reasonable updates about whereabouts and timing.
- Avoid spending time with others who may want us to be unfaithful to each other.

Applying Character Qualities:

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

Adherence

- Show steadfast faithfulness to each other, respecting any promises or vows of commitment we have made to each other.
- Treat each other’s personal information and private activities as confidential.
- Create clear boundaries and agreements for a beneficial plan for improving our relationship and aiming for long-term success.

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Moderation

- Assess the effect of our time choices on our relationship.
- Look at the overall balance of our responsibilities and adjust them as needed to protect the unity of our relationship and our well-being.
- Choose to spend leisure time together.

Unity

- Enthusiastically participate in couple activities.
- Focus on increasing sincere harmony while spending time together.
- Identify specific activities that especially increase feelings of connection, appreciation, and long-term commitment.

Learning Activities:

1. Reflect, consult, and agree on times and activities in which mobile phones are turned off or silenced and not responded to. Agree on what could qualify as an emergency interruption that we would respond to.
2. Consult about ways to be in regular contact with each other when apart, try them, and agree on what is effective.
3. Identify an area or activity where we could be more allied with each other and carry out the steps needed to increase unity and goodwill partnership.
4. Plan a time away from home where there can be intimate conversations about wishes and dreams.

Couple Reflection and Consultation:

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

1. How can we know if something is good for us?
2. When have we been effective at having a spirit of goodwill in our relationship?
3. How could we increase our spirit of goodwill toward each other? How could this benefit us?
4. When is it wise to suspend judgment about each other so we don't overreact?
5. How do we view being in communication with each other when apart? How can using Respect influence our choices with this?
6. How can we protect our relationship from harm?
7. How happy or unhappy are we with our amount of couple time? What do we want to do differently?
8. Does our current couple time feel like quality time? Why or why not?
9. How does time on our electronic devices affect our couple time? What is beneficial? What seems potentially harmful? What boundaries or practices do we want to now include in our lives?

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10. Are we balancing who does the arranging of couple time? If not, what new arrangements need to happen?
11. How do we feel about watching or hearing about each other's activities or accomplishments?
12. When does spending time with family members also feel like couple time? When does spending time with friends also feel like couple time?

Welcome!

ⁱ Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, *Relationships*, p. 11

ⁱⁱ Kevin Leman, *Have a New Husband by Friday*, p. 27

Section 1: Powerfully Creating Vitality

ⁱⁱⁱ Susan Page, essay in Susanne M. Alexander, *All-in-One Marriage Prep*, pp. 284-285