
The Stress-Reducing Conversation

In this exercise, you will discuss a recent or upcoming stress in each of your lives, like an upcoming job deadline or a future event (outside of your relationship), that may prove stressful.

In addition, it will be helpful to also say one thing that happened during your day that was good and perhaps one thing you are looking forward to in the coming days.

Each of you will have 15 minutes to be a speaker (about your own stress) while your partner listens.

After 15 minutes, you'll trade roles.

Both male and female styles of communicating need to be honored. The motto, "Understanding First, Then Advice", means that emotional connection should be honored before moving to problem solving. Empathy and problem solving are like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: they fit together, and each is invaluable.

SPEAKER:

Talk about your stress with as much detail and depth as possible.

Also include one good thing that happened that day for you and maybe one thing you are looking forward to in the coming days.

But spend the majority of your time talking about what was stressful to you.

The purpose of this process is to assist you in the management of daily external stress, stress that comes from *outside* the relationship, like job stress.

LISTENER:

Offer support to your partner using the methods listed on the next page. Be sure to avoid problem solving unless your partner wants your help doing so. Just do your best to listen and understand your partner's thoughts and feelings.

Remember: Understanding first, then advice

Don't:	Do give support:	
Stonewall Ignore your partner Fail to respond Get defensive Criticize Side with the enemy	Show genuine interest	Maintain eye contact. Ask questions.
	Be an ally for your partner	Show empathy
	Communicate understanding	"What a bummer! I'd be stressed out too."
	"We" against "others". Don't side with the "other".	Even if you agree with the enemy, empathize with your partner's emotions. Focus on what your partner is feeling, not what your partner is perceiving.
	Solidarity	This is our problem and we'll face it together.
	Provide affection and comfort.	Let your partner know they are not alone and that you facing this stress together.
	Do share emotions:	
Interest	"Tell me more about that." Ask questions.	
Excitement	"Wow! This is really hot stuff! Let's do it!"	
Sadness	"That's so sad."	
Fear	"That is something that would have me worried too."	
Irritation and anger	"I can see why you'd be annoyed here."	

Questions to ask your partner:

First, ask your partner, “Do you feel understood yet?”

If she or he answers “no”, then ask questions to help increase your understanding:

What is most upsetting to you about this?

What is it that you don't like about this situation?

What is the worst thing that could happen in this situation?

What is this like for you?

Is there anything I can do to support you in this?

What do you need?

If she or he answers “yes” and does feel understood, then ask, “Are you interested in receiving advice or problem solving?”

If the answer is “yes”, then move onto advice and/or problem solving suggestions.

See if your partner has ideas before suggesting some ideas of your own.

Remember: There is no such thing as an “overreaction” emotionally. Try not to judge your partner’s emotions.

Write here how you and your partner have agreed to build the Stress-Reducing Conversation into your daily schedules:
