

► **Exercise:** **The Stress-Reducing Conversation and Earning Points in the Emotional Bank Account**

How you manage stress turns out to be very critical.

Instructions:

In this exercise, you will discuss a recent or upcoming stress in each of your lives such as an upcoming job deadline or a future event that may prove stressful. Each of you will take a turn to be a speaker (about your own stress) while your partner listens. After the speaker has finished, trade roles.

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

Listener: Offer support to your partner using the methods in the following list. 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 Must Precede Advice.

Use the bullet points below for ideas on ways to give *support and share emotions*.

GIVING SUPPORT MEANS:

SHOW GENUINE INTEREST: Maintain eye contact. Ask questions.

COMMUNICATE UNDERSTANDING: What a bummer! I'd be stressed out too.

WE AGAINST OTHERS. DON'T SIDE WITH THE OTHER: That guy is a total jerk!

SOLIDARITY: This is our problem, and we'll face it together.

AFFECTION: Come here and let me hold you. I am totally on your side.

SHARED 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. I can change what I do in this situation.

DON'T stonewall or ignore your partner; fail to respond, get defensive, criticize.

DON'T side with the enemy.

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:

- a. What is most upsetting to you about this?
- b. What is it that you don't like about this situation?
- c. What is the worst thing that could happen in this situation?
- d. What is this like for you?
- e. Is there anything I can do to support you in this?
- f. 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 on to giving 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 "over reaction" emotionally.
- Try not to judge your partner's emotions.

It would be great if you could commit to having a conversation like this one for about 20 minutes at the end of each day. Discuss how and when you could build this kind of conversation into your every week.

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

Group Role Play: Stress Reducing Conversation

Scenario:

Steve is worried that, after all he's learned in the past year, he'll make a mistake that will cause him to lose his job.

His worst case scenario is that he'll miss communication cues from patients that maybe they don't want to talk about certain things, which goes against his nature of being a problem solver.

Therapist's instructions:

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Remember:

- Understanding Must Precede Advice.
- **DON'T stonewall or ignore your partner**
- **Don't fail to respond**
- **Don't get defensive**
- **Don't criticize.**
- **Don't side with the enemy.**
- There is no such thing as an "over reaction" emotionally.
- Try not to judge your partner's emotions.