



A DAILY COUPLE RITUAL

# THE STRESS-REDUCING CONVERSATION

A 30-minute structured ritual for couples to download daily external stress (work, family, life events) without it curdling into defensiveness or problem-solving. Adapted from the Gottman Method.

## THE FORMAT

<p><b>15</b> <b>MINUTES EACH</b></p> <p>One partner speaks while the other listens. Then switch. Set a timer.</p>	<p><b>1</b> <b>TOPIC PER TURN</b></p> <p>External stress only — work, family, friends, logistics. Not the relationship.</p>	<p><b>0</b> <b>ADVICE UNTIL ASKED</b></p> <p>The motto: understanding first, then advice. Only solve if the speaker asks.</p>
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## WHEN TO USE THIS

### AFTER WORK, BEFORE DINNER

End-of-day decompression so the stress doesn't leak into the rest of the evening.

### SUNDAY-NIGHT DREAD

Pre-week venting so the dread doesn't carry into Monday with no outlet.

### AFTER A HARD MEETING OR APPOINTMENT

When one of you needs to land before re-entering family logistics.

### NOT FOR RELATIONSHIP ISSUES

If one of you is the source of the stress, that's a different conversation. Use a different tool (see Gottman-Rapoport).

## THE SPEAKER'S ROLE

You are not pitching a solution. You are telling the story to someone you trust.

### YOUR JOB IS TO TELL THE STORY

- Talk about your stress with as much detail and depth as you have. Specific is more useful than summarized.
- Include one good thing that happened today and one thing you're looking forward to, but spend most of your time on what was stressful.
- Name the emotion underneath the facts. Not just what happened — what it felt like.
- You are not arguing for a solution. You are telling the story to someone you trust.



## THE LISTENER'S ROLE

Your job is to be an ally, not a fixer. Get curious, not clever.

### DO

#### SHOW GENUINE INTEREST

Eye contact. Body turned toward your partner. Phone face-down.

#### BE AN ALLY

"We" against the problem. Stay on your partner's side, even if you might see it differently.

#### COMMUNICATE UNDERSTANDING

"That sounds brutal. I'd be stressed too."

#### SOLIDARITY

"This is ours to face. You're not in it alone."

#### OFFER AFFECTION

Physical touch where it fits. A hand on the knee. A long hug at the end.

#### ASK, DON'T SOLVE

"Tell me more." "What was the hardest part?"

### DON'T

× Stonewall or zone out.

× Get defensive ("that's not what I would have done").

× Criticize the way your partner is handling it.

× Side with the coworker, the boss, the in-law, the friend.

× Minimize ("at least it's not...").

× Jump to fixing before they feel heard.

## PHRASES FOR DIFFERENT EMOTIONS

Match the language to the feeling in the room. Naming the emotion lands harder than commenting on the facts.

### INTEREST

"Tell me more about that." "What happened next?"

### SADNESS

"That's so painful. I'm sorry."

### FEAR OR WORRY

"That's the kind of thing that would worry me too."

### ANGER OR IRRITATION

"I can see why you'd be furious. That's a lot."

### EXCITEMENT

"This is huge. Tell me more."

### OVERWHELM

"That's so much at once. No wonder you're wrung out."

## IF UNDERSTANDING HASN'T LANDED YET

Ask your partner: "Do you feel understood yet?" If the answer is no, slow down and try one of these.

### USE ANY OF THESE TO OPEN THE PICTURE WIDER

- What's the most upsetting part of this for you?
- What is it about this situation that doesn't sit right?
- What's the worst-case version playing in your head?
- What does this remind you of?
- What do you need from me right now — just listening, or something else?

**Then transition.** When your partner says they feel understood, ask: "Do you want to think about what's next together, or are you good with just being heard?" Let them choose. Adapted from John and Julie Gottman's Stress-Reducing Conversation.

**EDUCATIONAL ONLY — NOT THERAPY.**