



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

<p>AFTER WORK, BEFORE DINNER</p> <p>End-of-day decompression so the stress doesn't leak into the rest of the evening.</p>	<p>AFTER A HARD MEETING OR APPOINTMENT</p> <p>When one of you needs to land before re-entering family logistics.</p>
<p>SUNDAY-NIGHT DREAD</p> <p>Pre-week venting so the dread doesn't carry into Monday with no outlet.</p>	<p>NOT FOR RELATIONSHIP ISSUES</p> <p>If one of you is the source of the stress, that's a different conversation. Use a different tool (see Gottman-Rapoport).</p>

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.

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