

## Turning Towards Exercise 12a - The Stress-Reducing Conversation & Earning Points in the Emotional Bank Account

*How you manage stress turns out to be very critical.*

**Purpose:** The purpose of this process is to assist you in the management of daily external stress—stress that comes from outside the relationship, such as job stressors. Research has shown that the couples who buffered their relationship from external stresses were able to maintain their positive changes over time.

**Introduction:** In today's world, stress runs very high, and your ability, as a couple to create a peaceful home is critical. One way to do this is to give support and share emotions, as a way of making a "deposit" into each other's "emotional bank account."

**Instructions: Part One:** 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 have 15 minutes to be a speaker (about your own stress) while your partner listens. After 15 minutes, you'll 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.

### *Understanding Must Precede Advice.*

Use the bullet points listed below that give 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 was a 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."*

Share Emotions:

- **Interest:** *"Tell me more about that."* Ask questions.
- **Excitement:** *"Wow! This is really great! No wonder you're excited!"*
- **Sadness:** *"That's so sad."*
- **Fear:** *"That's something that would have me worried too."*
- **Irritation and anger:** *"I can see why you'd be annoyed. That's very irritating."*

Try to make a stress-reducing conversation part of your daily ritual as a couple. This is an important everyday context for "Turning Toward" versus "Turning Away."

**For Males:** It is important to be aware of the tendency that guys have to give support by feeling that they have the responsibility to come up with the solutions to the problems. **No, men do not have this responsibility.** They should stop trying to come up with their own solutions. Their partners are not dumb. Partners can come up with their *own* solutions. Men can gain enormous mileage JUST BY LISTENING AND BEING UNDERSTANDING. This is an eye-opener for most men. They can make deposits in their partner's Emotional Bank Accounts by just listening and being understanding. **That's all men have to do.** Problem-solving comes later. Men have a tendency to rush in with the solutions too soon.

**For Females:** It is important for women to separate themselves from the stresses that their partners are describing. Women should try not to think of her partner's stress as "OUR Problem." Women should be sure not to respond to their partner's stresses with complaints and criticism of their own. JUST LISTEN AND BE UNDERSTANDING.

Don't stonewall by:

- Ignoring your partner
- Failing to respond

Don't:

- Get defensive
- Get critical

***Don't side with the enemy***

***Part Two:***

Ask your partner: ***"Do you feel understood yet?"***

- *If she or he answers, "No," ask open-ended questions to help increase your understanding.*
- *If she or he answers "Yes," and does feel understood, then ask, "Are you interested in talking about or receiving advice or problem-solving?"*
- *If the answer is "Yes," see if your partner has ideas before suggesting your own. Your own advice and/or problem-solving suggestions should come last.*

**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. In the last five minutes of this exercise, discuss how and when you could build this kind of conversation into your week.**