

Couples in Crisis: Keeping Your Connection Strong

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How to Access Q&A

- There will be time for Q&A halfway through, and at the end of the presentation. Feel free
- To submit a question on your desktop, click Questions in the bottom right of
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Feeling distressed under crisis

- In the midst of crisis, our relationship insecurities typically get louder, our raw spots might feel more irritated/sensitive. We need to feel comforted. This is normal and understandable.
- “Relationship insecurities” might include: worries that we might have about our relationship. Sadness that we might feel about our relationship. Helplessness, stuckness, loneliness, injuries that might have occurred between us.

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Withdrawers and Pursuers

- We handle relationship insecurities in different ways:
- 1. Some people go quiet and withdraw
- 2. Some people become verbal and expressive, seeking engagement
- How do you tend to handle difficulties in your relationship?
What about your partner?

Withdrawers and Pursuers, con't

- Common to see one of each type in a couple.
- Tip: whether you are going quiet and withdrawing, or turning up the volume and pursuing, this is most likely your best attempt at regulating your relationship insecurities. It may be your “self-protection mode.”
- Unfortunately, these tendencies can get us stuck into a back and forth pattern of unresolved relational distress. This can be very frustrating for both partners!

Negative Cycles of Interaction

- When we are operating in our “self-protection mode,” we do not always see how we are impacting our partner on the inside, and triggering their underlying relationship insecurities. When your partner gets triggered, they most likely employ their own form of self-protection, which might in turn trigger you. This can become a negative cycle of interaction.
- This is how couples get stuck in difficult conversations, and can end up feeling disconnected and angry.

Q&A



Let's Talk About Anger

- Different types of anger:
 - 1. Withdrawing anger “Leave me alone!” This can also resemble numbness, or showing very little emotional reaction.
 - 2. Protesting anger “I’m not okay with how things are between us!”

Tip: It can be very powerful to say to someone in protesting anger, “I want to hear every single thing you have to say.”

Anger as a Masking Emotion

- The challenge for all relationships is that anger is a masking emotion—it almost always covers up something more vulnerable below, such as relationship insecurity.
- Car accident example—consider how sharing the underlying vulnerability helps to tell the entire story. (This is a part of good communication.)

Anger as a Masking Emotion, con't

- Tip: Always assume that if you or your partner is angry, there is something more vulnerable triggered underneath. (i.e. fear, sadness, helplessness, shame...) Try to be curious and non-judgmental about what they might be experiencing, besides the anger that they are showing you.

What's "Beneath" Your Own Anger or Shut Down?

- Do you have a sense of what your own most common relationship insecurities might be? What concerns/fears do you often have about yourself or your partner and your relationship?

Exercise: Can You See a Pattern for Yourself?

- **CUE:** What would be a trigger for you? Sometimes it's very small.
- **BODY:** What sense/feeling do you notice in your body?
- **COGNITION:** What meaning do you make? This could be an interpretation about your partner, but also an idea about yourself in that moment.
- **VULNERABLE EMOTION:** What's the first thing you feel, possibly hidden and underlying.
- **MASKING EMOTION:** What's the emotion that your partner most clearly sees in a fight? (Could be anger, or numbness.)
- **ACTION TENDENCY:** What do you feel the urge to do when these emotions are online?

A Different Kind of Conversation

- Tip:When we can communicate in an honest way about how we get triggered and what we do to handle that, it can be very helpful for communication. Only share if you can do so in a way that reveals information about yourself—this is not a time to point out your partner’s unhelpful behavior.

Sweet Message, Desire for Close Connection

- Can you feel your sense of longing for connection and trust with your partner? Each of you probably struggles the most when those things feel wobbly or uncertain. This longing is always in the background of our negative cycles.
- **Tip: Try to directly communicate your love and desire to be close with your partner. Focus on recalling and sharing memories in which you felt close, secure, and connected.**

Q&A



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