

How to Support Your Partner When You're Hurting Too

[Donald L. Cole](#)

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*Be there for each other even if you're both in pain.
Here are 8 ways to support your partner when you need support as well.*



Supporting a partner in crisis while you're also hurting is all too common in the lives of people under average circumstances and recently life has been far from average. The stresses of the pandemic have been overwhelming. Our jobs may be gone. Family visits for the holidays may be lost this year. Some have lost friends and family. It's likely that both partners are in pain. Our partner's needs may feel overwhelming when we are

struggling with our own feelings. There are no easy answers, but here are a few tips that can help.

Set aside time daily to listen to each other

When we feel heard and cared about, our hurts become more manageable. This goes against the natural style for some people, but this may be the time to change that pattern. When couples practice sharing and listening they grow closer over time, deepen trust, and feel supported in their pain.

Ask for what you need

There are times when life takes us beyond the point of being able to listen and we just need to be held. It's okay to [ask for what we need](#).

Engage in 'non-demand' affection

Often when people are under stress they need the reassurance of their partner's touch. Unfortunately for many couples, they become reluctant to ask for or to offer physical affection because they worry that their partner will take that as an invitation for sex. There is certainly nothing wrong with desiring your partner sexually, but there are times, especially when we are stressed that we just need a hug or a cuddle without having to deal with what might feel like pressure for going further.

Practice the Stress Reducing Conversation

Years ago it was discovered that couples who remained close over time were good at listening to each other's stresses. Take about 30 minutes. Spend half the time listening to your partner's feelings and half sharing your own. Keep the focus on things from outside the relationship. This isn't the time to talk about things about your partner that's upsetting you. Avoid problem-solving, but instead, offer empathy and understanding. Ask caring questions like, "What's the worst part of this for you?" It can be really nice to know that our partner is on our side, no matter what.

Avoid competition

Everyone has their own experience of stress and hurt and it helps to feel heard by our partner. Focus on your role as a listener when your partner is sharing. Comments like, “You think that’s bad, listen to this!” will only get in the way.

Listen to the triggers

Often current problems bring up feelings from past experiences which adds to the hurt. Try to be aware of these moments inside yourself. You can also ask your partner about triggers that might be true for them. Something like, “I know you’re really worried about money now, and I remember how that was so hard for you when you were a kid” can help your partner feel understood and cared for.

Make time for good things between you

Don’t spend all your time talking about problems and hurts. Remember that you are friends and lovers. The more you are able to find moments of happiness, laughter, intimacy, and warmth, the better you will be able to manage the struggles of this time. Plan for date times, even if they are limited to be delivered dinners and Netflix.

Repair the damage

What if the hurt is there because of a negative experience with your partner? Research into couples shows us that all couples have those moments. We do get hurt by what our partner says or does or fails to do. Sometimes we nurse those hurts in our minds and memories and our partner might not even be aware of our feelings. [Repairing](#) these moments is *the* essential skill to learn. Try to cultivate the courage to tell your partner when they have done something to hurt you. Don’t criticize them, but just tell them what’s bothering you. When your partner approaches you about their hurt feelings, try to listen without being defensive. It can be hard, but remember that repairing these negative moments is essential to a positive relationship and that it will be worth it in the end.

When we know that our partner cares about us and what we are going through, it becomes easier to show that caring in return. Focus on that part of you that cares for the other and give them the chance to care for you.

You can weather the storms that life can bring together. The Gottmans can help. Learn more in the new [Gottman Relationship Coach](#).

About the Author – Donald L Cole, D.

Donald L. Cole, D.Min., is the Clinical Director of The Gottman Institute. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Licensed Marriage & Family Counselor in the state of Texas and an approved LPC & LMFT Supervisor. He is also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Washington and sees clients both in Seattle and the Houston area. He received his doctorate in ministry with a specialization in psychotherapy from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1993. He has 30 years of experience working with individuals and couples in various capacities including marital therapy, affair recovery, depression, anxiety, trauma recovery, parenting, and personality disorders.

Dr. Cole is the Clinical Director for The Gottman Institute. He is a Certified Gottman Method Couples’ Therapist and a Master Trainer for the Gottman Institute. He is also a Clinical Member of the American Association of Marital and Family Therapists.

Dr. Cole is an experienced public speaker and has trained therapists in all levels of the Gottman method nationally and internationally. He is also an ordained Lutheran Pastor through the ELCA.