



What to say to support a stressed partner

Cut out the card along the dashed line (6 by about 4 inches). Say one line, then stop and listen. Use your own words when they come.

Supporting a stressed partner

1. Offer one specific thing: "I'll take the dishes all week."
2. Ask: "Talk about it tonight, or take a night off from it?"
3. Name the strain: "You've been carrying a lot. I see it."
4. Keep showing up on day nine, not just day one.
5. Put the break on the calendar before the stress ends.

All the lines, and when to use them

What's one thing on your list I could take off it this week? (Early in a stressful stretch. One concrete offer is easier to accept than "let me know if you need anything," which puts the work back on them.)

I've got dinner and the kids' bath tonight. You don't have to thank me. Go sit down. (When they are too depleted to answer questions. Sometimes the kindest move is to decide and do.)

Do you want me to ask about the deadline, or would it help more if we didn't talk about work tonight? (Midway through, when you are not sure whether bringing it up helps or hurts. Some people want to process; some want an evening off from the topic.)

You've been carrying a lot since your dad's surgery. I see it, and I'm proud of how you're handling it. (A quiet moment during a long stretch. Naming the strain shows you have been paying attention all along.)

Walk me through everything that's on your plate. I'm not going to fix it. I just want the whole picture. (When the stress feels like a fog to them. Laying it out loud can make it look smaller, and it tells you where help would count.)

Would it help if I sat next to you while you made the call to the insurance company? (A specific dreaded task. Company during the hard part can matter more than advice about it.)

I've been a bit snappy because I'm worried about you. That's on me. What would make tomorrow easier? (Their stress has spilled into your mood. Owning it keeps your worry from becoming one more thing they have to manage.)

When this is over, what would feel like a real break? Let's put it on the calendar now. (Late in a long push. Something concrete to look forward to can make the remaining days feel finite.)

Phrases to avoid

"You need to relax.": It turns their stress into one more thing they are doing wrong, and it has never relaxed anyone.

"Let me know if you need anything.": Kindly meant, but it hands the job of figuring out what to ask for to the person with the least spare energy.

"I'm stressed too, you know.": It may be true, but raised in their moment it turns support into a contest. Find a separate time for your own load.

"Why didn't you start this earlier?": Hindsight criticism changes nothing about tonight and adds shame on top of pressure.

"Just quit, then.": Big, fast solutions skip over what they are actually feeling, and they rarely reflect the real options in front of them.

If you are afraid of your partner, scripts are not the answer: call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. In danger, call 911.