



What to say when your partner is upset

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.

When your partner is upset

1. Notice it: "That sounds really hard."
2. Ask the need: "Vent, or ideas?"
3. Reflect one detail and check: "Is that right?"
4. Link feeling to facts: "Of course you're upset, because..."
5. No "calm down", no fixing in the first minute.
6. Close with a check-in time.

All the lines, and when to use them

That sounds really hard. Do you want to vent, or do you want help figuring out what to do? (The first minute, when you do not yet know what they need. Asking spares you from guessing wrong.)

I'm here. Tell me what happened from the start. (They are clearly upset but have not said why yet. It invites the story without pressure to summarize it.)

So the part that got to you was that your manager said it in front of the whole team. Is that right? (After they have told you what happened. Reflecting the specific detail shows you were listening, and the question lets them correct you.)

Of course you're angry. I would be too if I'd spent a week on that and it got cut in five minutes. (When their reaction makes sense given what happened. Linking the feeling to the facts is what makes validation sound real rather than scripted.)

I don't have to agree with every part of this to see how much it hurt. (You see the situation differently but this is not the moment to argue it. It keeps you honest without leaving them alone with the feeling.)

Would a hug help, or would you rather have some space for a bit? (They have gone quiet or tearful. Some people want closeness when upset and some want room; asking beats assuming.)

Is any of this about me? If it is, I want to hear it, and I can handle it. (You suspect you are part of what upset them. Saying it first lowers the cost of them telling you.)

Can I check back with you tonight to see how you're doing? (Ending the conversation when they are calmer but not done. A specific check-in shows you are not just waiting for it to be over.)

Phrases to avoid

"Calm down.": It tells them their reaction is the problem, which almost always makes it bigger.

"At least it wasn't worse.": Looking on the bright side too early sounds like a request to stop feeling bad, and they stop telling you things.

"You're overreacting.": Even if you think so, it starts an argument about whether they are allowed to feel this, which you cannot win and do not need.

"Here's what you should do..." in the first minute: Fast advice skips the part where they feel understood. Offer it after you ask whether they want it.

"I know exactly how you feel, this happened to me...": Shared stories can help later, but too early they move the spotlight to you.

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.