



Communicating with your partner

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Communicating with Your Partner

As an aviator one might feel:

I'm not used to
being at home

I feel useless and
out of my depth

I don't have
answers

I feel powerless
and frustrated

I can't stand
not being able
to provide
financially

I will deal
with it.

I will protect
my partner.

These are anxious times: It's okay not to have the answers but it's crucial to talk about it.

As the weeks of uncertainty roll on and the implications for aviation worsen, it may increasingly affect our relationships with those closest to us. How do we communicate with our partner?

1. **Acknowledge the facts** underlying the stress without offering or seeking a solution. E.g.: "I do not know when I will have an income again" "My job is at risk"
2. **Address the feelings** which arise as a result of stress and their impacts. "I'm feeling anxious, worried, fearful". Both allow the other to express how they are affected without offering solutions or judgment.
3. **Use problem-focused stress communication** to mitigate feelings of stress:
 - Explore any possible practical and tangible solutions
 - Explore coping skills
 - Explore what both can do to best support one another at present. Write them down.

Useful tips:

- ▶ **Use I-messages** "I feel..." instead of blaming "You never..."
- ▶ **Talk when both are calm.** When emotions take over, the likelihood of making things worse increases.
- ▶ **Identify what the actual issue is.** This may require one to first do introspection to understand and to be clear about what you are actually upset about. For example: Are you really upset about him/her forgetting to take out the garbage or do you actually wish to receive more affection from your partner?
- ▶ **Don't bring up the past or other topics**, even if you feel they are related. Bringing up your partner's past mistakes, might cause him/her to be defensive instead of being open to finding a solution to the current problem. By bringing up other topics, the current conversation gets derailed without resolving anything.
- ▶ **Don't win the argument and lose the person.** The real goal is to come out the other end of the argument with the relationship even stronger. We can lose sight of this goal when we insist on being right and are so determined to prove that our partner is wrong.
- ▶ **Agree on a plan going forward.** Rather agree to try something if an absolute solution is not coming to the fore. *For example: "let's try..." or let's focus on..."* Try to ensure you both are on-board with the solution instead of having someone agree passively.
- ▶ **Evaluate your plan after some time.** Give each other honest feedback and fine-tune your solution until it genuinely works for the both of you

- ▶ **Talk before hurt turns to anger.** Most problems start with hurt. If one doesn't express what you are upset about, you keep thinking about it. It festers and could turn into feelings like hostility or anger. *For example: My partner made a decision without discussing it with me first. I feel hurt and like my opinion does not matter. I don't address it but later explode when he/she asks for my help with something.* If we express our hurt, our partner also has the opportunity resolve any misunderstanding.
- ▶ **Apologise** when you realise that you have hurt your partner.
- ▶ **Ask for what you need**, rather than blaming or expecting your partner to know.
- ▶ **Openness** draws us toward each other, it seeks to understand and it aims to achieve intimacy. Pride pushes us away from each other.
- ▶ **Truly listening** to your partner often calms him/her down in an argument and obviate the need to attack or defend. A practical tip is to reflect back to your partner what you heard, for example: "I can hear that you had a really difficult day."
- ▶ **Listen with the intent to understand** and not to reply.
- ▶ **Don't take it personally.** If your partner is moody, remember it's probably not really about you.
- ▶ **Focus on things you appreciate about your partner.** Give specific praise, *for example: "I really appreciate it that you took care of dinner this evening."*
- ▶ **Sexual intimacy** should not be used to solve arguments but does help with relieving stress and anxiety and increasing happiness.
- ▶ **Remember that both of you are in this together.** Both the aviator and his/her partner are affected by these stressful times. There will be times when your partner feels positive and when you struggle to cope and vice versa. Allow for this without judgement.

Reference:

Lau, K., Randall, A. K., Duran, N. D., & Tao, C. (2019). Examining the Effects of Couples' Real-Time Stress and Coping Processes on Interaction Quality: Language Use as a Mediator. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 2598. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6340998/>

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