

How to De-stress Your Relationship

All relationships are stressful at times. People in healthy relationships have fewer stressed times, and recover quickly when they do. In other words, they fight or argue quickly and resolve the problem so that it does not interfere with their relationship later. Try using some of these techniques to increase the health of your relationship with your partner.

- 1. List Your Stressors:** make a list of everything that is bothering you both large and small. Then compare lists with your partner. This will help start the process of re-establishing good communication. Then divide the list into two columns titled “what you can change” and “what you can’t change”.
- 2. Assess the Bottom Line:** determine what you really need and want and what you are willing to give up or risk losing in order to achieve it.
- 3. Prioritize the People in Your Life:** list all your friends, co-workers, family members, etc. Then divide the names into three groups- those who are “very important”, “fairly important” and “peripheral”. Use this as a guideline when making decisions about how to spend your time.
- 4. List All Your Responsibilities:** include tasks at home, at work and extracurricular activities. What responsibilities can you drop, share, or delegate/hire out?
- 5. Be Absolutely Available to Each Other in Crises:** come to an agreement with your partner about what constitutes a “real emergency.” Then advise your co-workers that if your partner calls and says “It’s an emergency” they are to interrupt you no matter what you’re doing. Mutual support is key to healthy relationships.
- 6. Reserve Some Exclusive Time for Each Other:** enjoy each other’s company – rediscover the person you fell in love with. Get together when you have energy to spare.

7. **Make More Plans:** take more control of your lives. Take mental health days off together, go on weekend getaways, and schedule in sexual encounters – do mood enhancing things like sitting in front of a fire, bathing together or giving each other a massage.
8. **Distribute Household Chores Fairly:** list everything you need to accomplish then negotiate for fair division. If your budget allows, contract out certain activities. Do more of what you enjoy and less of what causes you distress.
9. **Learn About Your Partner’s Job:** explain your responsibilities to your partner – the demands on your time, what you like about your job and what annoys you. This helps to create understanding and empathy.
10. **Use Technology Wisely:** record TV programs to enjoy later; don’t answer the phone – let messages go to voice mail. Take a break from your devices at home and connect with each other personally. Stay in touch during the day with texting.
11. **Give the Gift of Pleasant Surprises:** do the unexpected when you can. Do small things to show you care – do something your partner says you “never do”.
12. **Don’t Use Alcohol to Cope:** alcohol creates more stress than it relieves – it can negatively affect your relationship with family, friends, co-workers, and your partner.
13. **Make a Contract:** discuss a plan to implement some changes with your partner and then make a written contract about how the changes will be implemented. Start small – one or two changes is enough. Set a time line and a concrete plan.
14. **Commit to Your Relationship:** when people are under stress, they may feel like they have no extra energy. Making the commitment to invest the time, energy and effort to implement one small change in your relationship will have huge payoffs.

*Adapted from the handout: “How to de-stress your relationship” created by The Family Centre
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