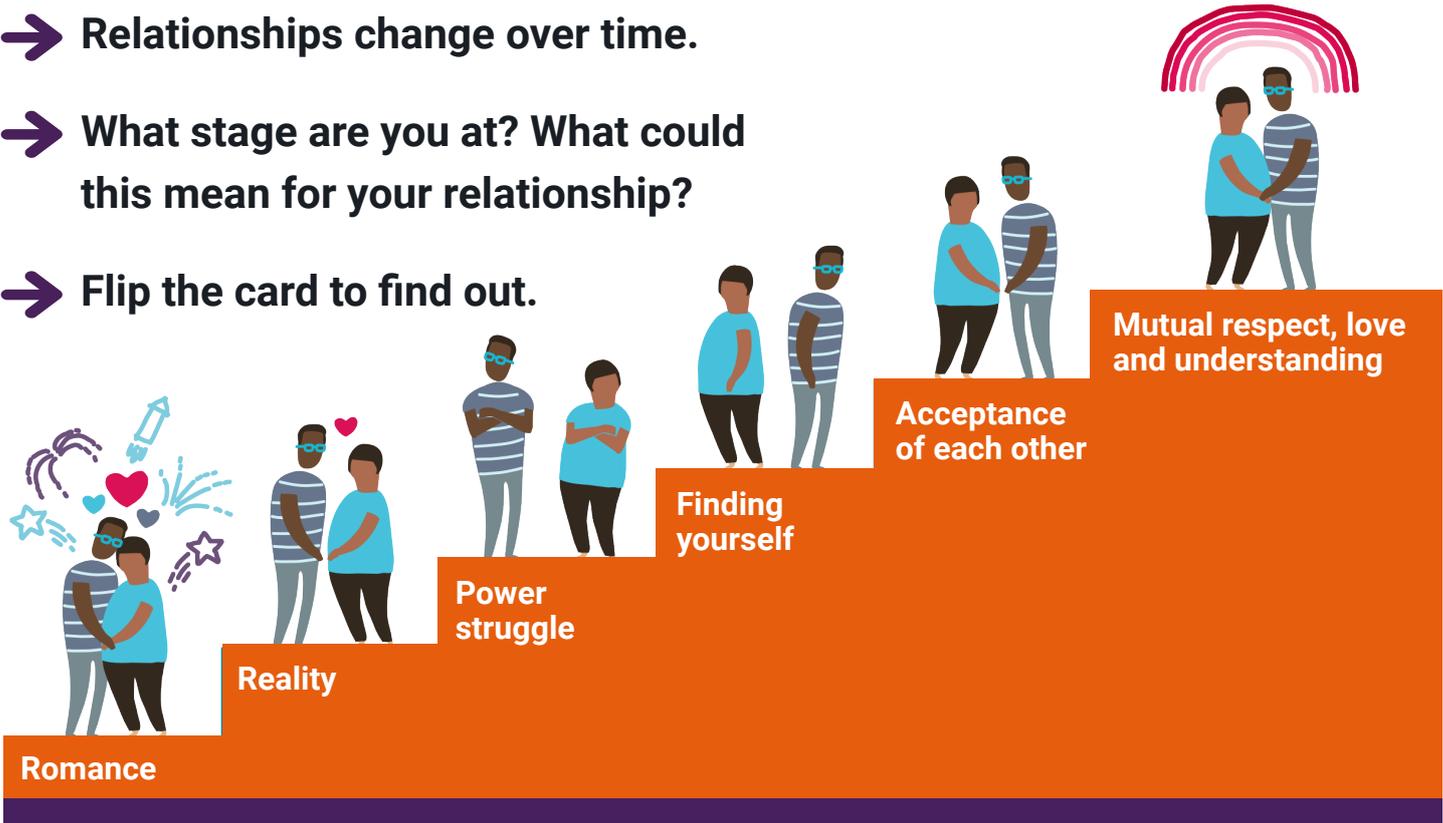


GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Stages and changes of relationships



- ➔ Relationships change over time.
- ➔ What stage are you at? What could this mean for your relationship?
- ➔ Flip the card to find out.



Romance

Reality

Power
struggle

Finding
yourself

Acceptance
of each other

Mutual respect, love
and understanding

Stages and changes of relationships

Long term relationships tend to go through lots of **STAGES** and **CHANGES**.

It's different for everyone and your journey will be affected by the changes in your lives.

1) Romance

Many relationships start here – everything seems perfect and you want to spend every moment together.

2) Reality

You start to see each other's flaws. You may find that you want different things from life.

3) Power struggles

As you figure out how things are going to work between the two of you, you may have to reach a compromise about important issues like children, money, or housework.

4) Finding yourselves

Once you've figured out how your relationship works, you may need to focus on yourselves as individuals – your personal hopes and dreams.

This can be a difficult stage for many couples.

5) Acceptance

When you have learned to respect each other's needs, you can start to see your differences as a strength.

6) Mutual love and respect

You learn to love each other completely – warts and all. You've found a way to balance your needs as individuals with your roles in the relationship.

Throughout your life, you may move up and down through the stages. Big changes like having a baby or losing a job can cause arguments, which may set you back. And you won't always be at the same stage as each other.



Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- a) Where do you think you are at the moment?
- b) Where would your partner say they are?
- c) What would you have to do to get to the next stage?



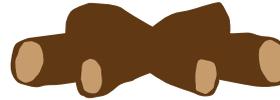
Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/stages-changes to watch the relevant video clip

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Logs and fire



➔ The LOGS



What issues do you argue about most?

➔ The MATCH



What usually starts an argument?

➔ The FUEL



What makes it worse?
Are you fuelling the fire?

➔ The WATER



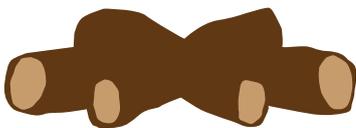
What helps calm things down?

1) You can think of arguments as a fire.

The **LOGS** are the things you argue about most. Even when you're getting on well, the logs are still there.

Some common ones are:

- Money.
- Friends.
- Housework.
- Sex.
- Children.



Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/logsandfire to watch the relevant video clip

2) The **MATCH** can be anything that starts an argument. It's often something small:

- The wrong tone of voice.
- Feeling stressed.
- Not listening to each other.



3) Once the argument has started, we can make things worse by the way we respond. This can **ADD FUEL** to the fire:

- Raising your voice.
- Walking out.
- Bottling things up.
- Saying hurtful things.
- Bringing up old arguments.



4) There are also things we can do to stop the argument getting worse. This is like putting **WATER** on the fire.

- Taking a break.
- Listening.
- Saying sorry.
- Having a hug.



A few things to try:

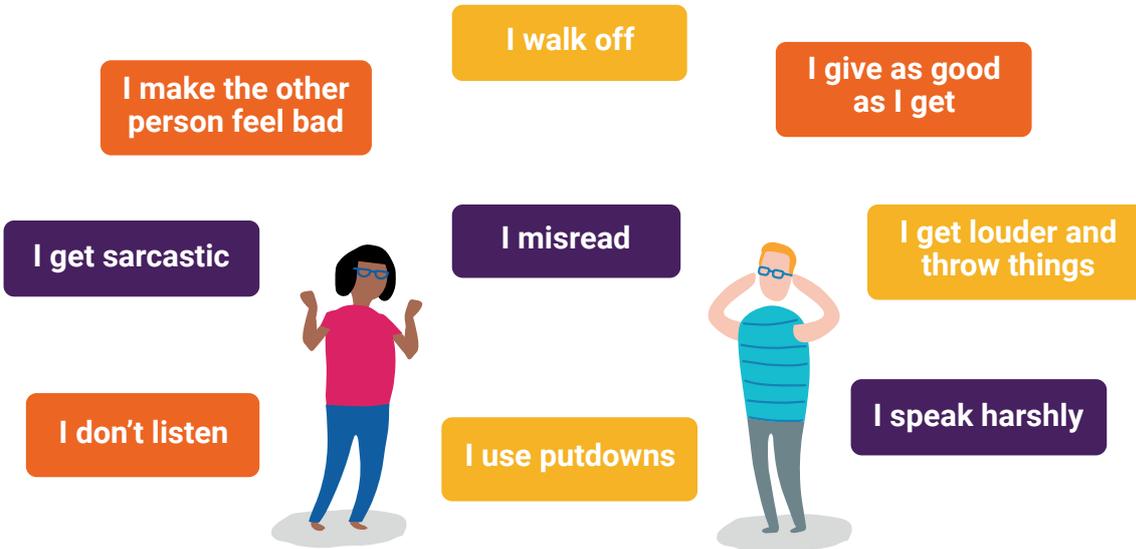
- a) Think about what your logs might be.
- b) Next time you argue, try to notice when you're adding fuel.
- c) See if you can water things down before the argument escalates.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Conflict styles



→ Things that people commonly do during an argument.



→ When you can recognise these, you can change the way your arguments play out. Flip the card to find out how.

Conflict styles

This card shows some common things people do during an argument. Which of these do you do?

- Bottle things up and then launch an attack.
- Get overwhelmed by your feelings.
- Sulk or give the silent treatment.
- Something else?



Think about a recent argument you had with your partner.

- What did you say and do?
- How do you think that made your partner feel?
- What did your partner do in response?
- How did that make you feel?
- If you have children, how do you think this made them feel?



➔ When you are stressed or angry, it's harder to stay calm and in control. Learning to recognise your own behaviour can help you to stop some arguments from getting out of hand.

Scan the QR code or visit
bit.ly/conflict-styles-2
to watch the relevant
video clip

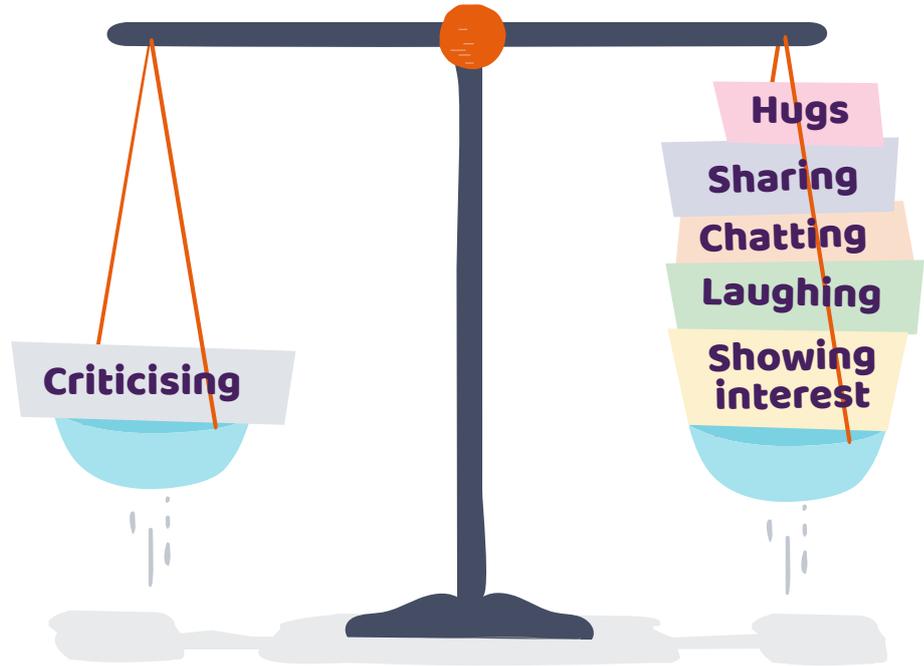


GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

The magic ratio



- ➔ How many positive moments does it take to balance each negative moment?
- ➔ Flip the card to find out.



The magic ratio

Even the happiest couples have negative moments. Sometimes you might find yourself snapping, criticising, shouting, or blaming. What would it take to balance this out? Relationship experts tell us that for every **one negative moment**, you need **five positive moments**.

For each negative interaction with your partner:

- Criticising.
- Trying to win.
- Blaming.
- Name-calling.
- Sneering.
- Sarcasm.
- Shouting.
- Being defensive.
- Talking over each other.



You need to try to have five positive interactions:

- Hugging.
- Sharing.
- Chatting.
- Laughing together.
- Supporting each other.
- Showing interest.
- Listening.
- Being grateful.
- Thoughtful gifts.



Start practicing the magic ratio:

- a) Think about your relationship.
- b) What positive things could you do for each other?
- c) What can you do to show you care?



GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Better communication



- ➔ The downward spiral.
- ➔ Some types of behaviour can increase the risk of relationship difficulties.
- ➔ Flip the card to learn more.



What poor communication looks like:

How you can protect against it:

Criticism

Criticism isn't the same as complaining. It's a direct attack on your partner. *"You only think about yourself."*

If these happen a lot, things can spiral out of control, and you may find yourselves going your separate ways.

Try starting a sentence with "I..." and asking for what you need. *"I was worried last night. I'd like it if you could text me when you're going to be late."*

Contempt

Contempt is when we are deliberately mean. We might use name-calling, or sarcasm, or roll our eyes to show we're not interested.

Do you recognise any of these behaviours?

Focus on what you love about each other. Look for opportunities to pay each other compliments and do things together that you both enjoy.

Defensiveness

Defensiveness is usually a response to criticism. We deflect blame onto the other person. *"I've been busy. Why couldn't you do it?"*

Here are some things you can do to protect your relationship against them.

Look at things from each other's point of view. Take responsibility and say sorry when you're in the wrong.

Stonewalling

Stonewalling is when we get so overwhelmed that we shut down completely, blanking our partner, or walking out of the room.

Be good to yourself. Take some time out to do something relaxing and enjoyable.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Harmful and helpful arguments



HARMFUL arguments can be
BAD for your relationship



HELPFUL arguments can be
GOOD for your relationship



We all need to have difficult conversations sometimes.
The way you start these conversations can affect the way they go.

1) A harsh start up

A **harsh start-up** is when you go straight in with a verbal attack:
"You never think about me!"

The other person is likely to be defensive and you won't get the support you need.



Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/helpful-harmful to watch the relevant video clip

2) A soft start up

A **soft start-up** is a way of asking for something you want without blaming the other person:

"I'm worried about how we're going to get everything done."

This makes it easier for the other person to listen, so you can sort things out together.

Soft start-ups often begin with "I". Instead of focusing on what the other person is doing wrong, focus on how you feel and what you need.

How to practice a soft start up:

Instead of saying:
"You never help out! I have to do everything by myself!"

Try saying:
"I'm feeling stressed out. I'd really like some help."

It's the same thing, but it's more likely to get you the help you need.

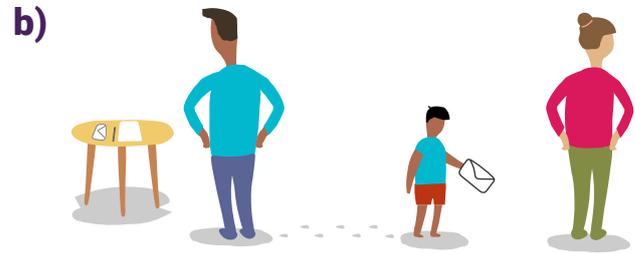
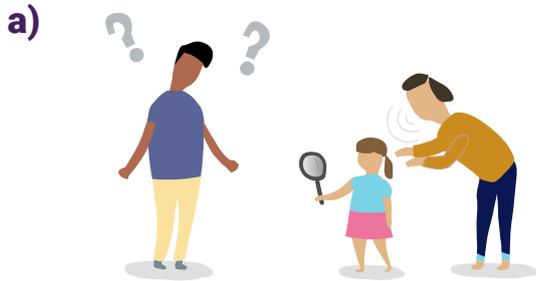
So, before you start a difficult conversation, ask yourself if there's a softer way to start.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Child roles: for separated parents



➔ When parents separate, children can often feel like they're being put into these different roles. Can you guess what they are? Flip the card to find out more.



Child roles: for separated parents

a) Spy

Asking your child about their other parent can make them feel like a spy. They will want to give you the right answer, but they won't want to betray their other parent.

Try instead: Stick to general questions about the time they spent together. If you find yourself asking probing questions about your ex, ask yourself why you really want to know.

c) Counsellor

Seeking emotional support from your child can put them under pressure to try and make you feel better. It's not their job to support you.

Try instead: If your child sees that you're upset, you can tell them how you are feeling. But let them know that you'll be OK, and that they don't need to worry.

b) Messenger

Asking children to pass messages back and forth puts them in an uncomfortable position. They may worry that whatever they do, it will upset one of their parents.

Try instead: Find a way to talk to your ex directly. If that's not easy, try asking someone neutral to come along to help keep things calm and respectful.

d) Mediator

It can be extremely upsetting for children to see their parents arguing with each other. They may feel the need to try and solve the problem, which is too much responsibility for children.

Try instead: Let them know that these are problems for adults to solve. Reassure them that you both still love them, even though you're not together anymore.

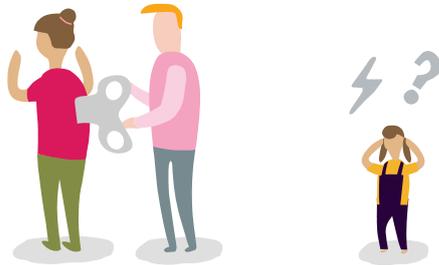
GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Parent roles: for separated parents



➔ When parents separate, they sometimes do things that can put their children in difficult positions. Do you recognise any of these behaviours? Flip the card to find out more.

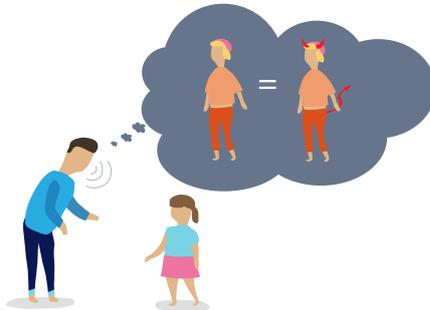
a)



b)



c)



d)



Parent roles: for separated parents

a) Provoking your child's other parent

If you add to your ex's stress or anxiety, it can have a direct impact on your child. A parent who feels overwhelmed will find it harder to meet their child's needs.

Try instead: Think about your decisions from your child's point of view. Ask yourself, *"How might this affect my child?"*

c) Badmouthing your child's other parent

When parents badmouth each other, children can feel forced to choose sides. They may avoid telling you about problems because they'll be worried about your reaction.

Try instead: If you need to vent, call on a trusted friend or family member. Work on finding solutions and make sure you protect your child from any negative exchanges.

b) Competing to be the favourite parent

Competing with your ex can mean you lose touch with what your child really needs. Most children just want their parents' time and attention.

Try instead: Focus on what your child needs from you. Ask yourself, *"Am I doing this for my child's best interests, or for another reason?"*

d) Not letting your child talk about the other parent

It can be painful to hear your child talk about their other parent. But if children think they are upsetting their parents, they may start to censor what they say.

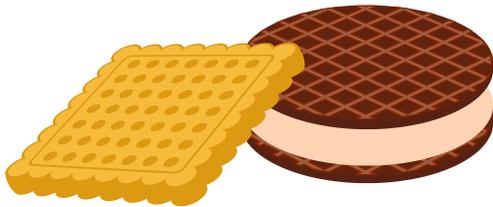
Try instead: Remember that your child still loves their other parent. Show interest, say something positive, and try to smile – even if it's not always easy.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Small gestures



- Small acts of kindness can make a big difference to your relationship.



- Kindness and thoughtfulness are important in long-term relationships. Regularly doing nice things for your partner without being asked, like making them a cup of tea, can mean more than big gestures or presents as it shows you care about them.

Let's use the example of making your partner a cup of tea.

Regular small gestures like this can:

...help you feel connected



Small acts of kindness can help you stay connected by demonstrating your interest and devotion to your partner, and can be more meaningful than grand gestures.

...show you care



Doing little everyday things for your partner can remind them you care about them and are thinking of them, especially when life is tough and they have a lot on their mind.

...build intimacy



Over time, regular gestures can build intimacy between you and your partner. Knowing the way your partner likes their tea reinforces how well you know them and that they are important to you.

...be a way of saying sorry



It can be hard to apologise. Doing something small but familiar can be a way of saying "sorry" after an argument and opening up the conversation with kindness and attention.

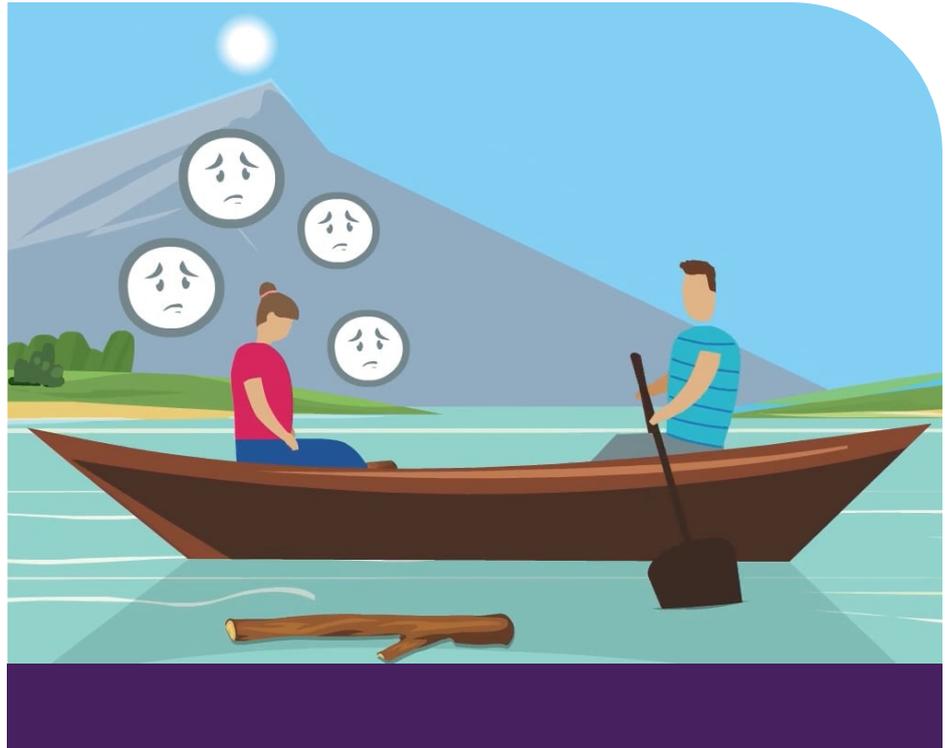


GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Sharing the load



- ➔ **When your partner is going through a tough time, you might feel the urge to take control until they get back on their feet.**
- ➔ **But it's usually best if you face things together. Slow down, take an oar each, and approach things as a couple.**



Sharing the load

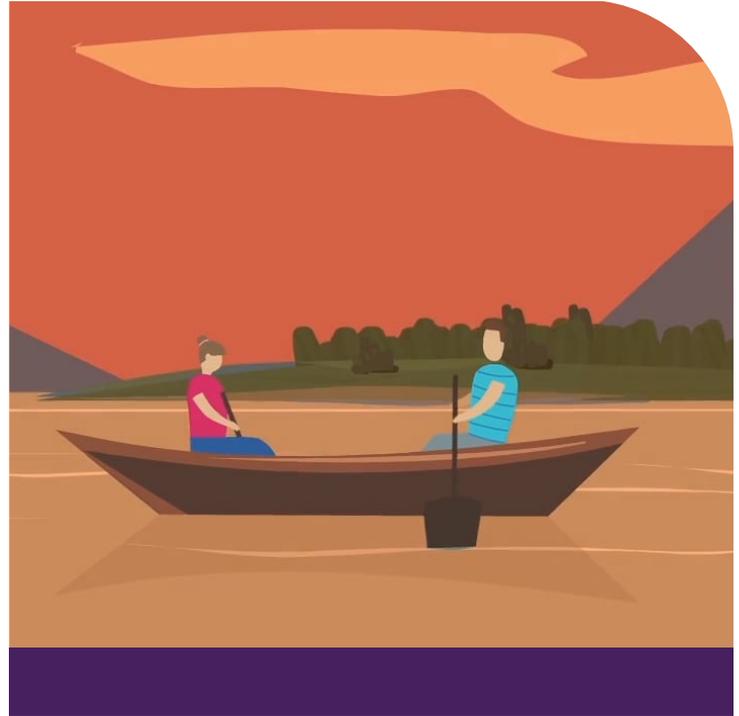
- ➔ **When one of you is going through something stressful, like an illness or a job loss, it can be tempting for the other one to take over.**

This might help for a little while but it's not a long-term solution. The person doing the heavy lifting ends up feeling tired and stressed. The person going through a tough time starts to feel like a burden.

Seeing the stress as a shared problem can make it easier to deal with. Instead of **my stress** or **your stress**, try to see it is as **our stress** – something for you to deal with together.

When we feel supported by our partner, it makes us feel happier with the relationship and more able to cope.

- ➔ **Even if you have to slow down for a while, things will be much easier in the long run when you work together.**



GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Balance of stress



➔ Everyone has 'demands' and 'resources' in their life.



DEMANDS are things that require your time, energy, and attention. They might be big things like having a baby, or regular events like paying the bills. Even things like helping your child with homework or looking after your partner can be thought of as 'demands'.



RESOURCES are coping mechanisms you use to deal with demands. They might be practical things like money or a car, or emotional things like the support of your partner or family, talking to a friend, or playing with your kids.

➔ So how do we keep our demands and resources balanced?

→ Keeping the scales balanced

Think of your capacity like a scale. When you've got plenty of **resources**, the scale remains balanced – you're more likely to cope with new **demands** that come your way.

Stress usually happens when you feel there is an imbalance between demands and resources. As demands pile up, it can feel like you don't have enough resources to cope. You may get overwhelmed, irritated, or anxious.

Some coping mechanisms may also end up becoming unhealthy demands, like drinking alcohol or spending too much money.

That's why it's important to use **healthy coping mechanisms**:

- Reframe demands in a positive way: *"I'm lucky to have a family to take care of."*
- Practise acceptance: *"I can't change this demand, but it doesn't dictate my happiness."*

Sometimes just asking for support can lighten the load. Family and friends can help with practical things or hold you accountable to changes you want to make.

Remember – when we share our demands, we can help create resources for each other and rebalance the scales.



GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Listening and talking

- ➔ Sometimes, good listening is the difference that helps you understand each other and come to an agreement. Try this one-minute listening activity with your partner to practise your listening skills.
- ➔ It might take a few goes to get it right, so it's helpful to practise with an easy topic. Doing this can make it easier to **stay calm** and **really listen** the next time something big comes up.



→ Choose one person to be the **talker** and one to be the **listener**.

TALKER

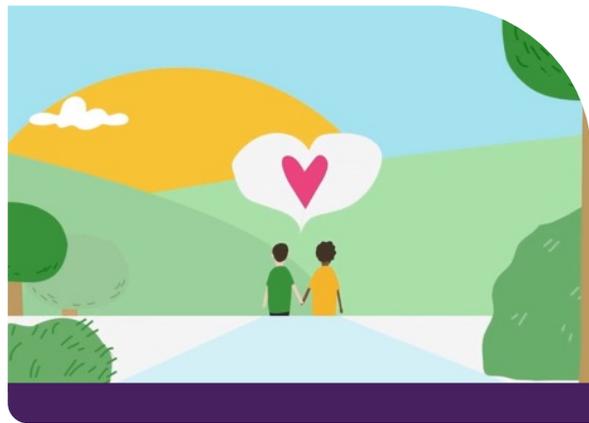
Pick a neutral topic like something you've seen on TV, or a walk you've been on. Set a timer for one minute, and talk. It can be difficult to express thoughts and feelings, so be kind to yourself. Describe your experience, and try to be specific about how it made you feel.

LISTENER

Listen to what's being said without responding. If you get distracted, bring yourself back to what the talker is saying.

When the minute is up, the **listener** summarises what the **talker** was saying. Go over the main points and reflect back what you've heard without judging or trying to solve problems. You might also pick up on body language or tone of voice. Ask questions to clarify anything you might have missed.

→ When you're finished, swap over. The **listener becomes the talker** and the **talker becomes the listener**. Notice how it feels to be listened to, and how it feels to listen without interrupting.



GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Internal-external stress



INSIDE STRESS is stress that is directly connected to your relationship with your partner. It includes things like arguments, having different goals, habits, and worrying about each other.

OUTSIDE STRESS comes from outside your relationship. It includes things like work, money, friends, in-laws, and problems with the children.

➔ It might seem like **OUTSIDE STRESS** doesn't have anything to do with your relationship, but it can easily spill over into your relationship and become **INSIDE STRESS**.

→ There are four main ways that **OUTSIDE STRESS** can affect your relationship:



TIME: When you or your partner have a lot of stress in your life, you have less time for each other.



COMMUNICATION: If you are stressed, you may argue more or snap at each other.



HEALTH: Stress can make you feel unwell and want to be alone. It can even make you less interested in sex.



BEHAVIOUR: You might behave in a way you wouldn't normally. Stress can make you impatient or grumpy, and less willing to see things from your partner's point of view.

→ If you're under a lot of stress, **talk to each other**. It could be affecting your relationship more than you realise. Keep communication open, talk about what's going on, and work together to look for solutions.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Looking after myself

When you are journeying through a stressful situation, it's important to take a bit of extra care of yourself.

→ **Self-care** happens when you take action to improve your own health and happiness – particularly during stressful times. It requires you to *intentionally* try to guard your peace of mind by managing your stress, anxiety, or worry through proactive steps that enhance your resilience and wellbeing.

Studies show that practicing self-care can improve your relationships with others as well as yourself. It can increase affectionate communication, reduce conflict, and lower healthcare concerns.

→ So how do you engage in self-care?



→ What self care means to you.

Self-care is not a one-size-fits-all practice. What works for one person may actually bring you more stress or discomfort. When you define what self-care means to you, it is easier to plan your own personal self-care practice that will work.

There are **SIX** areas of self-care: **physical, professional, relational, emotional, psychological,** and **spiritual.**

- **Physical:** sleep, nutrition, exercise, breathing, and hobbies (reading, knitting, painting, video gaming, etc.).
- **Professional:** work-life balance, workplace support, and professional development.
- **Relational:** charitable acts, prioritising relationships, and setting boundaries.
- **Emotional:** healthy coping habits (meditation, yoga, tai chi, journalling, practising gratitude, therapy, etc.).
- **Psychological:** self-awareness and 'flow state hobbies' (music, art, games, daydreaming, etc.).
- **Spiritual:** finding greater purpose through prayer, meditation, connecting with nature, etc. (does not need to be religious, but can be)

To create your personal self-care plan, create a list of:



Specific activities that are soothing, relaxing, distracting, or mood enhancing.



People who provide meaningful emotional support to you.



Positive self-statements ("I am strong. I am brave. I am capable.")



Helpful – and practical – things you can do during stressful times.

GETTING ON BETTER (2026)

Emotional and practical support

➔ Do you know the difference between **emotional support** and **practical support**?

- **Emotional support** is when you show you understand someone's feelings.
- **Practical support** is when you offer functional solutions to solve a problem.

While both are important, **it's usually better to offer emotional support first.**

➔ Our emotions influence how we relate to each other. If a partner, family member, or friend is facing a problem and you choose to offer practical support, it can make them feel like you don't care about how they are feeling. Even if you're able to "fix" the problem, you may create another in the process.



➔ Instead of immediately trying to fix things, it's better to **listen first without offering a solution**. By actively listening, you show you care about how this problem is affecting them. Most of the time beginning with emotional support will naturally lead to an opportunity to provide practical support.

Here are some ways you can provide emotional support first:

- **Actively ask and listen to how the other person is feeling**
(*"How has this made you feel?"*)
- **Ask questions to learn more about the problem**
(*"What about this are you finding particularly difficult?"*)
- **Show that you understand how they are feeling**
(*"It makes sense you would be feeling sad after this."*)
- **Reassure them by encouraging and affirming them**
(*"Things may feel heavy right now, but I know you can do it."*)
- **Work out solutions together – when they are ready**
(*"I'd be happy to help you figure this out."*)

