Understanding relationship stress

PART 1 OF 5 • UNDERSTAND / REFLECT / RECONNECT

Stress in relationships is not always caused by a lack of care. Differences in communication, sensory needs, expectations and recovery time can build pressure even when both people want connection.

THE STRESS CYCLE

A trigger → interpretation → emotional response → protective behaviour → another misunderstanding.

NOTICE

What changes first when stress rises: your tone, energy, concentration, body sensations or willingness to talk?

YOUR REFLECTION

Write about a recent moment when tension began. What was happening before it?

Different needs, same relationship

PART 2 OF 5 • UNDERSTAND / REFLECT / RECONNECT

One person may need immediate reassurance while another needs quiet to process. Neither need is automatically wrong. Conflict often grows when each person interprets the other's coping strategy as rejection.

TWO VALID NEEDS

Connection and reassurance ↔ Space and processing time

A BRIDGE

"I care about this. I need twenty minutes to settle, then I can listen properly."

YOUR REFLECTION

What do you need when upset? What might the other person need?

Overload and misunderstanding

PART 3 OF 5 • UNDERSTAND / REFLECT / RECONNECT

Autistic and ADHD experiences can include sensory overload, difficulty switching attention, rejection sensitivity, delayed processing or impulsive responses. These experiences vary by person and should not be assumed.

EARLY SIGNALS

Tension → shorter answers → reduced flexibility → shutdown or argument

REPAIR

Pause; reduce stimulation; name the difficulty without blame; return at an agreed time.

YOUR REFLECTION

Which early signs tell you that you need a pause?

Communicating without blame

PART 4 OF 5 • UNDERSTAND / REFLECT / RECONNECT

Describe one observable event, say how it affected you, explain your need and make a specific, achievable request. Avoid mind-reading or assigning motives.

FOUR-PART SENTENCE

When [specific event] happened, I felt [emotion]. I needed [need]. Could we [request]?

LISTENING

Reflect back what you heard before defending your intention.

YOUR REFLECTION

Write one sentence you could use in a difficult conversation.

Reconnection and next steps

PART 5 OF 5 • UNDERSTAND / REFLECT / RECONNECT

Healthy repair does not require immediate agreement. It can involve acknowledging hurt, clarifying intentions, accepting different needs and making one small change. Persistent fear, coercion or threats require safety-focused support, not simply better communication.

REPAIR PATH

Pause → regulate → listen → clarify → agree one next step → check in

ONE SMALL CHANGE

Choose a calmer time, a shared signal for breaks, or a weekly ten-minute check-in.

YOUR REFLECTION

What one realistic change could help reduce stress this week?