



PRESENT PRESSURES EDITION

In every marriage each person is constantly dealing with the pressures of life that range from jobs, relationships, projects, and parenting. Stress from the different areas of our life is inevitable and it is often our response to these stresses that negatively impacts our marriages.

An important skill to learn as we build strong marriages is learning to control our

≡ RESPONSE TO STRESS ≡

but also how to help one another be aware of and help deal with those stressors.

Set It Up

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE STRESSES IN OUR LIVES CAN BE... WELL, STRESSFUL.

Pick a time and place during your date or even after where you can be fully present and and share openly with your spouse. The goal is that you have uninterrupted time for great conversation, so choose what works best for both of you. You could try dinner and drinks, a sunset walk in a nearby park, a country drive with no particular destination, or maybe just cuddled up under a blanket on the couch.

Just pick a place that is comfortable and safe.

The Date

Below there are three parts to this date, but before you get started, take some time to

☞ PRAY FOR EACH OTHER ☞

If you wish to pray a scripture over one another we suggest Colossians 2:2-3. Paul is writing to brothers and sisters about his purpose and prayer for the Church. That purpose and prayer is just as relevant for our marriages.

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Part 1 : Brain Dump

Decide who will start and then that person takes about 4-6 minutes to talk about the pressures they are feeling and the stresses weighing on them while the other person listens. It is important that the person talking gets the time that they need to open up and talk. If opening up is difficult then they may need more time and patience from the listener so they can work through what to say. If one spouse is comfortable verbally processing their feelings they may not need as much time to begin opening up.

The spouse who is listening should work to be patient, not interrupt or ask questions. While your spouse is talking you should be actively listening and paying attention to their voice, their body language, and your perception of them. You can ask yourself the following questions as they talk:

≡ HOW IS MY SPOUSE FEELING? ≡

≡ WHAT COULD BE MAKING THEM FEEL THAT WAY? ≡

≡ WHAT HAVE THEY SAID THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND? ≡

When the time is up ask any questions you need to ask for clarification and understanding, then switch.

Part 2 : Present Response

|Take turns asking your spouse to share their perceptions and observations of how they see you respond to the pressures and stresses that you shared with them. Ask them to specifically share the negative ways that you respond and why they experience it as a negative response. You will need to listen and ask clarifying questions without getting defensive.

Part 3 : Desired Response

Take turns asking your spouse to share the positive ways you respond to the pressures and stresses you shared with them. Ask your spouse to share what they think the ideal response would look like. Discuss ways that you can help each other to interrupt negative responses and shift to the desired response. You can find a few ideas below to get you started on what it might look like for you to work on this together being “encouraged in heart and united in love.”



☞ CODED LANGUAGE ☞

Choose a phrase, a sound, a gesture or a sign as a gentle signal to you that helps remind you to shift from your present response to the response you desire.

Example: “When I am stressed, I need to remember that Jesus is the Prince Of Peace. When my spouse notices I’m stressed, she uses her finger in her mouth to make a POP! sound (Prince of Peace). Upon hearing the POP!, our children are instructed to immediately and incessantly repeat this hilarious mouth-sound. They can only stop once they have made me genuinely smile.”

☞ CHANGE "WHY" TO "WHAT" OR "HOW" ☞

Sometimes phrasing is everything. Talk about the questions your spouse can ask you to help move you from the present response to your desired response. Starting questions with “What” or “How” can be ways to be less confrontational and more invitational when asking questions.

Example: “Why are you acting that way?” or “Why did you do that?” can become “How are you feeling right now?” or “What do you need right now?”

☞ THE NOTEBOOK ☞

Journaling can be very helpful, especially when talking about what we are feeling is difficult. Buy a journal to share with one another. Take turns writing in the notebook about what you are feeling, the pressures weighing on you, and the victories you are experiencing. End each entry with a 1-2 sentence prayer for your spouse and your marriage and then place the notebook in an agreed upon location. You can choose a fun or silly object like a rubber duck to put on the notebook as a signal that it is the other person’s turn. The rhythm of writing in the journal may vary, but it is recommended that you try to read your spouse’s entry within 24 hours, so you can talk about it if needed.

☞ Next Steps ☞

First, pray for one another. Pray for peace and relief from the stresses and pressures of this world.

Second, continue communicating and sharing your heart with one another.

