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Pre Problem Solving Guidelines

People want to be understood! Your partner may want to vent about or decompress from unpleasant events of the day. Often, the listener jumps to problem solving versus thoroughly listening and understanding their partner. The following are steps to follow before problem solving with your partner.

Listener Guidelines

1. Listen carefully, with the goal of fully understanding your partner and being able to paraphrase the main points. Listen for both content and feeling statements.
2. Avoid interrupting your partner. Let your partner finish before you respond.
3. Paraphrase your partners communication, and check to see if you “got it all” before you respond to the content of your partners communication.
4. Once you paraphrased to your partner satisfaction, provide a sympathetic statement (e.g., I am sorry that that happened to you, that sounded hurtful) and, if appropriate, a sympathetic touch (e.g., hold your partner's hand).
5. Assess if listening and understanding is all your partner needed from you. Your partner may thank you for listening and want to move on. If you are unsure, ask your partner if they want to continue on this topic.
6. If your partner wants to continue the conversation, ask your partner what their thoughts and ideas are about the situation they expressed. Ask what they already tried or thought about in terms of problem solving.

If your partner has no ideas or thoughts about problem solving the situation they expressed, skip to number 8.

If your partner shares their ideas about problem solving the situation they expressed, then

7. Ask if your partner wants your feedback regarding their thoughts about problem solving. If so, provide your thoughts about what they shared.
8. Ask if your partner would like your input so that you can collaboratively problem solve.
9. If so, collaboratively problem solve.