

Dealing with Frustration in Your Relationship

Objective

To reduce frustration in your relationship by communicating your needs and understanding the needs of your partner.

You Should Know

Frustration can lead to weakening of the bond between you and your partner. If you are frustrated, you might struggle to explain yourself to your partner, or you might avoid saying what you really want to say. Over time, your frustration might lead to tension and stress, diminishing communication and eroding your relationship.

Frustration manifests in a number of ways—answering questions in a curt manner, ignoring your partner, rolling your eyes, or saying “whatever.” Sometimes frustration shows itself in a slammed door or a sigh. However frustration shows up, it can indicate unhappiness and discontent. You might feel trapped, while your partner is in the dark regarding the source of the problem.

Experiencing occasional frustration is perfectly normal because you will not always agree and live in complete harmony. However, it is important to deal with frustration in appropriate ways to avoid bigger problems. Your frustration might be about something minor or it might relate to a more serious issue. Either way, frustration increases when there are misunderstandings and poor communication—so it is vital to face it head-on.

These suggestions can help you handle your frustration:

Identify why you are frustrated. Frustration refers to being upset or annoyed, especially because of an inability to change or achieve something. There are internal sources of frustration, such as when you are unable to get what you want. There are external sources—the conditions you encounter outside yourself—including people, places, and things that annoy you. It is possible that you are not actually frustrated with your partner, but instead you are taking out your frustration within your relationship. To reflect on why you are frustrated, you might ask yourself:

- Am I frustrated at a certain time or can I identify a pattern? (For example, are you more frustrated when you have to pay bills, knowing you have to move money around or you fall short?)
- Am I stressed and unable to talk to my partner about what is bothering me?
- Am I projecting frustration from external sources onto my partner? These situations might cause frustration:
 - Your health or physical/medical conditions

- Your financial situation (including bankruptcy or wasteful spending)
- Emotional difficulties or loss (bereavement or acute stress)
- Stagnation at work or job loss

Knowing when, why, and where you get frustrated is important to your ability to remove and/or cope with the sources of frustration in the healthiest manner.

Communicate with your partner about what is frustrating you. If you keep your feelings to yourself, your frustration will increase. Failure to clearly communicate when the frustration begins prevents your partner from understanding what is wrong or modifying the behavior that feeds your frustration. For example, if you are frustrated because your partner does not share in household tasks, explain why you are upset and schedule some time together to come up with a solution.

Understand your partner’s point of view. Although your partner might be doing something that frustrates you, consider whether these actions are justified and logical—in which case, you can replace frustration with understanding and patience. Consider letting go of minor frustrations and making allowances for each other’s differences.

Look for the positive things and put your feelings into perspective. Evaluate whether the issue is worth getting upset over and replace your negative thoughts with positive ones. Look for what is “right” in your relationship and you might realize that your frustrations are minor.

Compromise when something is really frustrating you. Discuss these issues with your partner and come up with solutions to overcome the problems together. If you practice dealing with your frustrations through compromise, you will overcome problems more quickly and experience less frustration.

Everyone feels frustration sometimes, and you may feel that some of your frustration is caused by your partner. You might feel like confronting your partner, or even getting angry, but making another person feel bad will not reduce your frustration. You can work on expressing your feelings and communicating what you want without blaming your partner—taking responsibility for your own behavior.

What to Do

Make a copy of this worksheet for each partner. After you have both completed it, share your responses without judging or criticizing.

When my frustration level is high, I tend to: *(check all that apply)*

_____ Get very quiet

_____ Lose my temper

_____ Raise my voice

_____ Freeze

_____ Say things I don’t mean

_____ Blame others

_____ Make empty threats

_____ Stop listening

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Start to cry | <input type="checkbox"/> Leave the room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use alcohol or drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> Use guilt/shame |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid/withdraw | <input type="checkbox"/> Throw things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use "you" statements | <input type="checkbox"/> Count to ten/breathe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Involve others (friends, other family members) | <input type="checkbox"/> Exaggerate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lie | <input type="checkbox"/> Become physical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm myself before reengaging | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

This is how my partner responds to my frustration: (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shuts down | <input type="checkbox"/> Gets quiet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Leaves the room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goes to the gym/exercises | <input type="checkbox"/> Escalates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets physical | <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets defensive | <input type="checkbox"/> Breaks things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accuses me of things | <input type="checkbox"/> Makes empty promises |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stops listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Apologizes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uses sarcasm | <input type="checkbox"/> Fights back |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignores me | <input type="checkbox"/> Threatens me or others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets loud/yells | <input type="checkbox"/> Cries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Says "whatever," or "I don't care." | <input type="checkbox"/> Becomes disrespectful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Says things they don't mean | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts depressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agrees with me so I will stop talking | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Over the next week or two, keep track of what you do when you get frustrated and how your partner responds to your frustration.

Date	What happened?	How did I show my frustration?	How did my partner respond?

Review the chart and describe any patterns you notice; for example, "I tend to get frustrated in the morning when I feel pressure to get to work on time."

Describe some healthier ways you can manage your frustration.

Were you surprised by your partner's responses? Explain.

What can you do as a couple to work together to manage frustration?

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?
