

Quick Guide to Understanding Your Partner

The most common complaints I hear from partners is that they don't feel seen, heard & understood by their partner. Feeling seen, heard and understood leads to deeper intimacy and relational growth. It's all about feeling connected. Not feeling seen, heard and understood leads the misunderstood partner towards feeling like they don't matter and feeling rejected, in either big or small ways and, over time, can add up to big fractures in your relationship.

Though tricky in practice, reaching understanding is actually deceptively simple. **Here are the four basic steps:**

Be fully present.

When your partner is talking, you don't need to do anything. You don't need to try to fix the situation or make things better. Your only role is to be another being for your partner to share their human experience with. Try not to formulate your responses as you're listening to your partner. You only need to hold space and listen.

Understand first.

Clarify what you've heard by saying, "I think I'm understanding, but let me check..." and continue until your partner feels understood. Once understanding has been established, they will naturally reciprocate with curiosity about what you think and feel. This will open the door to sharing your perspective and receiving a similar understanding.

Avoid complaints & defensiveness.

When someone critiques and complains, they inadvertently put their partner on the defensive. Both are toxic patterns. It communicates to your partner that "it's not me, it's you." The trick is to take some responsibility — 'I can see your point, I did say that I would...I need to...' Another productive tactic is to tell your partner how you're feeling and what you need instead of how they fell short.

Manage your own stuff.

It's important to slow down and drop into your own feelings. Be honest with your partner when you need to do that: "I want to understand you but I need to sit with myself first, can you give me __ time?" Then allow yourself to embody what you're feeling. Simply notice any sensation such as a racing heartbeat or your breath. What do you need to soothe yourself? This helps you identify what's happening to you internally, so you can then articulate what you feel and need with your partner.