

Calling a Pause With a Partner

The following process is designed for empathy buddies to use in order to bring connection when one or both partners are triggered and not able to easily speak about it. (This process can be adapted for any relationship in which all parties are willing to make an agreement about how to respond when a pause is needed.)

I use the term “receiving partner” for the partner who is taking a turn to receive empathy and “supporting partner” for the partner who is taking a turn to give empathy.

1. Either partner calls a pause because there is an awareness of a trigger and a need for connection. Speaking about it isn't working or doesn't seem like a doable strategy in the moment.
2. The one who called the pause names two sensations.
3. The other partner names two sensations.
4. Take a few turns naming two sensations.
5. When you both feel ready, take turns naming needs, the needs that are most alive. Use a needs sheet if needed.

Say just the need word without attaching it to the other person.

“Empathy” “acceptance” “safety” “autonomy” or whatever the need word is.

6. When all the needs have been named, reflect back each other's needs. I suggest first saying, “Can I tell you what I'm hearing from you?” Either partner can start.
7. If the receiving partner called the pause, then the receiving partner says something like, “I appreciate you're efforts to support me and I'd like to tell you how I'd like to be supported. Are you willing to hear that from me?”
8. If the supporting partner is willing, then the receiving partner shares and the supporting partner reflects back what she's heard until the receiver feels understood. If the partner is not willing, then stay with each of you connecting to your own needs and sensations.

*[If the supporting partner called the pause, then supporting partner shares whether or not she can continue giving empathy.]

9. Once the receiver has been heard and understood, then the supporting partner takes a turn to be heard and understood by the receiver, if needed.

10. Move forward once there is agreement about how to move forward. If there is not agreement on how to move forward, continue hearing each other's needs. If the trigger is such that both of you are needing more empathy than the other can give, then you can end the call and find empathy from someone else or from going through the self-empathy process, and then try again with your partner another time.

* It is more likely that the receiving partner will call a pause. However, a supporting partner might need a pause because something is activated for him and he is unable to stay present for his partner. Going through the steps of the pause may help the supporting partner calm and self-connect enough to continue, or it might not. If not, then roles can be switched or the call can be continued another time.