



Does Your Partner Need You, or More?

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Your heart hurts when you watch your partner struggle emotionally or get pulled into self-destructive behaviors. You can't help but feel despairing when fixing their problem is not in your power. But, the following suggestions can assist you in helping them, either by influencing them to make a change or to seek therapy.

Be empathic and compassionate: Allow yourself to connect with their emotional pain and then let them know that you feel that pain (whether or not you fully understand it). You will probably also wish that they were not hurting. Share this desire with them.

Ask them to share, and then listen: Encourage your partner to tell you more about their struggles. Also, ask how they think they might improve their situation. If any of the ideas are viable, discuss them. For instance, if your partner seems depressed, you might support them in connecting more with friends. But, if they are looking to cope in unhealthy ways, explain your concerns. For instance, you might share that you understand why they want to stay in all day, but that you think this will just make them feel worse. Then try to engage them in coming up with a better way to help themselves. If they are really struggling, you might just have to tell them what you think they should do, and then encourage them to do it, such as going for a walk or meeting up with friends. If your partner strongly resists or responds in a nasty way, you need a new approach.

Suggest therapy: Sometimes people need more than their loved ones can offer. If their struggles make it hard for them to function and they don't seem to be coming out of it after several days or a couple of weeks, you might suggest that they get therapy. Tell them about your concerns for them and also how you see their struggles hurting your relationship.

If they resist getting individual therapy, you might ask that they join you in couples therapy. You can then let the therapist figure out how to address the problems. Keep in mind, though, that partners often enter couples therapy thinking it's the other one who needs to change, only to learn that both of them must make some changes.

Seek your own therapy: If your partner absolutely refuses to try therapy, consider seeing a therapist on your own. You can talk with the therapist about how to handle the situation. This might mean learning to engage differently with your partner, or possibly even moving on from the relationship.

Talking with your partner about their struggles can be difficult, especially if they are reluctant to address such concerns. So, choose to approach this at a time when the two of you are calm; and when you think your partner will be receptive. Hopefully, with empathy, compassion, and commitment to address your partner's struggles, you will help your partner find relief and improve your relationship.