

How Can I Help My Spouse?

Years after their trauma, people remember small actions their spouse took that helped them feel better. Things they never knew they needed. That is, they didn't know they were thirsty until they were given a glass of water and told, "Here, drink this." The key is what their spouse took action – uninvited action.

Here's a sample of what some spouses did. They didn't ask; they just did it.

Conversation Actions:

- Remind them of why you married them. Remind them of the type of person they were back then and why those things never changed.
- Frequently find a quiet place after dinner to ask how they are *feeling*. Probe, but also direct them toward new directions. Don't ask what the plans are for the future. Let them bring this up when they're ready.
- If they are spending more time with a hobby, learn a little bit about it on the web (such as distinctions between A vs. B), and probe with interested questions. It's an easy way to broaden out from the usual topics.

Bonding Actions:

- Initiate one-on-one getaways that do two things: 1) Bond both of you closer together, and 2) distract both of you away from the trauma. While something new or different is best and most memorable, these getaways can also be as simple as a movie, afternoon drive, or a new lunch place
- Find a nonfiction book you think would be helpful or insightful. Figure a way to read passages of it together and discuss it. Or find the good parts and say, "Hey, listen to this . . ."
- Find inspiring DVDs or movies you think would be useful or relevant. Don't say why you got it, just say "This looks interesting."

Workload Actions:

- Take actions that let them know you're fighting beside them – write a letter, meet with a realtor, look into a support group, talk with a financial advisor
- Offer to filter emails, or to draft or proofread answers to difficult ones. Even if they decline, it opens the door to find how you *can* help.
- Reduce some of their household chores by doing them yourself, hiring them out, or letting them slide. It's only temporary.

You are a wonderful person who needs to be thanked. You are reading this for ideas of what you can do *for* your spouse. Other people – who aren't reading this – are looking for ideas of to do *to* them. What happens in this rough time lays the foundation for what gets built next.

This list may be a two-way list of things that your spouse could also do for you. Things they could do to ease your stress. A copy might just fit on the nightstand.