

Distress – Understanding Me

A template for deeply understanding our distress for a more productive discussion.

Understanding Your Current Distress:

To start getting your distress in writing and re-engaging your brain, fill in the next three items, as you understand them right now.

The incident/disagreement/issue that is upsetting me is:

It is making me feel: (If you are having a hard time coming up with the right feeling word or words, look on page 23 for a list to choose from)

The reason I feel this way is because: *(Write down your core distress as you understand it right now.)*

Let's get specific:

The next several sections of the Understanding Me tool asks you questions to help you think more deeply about whether one of the common struggles is at the heart of your distress. These include ideas about closeness, assumptions, expectations or decision making. Go through each section and see if there's one you can identify as the source of your distress. The point is not to fill in all of the sections. There may be more than one component for you, but we are trying to help you get to the core issue that is making you upset.

Closeness:

Is what I'm upset about related to an issue of **CLOSENESS**?

Try figuring this out by seeing if you can finish the following sentence:

I'm feeling: (see if any or another apply)

Dismissed _____ Misunderstood _____ Distressed _____

Insulted _____ Rejected _____ Overwhelmed _____

other _____ because :

Is this a **difference in**:

1. Ideas about **what** closeness should or shouldn't include? In what way?
-

2. Ideas about **who** closeness should and shouldn't include? In what way?

3. The **pace** at which you each are able to get close? :

I'm upset at how, or the way, my spouse wants **to be** or **not be** close at this point,

A. In general (details) _____

B. In some specific way (details)

C. Is pushing me away (details) _____

D. Is pulling away from me (details) _____

What constitutes being close (how we each feel we have to be with each other in order to feel close)? In what way?

Assumptions:

Is what I'm upset about related to an **ASSUMPTION** I came into marriage with? Think about the thing that is making you upset and try finishing the following sentences and see if any are applicable here. I am upset because I thought:

1. If my spouse really cares about me s/he will know what I want, (without me having to say), and will give it to me.
2. If I have to ask for what I need/want, even if it's given, it's not a real demonstration of care, and therefore it's inferior.
3. If I tell you what I need, expect or hope for, you, as my spouse will want to give it to me. You'll think, and see things like I do.
4. Marriage means getting all my needs met.
5. All the good things I had I'd be able to keep.
6. All the things that have made sense to me (to do) in the past, will make sense to my spouse too.
7. All past hurts would be behind me and my spouse and new life would heal them.
8. Good couples don't argue.

Which number applies here (if any)? Explain how it applies to your first answer of the tool:

Expectations:

Is what I'm upset about an **EXPECTATION** I have that wasn't met, or that we are in conflict about? Is it something related to a difference we have in expectations about a particular area of life, or an interest I have with an expectation of my spouse? Is this something I could fulfill myself, or something I have to negotiate with my spouse?

Look at the categories below (you can look at (pages 54-59) to refresh your memory regarding the details of these categories) and try finishing the following sentence to see if something here is what's bothering you:

- Roles/Chores
 - Finances
 - Work/career
 - Relationship with parents/family
 - Parenting
 - Family style
 - How to spend free time
 - Yiddishkeit
 - Intimacy
 - Family culture, values, rituals, goals
 - How I am Treated/How I treat my spouse
-

I'm upset because I expected _____ and now I see that _____

Or break it down further: I had an interest in (having) _____

We didn't discuss this, but I expected my spouse to _____ because _____.

We did discuss this. What seems to have changed is _____.

Decisions:

Am I upset about a **DECISION**?

The decision I'm upset about is: _____

Relook at the section on decision making (page 60). Whose decision do you think this was supposed to be?

Is that who made the decision? _____ If not, who made it? _____

Finish the following sentence(s):

I'm upset about the decision regarding: _____

This is because:

I thought the decision making belonged to _____ and that's not who/how things were decided. What happened was

OR

I agree that the decision was made by the appropriate person/in the appropriate way. I'm having difficulty because:

Some possibilities are:

I thought I agreed about whose decision something was, but now that it's made, I feel differently.

I know intellectually this was done right, but emotionally I'm having a hard time not being the one to make the decision.

I know intellectually this was done right, but I'm having a hard time with this decision.

PLEASE NOTE: If you find that you are upset about a decision, look at whether the decision you are upset about relates to one of the areas of assumption or expectation. You want your understanding of what's going on to be as specific as possible.

.....

Scanning for Hidden Distresses:

Sometimes, a distress is particularly explosive for us because it reminds us, or is similar to, something that distress us in our past that we haven't resolved or still aren't over. If the past is playing a role in your distress, that's important information. Whether that's so you can be aware of it and address it directly, or whether that's because it makes sense to share with your spouse. The goal of exploring this is not to make things more complicated. However, just like knowing the core reason for your distress will help you address it in the best way possible, knowing whether you are this upset because of the current issue, or whether past issues are compounding your distress, is also important. If that is the case, trying to address the issue without understanding the whole picture, can cause you to feel like you are working and working to resolve something but never quite get there. Sometimes that's because, a past circumstance is part of the issue but not actually being addressed. The following questions aim at helping you figure out whether the past is a factor here, or not.

Is there a reason connected to the past that makes this issue or these circumstances so important to you?

Now that I understand what's going on, I think what would be helpful for me to do is:

A) Use one of your Talking it Through tools, unit 5. These tools are for when we mainly need to share information.

B) Use your Conflict Management tools, unit 6. These are for when there is a conflict that you now recognize needs to be addressed.

C) Do nothing, sometimes understanding yourself is enough to resolve bad feelings and you won't feel the need to do anything after you understand yourself. You may want to share it with your spouse.

*There are times you may use the Understanding Me tool because you were feeling distressed and needed to figure yourself out before approaching your spouse to discuss something upsetting. She or he may not even know you were struggling with something. In a case like that you can decide whether you will even share this. However, if you have used this tool as a response to an argument, where you took a timeout in order to calm down and come back to a conversation, it's probably won't be enough to just say, "I figured out what was bothering me and I don't really need to talk about it". In that case, your spouse might still have things s/he needs to work through, or s/he just might need more information to create closure to the struggle you had between you, so they don't have to worry that this same thing is going to erupt all over again. Sometimes people can't help but feel worried that something isn't really over unless they get more details than, "I'm fine now".