

TALKING

You've been told, including here, that you need to talk. But, a common rebuttal is "I don't know what to say". Fair enough. Besides, you've likely been resisting speaking to your partners, spouses, and family about these things as you're afraid of hurting them through hearing these stories. One person struggling is better than two people, after all, I often hear.

What to say

Ironically, I'll start the "what to say" with what not to say. Keeping it basic, don't talk about the call. Your spouses don't need to know the details. And if you're worried that without the setting they won't understand, it is not relevant that they understand. All that is important is that they understand what you are struggling with.

So, what to say? Talk about your emotions. How are you reacting following this call? Is it frustrating, upsetting, or angering? Are you feeling hopeless, helpless, or useless? We've all felt these things on a call. So, own it. These, after all, are the important pieces to your story. But, by being able to identify it you are already one step towards overcoming it. The next question, though, is whether you are able to identify the emotions in the first place...

Opening up these conversations early. If you are already years into the service, time to switch it up. By offering up time to decompress and destress, you are also building your relationship. Your family often watches idly with no idea on how to approach helping you. And if you don't know, how could they? And, over the years they may even begin to stop trying. But, this is a two-way street so remember if you expect them to be there to listen when you need an ear, lend one back.

If you can't bear to talk about the call right then, that's okay. Set up some guidelines though about when you will talk about it. This is called Distress Tolerance, the ability to cope with an emotional/stressful situation when it can't immediately be solved. Sometimes, that requires walking away... for a set period of time. Walking away and not coming back is call Avoidance. That isn't helpful.



But, outline some appropriate times to talk if you are feeling overwhelmed. Be sure that you are clear on this. For instance, “I don’t want to talk about it” is not a clear message for when you are able to speak about it. “I can’t talk about it right now, I need an hour (or two, or a day) to make sense of it”. This outlines a clear message that you are not ready right now, but you are open to addressing it later. Better still, would be to identify the emotion in that moment as well, “I am feeling overwhelmed and I can’t talk about it right now...”. Now your family knows exactly what is going on with you and can support you accordingly.

Remember, it is not always the headliner calls that create the biggest issues. It's the calls that we don't see coming. The 2am chest pain calls and the domestic disputes that remind you of your family member or the MVC that comes across as innocent, until you come up on it. These are the times you are most at risk as your defenses are down. You've prepared for one thing only to get something completely different. By identifying the emotional connection to the call, naming it and letting your partner know, you will be better suited to overcome it. Knowing your enemy, as it were, is always better than trying to defeat something invisible.



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