



LIVING STONES

Specific tools that can be used for neurodiverse relationships, when one or both partners is autistic or has Asperger traits.

Q-AAA. Question, Answer, Answer, Answer.

Framework for reciprocal communication. Limit one question and three answers at a time – no more, no less. Some neurodiverse partners don't like to be asked or answer many questions, while some neurotypical partners like to over communicate. The goal for this format is to have a balanced dialogue exchange, not necessarily deep conversations.

Examples:

- *Did anything interesting happen at work today?*
- *Can't simply answer yes or no.*
- *Need to answer with 3 sentences.*
- *Practice this format about 10 mins a day.*
- *No interruptions. No filling in for the other. No criticism. No defensiveness.*

Benefits for QAAA: Helps build the skill of dialogue (versus monologue) to create connection. Allows each partner to have a framework or structure to actively listen. Gives a chance for the couple to slow down, to think about what is being shared, and to not have one partner dominate the conversation.

Couple Code.

Relying on a word, phrase, gesture, or touch that is developed as a team to signal a lot of information instantly. A strategy that can be very effective to safely share without a lot of external body language, facial expression and misinterpretations. Receiving the code is less likely to be taken as criticism. Could have a few codes for recurrent issues.

Examples:

- *Panda – we are seeing this from two different perspectives.*
- *Freight Train – my brain is moving really fast, and I need to slow it down to hear you.*
- *Place hand on your partner's arm – providing insight for a partner in social situations to let others talk & not overshare.*

Benefits of Code Words: It's a reminder of where you want the conversation to be steered and to veer from a meltdown or shutdown (well before!). Try to use the code word before things start to get elevated. Gives a chance to self-regulate and limit repeated conflict.



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1 – 5 Scale.

Help communicate how you are doing, without having to immediately identify the exact feeling. It is also useful for asking for adjustments for volume, tone, and touch. Determine what the numbers mean as a team, before putting them in place.

Examples:

- *1 can be happy/content, while 5 can be extremely agitated.*
- *That volume was a 5 to me, can you say it as a 3 or below?*
- *My feelings are at a 4 right now and I need them to be lower to continue this conversation.*

Benefits of the Scale: Allows a chance to share feelings without needing to find the words right away. Gives space for a pause and reconnection.

Visual Prompts.

Provide visual prompts for intentional connecting. Use images, items, pictures with colored pens, etc. to share your need with the other person. Plan ahead and be creative.

Examples:

- *Design a white board with couple's code words, tools, and goals for the coupleship.*
- *Instead of sharing your frustrations verbally, draw in stick figures or line art pictures.*

Benefit of Visual Prompts: This reduces confusion with spoken words, and less likely chance for misinterpretation. Gives a chance to use an external resource that has been thought about ahead of time.

Break and Redo.

Take 20 mins (or 2 hours depending on the need) to call time apart to cool down. It is not ok to leave the premise unless it has been agreed upon prior. Then, come back and have a redo, starting the conversation from the beginning again with a different result.

Examples:

- *"Can we cool down for 2 hours and then come back and try to have a redo."*
- *I would like to try a redo and say what I was intending in a different way.*

Benefits of Break and Redo: Gives each partner time to step away, reset and regulate self, trying to consider your needs and the other person's needs. Also allows for a new memory to form with a redo of the conversation.