

CARE Meeting Guide

A simple structure to stay connected, aligned, and supported.

1. Make Time for CARE

Choose a time when you can both be reasonably present and free from distractions.

- Treat this as protected time for your relationship
- Both partners share responsibility for initiating
- A regular rhythm can be helpful, but use CARE as often as it serves your relationship.

2. Pre-Start: Connect First (2–3 minutes)

Before you begin, take a moment to **warm up the connection**.

- Hug, hold hands, or sit close
- Share one appreciation or compliment
- Acknowledge something your partner did or who they are

Quick Check-In:

Take turns answering: *“How are you feeling right now?”*

Examples:

- Overtired or well-rested
- Calm or overwhelmed
- Distracted or present
- Low energy or energized
- Getting sick or feeling well

Important: This check-in is just **witnessing and acknowledging** each other’s current state.

- You are **not trying to fix or change** anything
- Simply notice and accept what your partner shares

Why This Works: The Volume Knob of Your Nervous System

Think of your nervous system like a **volume knob** on stress and reactivity:

- When we feel rushed, frustrated, or overstimulated, the knob is turned up — everything feels louder and harder to manage
- Gentle touch, a warm hug, or sitting face-to-face while sharing something positive acts like **turning the knob down**
- This signals to your brain: *“I’m safe. I can relax. I can listen.”*

Even a small gesture—touching hands or legs, making eye contact, or saying something kind—helps you both find a calmer, safer place before diving into conversation.

3. Set the Structure

Keep the meeting contained and intentional.

- Set a **20-minute timer**
- Sit **facing each other** (not side-by-side or distracted)
- Have your **CARE journals nearby**
- Choose **one focus topic** (don't overpack)

4. During the Meeting

Create a space that feels safe, respectful, and productive.

- One person speaks at a time
- No interrupting or talking over
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Stay with the chosen topic

If things escalate or you hit a hot topic:

- Pause if needed to breathe and regulate
- Agree on a return time (later that day or next meeting)
- Note where you left off in your journal
- End with connection if possible (hug, kind word, acknowledgment)

This structure supports both partners' nervous systems staying regulated, even during challenging topics.

5. Use the CARE Cards as Prompts

The cards are **guides, not a checklist**. They spark conversation in four key areas:

Connect

Daily habits that build your relationship
(encouragement, appreciation, planning, intimacy, follow-up)

Attune

Staying aligned in real-life areas
(money, parenting, time, responsibilities, energy)

Relate

Emotional safety and closeness
(listening, trust, forgiveness, feeling seen and valued)

Ease

Navigating conflict with care
(regulation, timing, communication, repair)

6. Use Your CARE Journals

Each of you has a journal to use in whatever way is most helpful.

At a minimum, you might:

- **Mark the date** of your CARE meeting
- **Note which card or topic** you addressed
- **Jot down decisions, insights, or things you'd like to revisit.**

Over time, your journals can help you notice patterns, remember meaningful conversations, keep track of things you want to return to, and see the story of your relationship unfolding over time.

A Simple CARE Journal Legend

If helpful, use these simple symbols in your journal to quickly capture what you want to remember from a CARE meeting.



Red Circle – Brake:

Something that created tension, disconnection, or a need to slow down.



Green Circle – Good Connection:

Something that felt positive, connecting, or especially meaningful.

NF – Needs Follow-Up:

Something you'd like to return to in a future CARE meeting.

S – Successfully Accomplished:

A decision, action, or follow-through you want to mark as complete.

7. End with Intention (2–3 minutes)

Close the meeting on purpose.

- Share one takeaway or appreciation
- Acknowledge the effort you both made
- End with connection (hug, touch, kind words)

Simple Ground Rules

- Stay on one topic
- Be honest, but kind
- Take breaks when needed
- Always come back and reconnect

The Goal

This isn't about doing it perfectly.

It's about:

- Staying connected
- Feeling seen and heard
- Working as a team

Small, consistent conversations create strong, lasting relationships.

CARE Meeting FAQs

Q: How often should we have a CARE meeting?

A: There's no single right rhythm. Many couples may find that setting aside a regular time helps CARE become part of their relationship, while others may use it more often or simply when it feels helpful. Choose a rhythm that works for the two of you.

Q: What if something comes up and we can't have our CARE meeting?

A: Life happens. Simply choose another time to come back to CARE. The goal is to create a practice you can return to—not another obligation that you have to do perfectly.

Q: What if one of us isn't in the right headspace?

A: Gently check in with each other. You might shorten the meeting, choose a lighter topic, or decide together to come back to CARE at another time. Paying attention to your capacity for connection is part of the practice.

Q: How do we decide who chooses the topic or card prompt?

A: Share responsibility for initiating. Take turns choosing, or decide together at the start. The goal is mutuality—both partners have a voice in what gets attention.

Q: What if we have different expectations for the CARE meeting?

A: That's okay. One of you may want to cover more, while the other may need a slower pace. Agree on one focus, prioritize connection over getting through a list, and use your journals to capture anything you want to return to later.

Q: How should we use our CARE journals?

A: Use them in whatever way is most helpful to you. You might note the date, the card or topic you explored, something you want to remember, or something you'd like to return to. Your journals can be practical, reflective, or a little of both.

Q: What if we get into a hot topic or the conversation needs more time?

A: Some conversations won't fit neatly into one CARE meeting. If either of you is becoming overwhelmed or the conversation is no longer productive, pause. Note where you left off, agree on when you'll return to it, and reconnect before moving on if you can. Connection can come before resolution.