

## Mother Nurture

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### *Asking for Empathy*

*My husband's good at solving problems, but I wish he listened better when I want to share how I'm feeling or talk about our relationship. Is there something I could ask him to do?*

All of us could probably get better at empathy, but men in particular tend to be raised in our society to focus on facts and solutions rather than feelings and relationships. If approached with respect (and some empathy as well), many fathers welcome a gentle suggestion about what to actually do in order to be more empathic. One dad actually asked his partner to give him a list of questions to ask her, and this is what she came up with:

*Can you say more about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Can you give me an example?*

*How was it for you that \_\_\_\_\_?*

*How did you react when he told you about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Could you say it in a different way so I can understand it?*

*How mad were you? (Or worried, hurt, alarmed, sad, etc.)*

*What was the most upsetting part? (The most irritating? The most worrisome?)*

*What do you wish would have happened instead?*

*What do you feel underneath all that?*

*Did you also feel hurt (or embarrassed, ashamed, helpless, etc.)?*

*What does \_\_\_\_\_ remind you of?*

*How does the history of \_\_\_\_\_ affect how you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Deep down, what is really bothering you about \_\_\_\_\_?*

*(Rick Hanson is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 11 and 14. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the authors of *Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships*, published by Penguin. You can see their website at [www.nurturemom.com](http://www.nurturemom.com) or email them with questions or comments at [info@nurturemom.com](mailto:info@nurturemom.com); unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)*