

## **Audio Track 22: STOP and LOVE**

[00:00:00]

Try this: STOP and LOVE.

Begin by finding a comfortable position, and allow your eyes to close if that feels okay to you. As you bring your attention inward, finding a sense of yourself in the room and offering yourself a smile of welcome. And then calling to mind a time when you and your partner were having a disagreement and you found yourself a bit distressed. Not the worst fight you ever had. Nothing traumatic. Just choose something distressing enough that you feel it in the body, like a 3 to 4 on the scale of distress. Even though you might be tempted to work with something difficult here, you'll be more successful, more likely to succeed if you stick with a 3 to 4. Or you can call to mind something you want to tell your partner about that's difficult for you to talk about. Remember, this is an opportunity to practice and build skills, so please don't choose something that's the most difficult thing to discuss. Stick with the 3 to 4. Maybe you're really tired of eating at that restaurant your partner loves to go to. Or maybe you've been doing more of the cooking than you like. Maybe you'd like to take up a new hobby. This takes some time.

And when you have something in mind, take a moment to write it down briefly. Then let yourself open to the situation, feeling your desire for something different. We begin by tending to ourselves with the STOP practice.

S — Stop. Remember to pause. We begin breaking through reactivity by slowing down, pausing and making space for something new to happen. Let go of the story and turn your attention toward this moment.

T — Take a breath. Actually take a few breaths. Let everything else rest in the background as you privilege your awareness on the sensation of breathing. Just breathing. Where do you feel the breath? And what does it feel like? Noticing the sensations wherever you feel them most easily. Anchoring our awareness in the breath gives us the chance to anchor in this moment and this body. Feel free to use a different anchor for awareness if the breath isn't the right anchor for you. For example, you might feel your feet or your hands.

And then, O — Observe. What is happening here in this moment, this body? Noticing the thoughts, emotions and sensations that are present. No need to change them in any way. Just notice them. And allowing the attention to broaden a bit, to fully take in what is happening right now, see if you can take a larger perspective. What's the context for you, for the other person? What's the bigger picture? And then, given your new perspective, perhaps asking yourself, what do I need right now?

And then P — Proceed to practice. Now that you have a better understanding of what's happening and what you need, see if you can find a way to honor your needs. Perhaps STOP was all you needed. Or maybe you need to take a walk, have tea, or sit in meditation. Maybe there are some words you need to hear. If so, can you say them to yourself now? The point is to give ourselves what we need to move out of the state of reactivity and into a state of responsiveness.

Tending to our true needs rather than reacting from whatever place was triggered in us is key.

See where you are right now. You can stay right here if you need to. No need to move on if you still need something. Or if you're in a state of responsiveness, you can turn your attention to the vulnerability of the other person with love.

L — Listen. This means letting go of ourselves, our vision of how things are or should be, our being right or wrong, good or bad. Let these things rest in the background. Listen to what the other person is saying. What is their perspective? Their truth? What is it they want us to know? Or if you haven't yet had a conversation about it, how might they feel? What might they say? When we truly open to taking in what the other is saying, we allow ourselves to be touched and moved to learn things we didn't know. Listening is both an act of generosity and an act of love.

O — Observe. Taking in the other's experience requires more than just hearing the words they're saying. What is the tone of the words? What does the body look like? Are there tears? A hot red face? A look of fear? As we listen to this person, we might notice the state they are in. Do they seem scared, angry, lonely, sad? Is their behavior reflective of their efforts to be safe and loved? Is there something underneath their possible reactivity? Maybe they're just trying to keep themselves safe. If we know them well, we might also know this to be a core pain they carry, and we can deepen our understanding of the vulnerable situation they're in. We can remember that, just like us and all beings, this person wishes to be happy, and free from suffering. We allow our hearts to be touched by the state of the other, and we see more clearly what the other person needs.

V — Values. It's helpful to pause here to remember our own core values. Whenever we take in the vulnerability of another person, we have a choice in how we will respond to them. Grounding that choice in our core values allows a wise and compassionate response. It can help to remember that this is someone we love and are loved by. We might remind ourselves of how important it is to us that they feel safe and loved, free from harm. We can remember how we wish all beings to be happy and free from suffering. We might remember our own values or even vows to be compassionate, courageous, kind, authentic, whatever they might be. We pause and ground ourselves in our own values and vows, and then it becomes clearer which actions are in alignment with what is deeply meaningful to us. Grounding in this way allows our response to be guided by wisdom.

And then E — Express. This is the action part of compassion. When we've deepened our understanding of ourselves and the other person and allowed wisdom and compassion to arise, it often becomes much easier to know how to respond now. What do you need to say or not say? Is there a gesture that would be helpful? Smile? Eye contact? A pat on the back or a hug? Or perhaps the most compassionate thing you can do is to say “no,” or otherwise set a boundary. Perhaps it's to remind your partner of their importance to you. Often letting the other know that we see and value them is the most loving thing we can do. Trust your own response and follow through by expressing whatever is needed right now. If you like, you can write a letter to them freely and spontaneously, practicing what you might want to say to them. These letters are just for you to practice saying what you would like to say. Not to give to your partner. Later, we can practice compassionate listening and compassionate speaking. This letter is a way for you to practice speaking in a way that feels safe.

And when you're done writing your letter, take a moment to notice how it felt to write a letter, having considered yourself and the other person with what they need, and rooting in your values. Might this be different than the way you approach the situation when you get caught in reactivity?

As always, please remember to thank yourself for showing up with curiosity, with acceptance, with love in your heart. It's important that you tend to what's important to you.

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