

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Working From Home and Managing Social Isolation With Your Partner

TIP SHEET



With the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19), more people are moving towards social isolation at home, which for many couples, can mean spending a lot more time together.

There can be many benefits to this, however there can also be some challenges as couples navigate changes in their relationships.

The following tips can help you to help manage this transition with your partner.

Spend time together & alone

A healthy relationship has a good balance of spending time together as a couple and spending time alone. What one person might consider to be enough alone time might not be enough for the other. With increased time together in the same place, it's useful to talk about your expectations and respect your partner's differing needs for space or closeness.

Remember that even in the midst of a period of physical social isolation, it's important to plan for quality time as a couple. That could mean taking a walk during a lunch break, cooking a meal together or planning for a relaxing evening at home.

Try to have daily conversations which are not about the pandemic. Take things one day at a time, or even one morning, one afternoon, one evening at a time. Be mindful, and focus on the current moment. Research shows that while couples can do it hard during enforced time together, they can also become much closer and bond in new ways. One positive way that couples can do this is by taking on a joint project that you can both be involved in, interested in and enjoy. Working on this together can be rewarding, and completing it can give you both a sense of fulfilment.

It's beneficial to maintain your social connections outside of your relationship with your partner, such as with your friends, family and professional support networks. You can take advantage of phone and video conferencing options, and mobile apps in the absence of face-to-face meetings.

If you're experiencing financial hardship and have limited funds for professional support, such as counselling, there are a number of free helplines available, such as [1800RESPECT](https://www.rav.org.au/1800RESPECT). Relationships Australia Victoria is also committed to supporting people throughout the coronavirus crisis by providing affordable services via telephone, online and video appointments.

Set clear boundaries

If both you and your partner are in social isolation and/or working from home, it can be helpful to set up separate office spaces, where possible. Setting clear boundaries around your personal life, work life, and your relationship can help you stay connected to these parts of your life during this transition. Talk to each other about your working hours, your planned breaks and how you'll manage any interruptions to your workday.

In addition to keeping set schedules, it's also important to be aware of not interrupting each other while in "work mode" and being conscious of each other's need for quiet, especially if on a video call.

Communication

Couples who are able to prepare and plan ahead are likely to do better in times of stress. If you're aware of parts of your relationship which could use improvement, talking about them early can help you both prepare and plan accordingly. For example, this might involve conversations around dividing household tasks and chores evenly to minimise stress for one or both partners.

The best way to bring up issues is by approaching the topic gently, and when you're feeling calm (not when you're already annoyed or angry). If your partner is the one raising the issue, try to listen and seek clarification. When making plans and brainstorming solutions, try to work to each other's strengths.

Respect differences

Appreciate and understand the differences in each other's personalities, including desires for structure or spontaneity, which are likely to be more obvious as you both spend more time at home.

It's normal to be anxious at the moment, however we all manage anxiety differently. Some people cope by needing to know more and control things while others feel overwhelmed and prefer to minimise or even avoid exposure to the constant updates about COVID-19.

It helps if you can appreciate and accommodate your partner's needs and be flexible, supportive and patient with one another. For example, if you want to watch the news, but your partner is limiting their media exposure, consider wearing earphones or watching on a separate device. Your roles as partners are to buffer each other from the external stress and create a caring and nourishing partnership to face the challenges together.

Managing conflict

Couples are facing increased stress, especially due to changes, uncertainty and loss of income and work. This can increase the amount of tension and conflict in your relationship. If you start experiencing conflict or an argument, especially if things are getting too heated for one or both of you, take some time out and try to spend at least 20 minutes apart. If you can leave the house, go for a walk around the block. If leaving the house isn't an option, try going into a different room for this time. This can give you both space to calm down and resume a good mental state to keep talking about the issue.

Remember to take time out for yourself for physical activities, as well as other activities. Physical activity helps to release endorphins in the brain which combat stress

and anxiety, and create a feeling of wellbeing. Being in a good head space can put you in a much better position to look out for others and respond empathically to your partner when in conflict.

For more information on different activities which can make up your day and help you to be physically and mentally healthy, look at the Healthy Mind Platter by Dr. Dan Siegel, linked below.

If you're experiencing financial hardship or aren't working as a result of COVID-19, find out what government services are available, including financial support, via the link in the resources section below.

Family violence

While all relationships can have tricky moments to work through, you should always feel safe in your relationship. If you feel emotionally or physically unsafe at any time, please call the police on 000 in an emergency or call 1800RESPECT.

Useful resources

Government services

Services Australia

www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/covid-19

Mental health

Healthy Mind Platter

www.drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy_mind_platter/

Lifeline Australia

www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Family violence

1800RESPECT

www.1800respect.org.au

safe steps Family Violence Response Centre

www.safesteps.org.au

Need support?

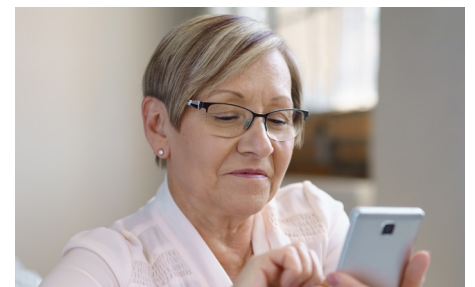
If you're feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed by the current situation and would like some support, our counsellors are here for you.

We're committed to supporting people throughout the coronavirus crisis. We're continuing to deliver services via telephone, online and video-conferencing appointments, including through our online counselling service.

For more information or to talk to us about how we can support you:

- Visit www.rav.org.au
- Call 1300 364 277

To learn about our typing-based online counselling service or to book an appointment, visit onlinecounselling.rav.org.au



About us

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. We have over 70 years' experience providing a diverse range of family and relationship support services.

These include counselling; family dispute resolution (mediation); and family violence prevention services; relationship skills courses; mental health services; workplace services; and professional training.

Our services are for all members of the community.

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