

Managing lockdown with your partner

COVID-19 TIP SHEET

Many couples are spending a lot more time together as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns, restrictions and work-from-home directives.

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

Tips to manage lockdown with your partner

1. Spend time together and 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 during lockdown, it's important to **plan for quality time as a couple**.

That could mean taking a walk at lunchtime, 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. In the absence of face-to-face meetings, take advantage of mobile, telephone and video-conferencing options.

2. 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.

3. Prioritise good 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**.

4. Respect your 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.

5. Consider how you manage 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.

Visit www.rav.org.au/resources to read our **tip sheets on good communication, managing conflict, and how to have a healthy argument**.

Family violence

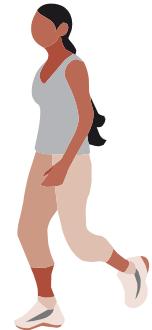
While all relationships can have tricky moments to work through, you should always feel safe in your relationship. **If you feel emotionally or physically unsafe at any time, call emergency services on 000 (triple zero)**.

For free, 24/7 crisis support, call:

- 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732
- Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre (Victoria) on 1800 015 188

6. Look after your physical and mental health

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 headspace 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: drdansiegel.com/healthy-mind-platter

To read our tip sheets on **self-care and managing stress and anxiety**, visit www.rav.org.au/COVID-19

Need support?

We're committed to safely supporting Victorians throughout the evolving COVID-19 situation. Visit www.rav.org.au/COVID-19 to access more free resources and find out how we can assist you.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.