

LIVING AT HOME: STRATEGIES FOR COUPLES

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Relationships can be hard, even in normal times. In today's extraordinary circumstances, where many are working from home, childcare and schooling have become in-home operations, and our routines are thrown into disarray, they can become even more strenuous. Ongoing stressors, compounded by the uncertainty of what we are facing, can make it difficult to come together as a team. Below are some tips for supporting each other during this challenging time.

- › **Arrange for “alone time” when needed.** You may want to have a designated time or space carved out for uninterrupted solitude. Or just confirm that you both have the right to take time when you need it. Don't take it personally if your partner needs to recharge by themselves. Try to respect the boundaries you've put in place. Take advantage of alone time yourself, when needed.
- › **If you're both are working from home, do something thoughtful each day.** Take turns fixing meals. This may be a time to try new recipes or make their favorite meal or baked good. Do a chore without being asked. Offer to keep the kids entertained or take a walk so your partner can have some alone time.
- › **Find a new activity or tackle a long-term project.** Clean out the garage. You might do a jigsaw puzzle, play a board game, or paint a picture together. This can not only relieve boredom and distract from anxious thoughts, it can also bring you together as a team, working together to achieve a goal.
- › **Connect virtually with others.** Consider having a standing “date” to connect with friends and family members. Use video chat, telephone calls, or other mediums to talk or play games. This can be fun as a family, a couple, or connect on your own, as well.
- › **Acknowledge your partner's strengths.** Pay them a compliment on how they are handling this. Let them know what you appreciate about them.
- › **Adjust your expectations of one another.** Try to be flexible when new challenges arise. It's okay for you or your partner to make a mistake. Remember that you're both managing extra stressors.
- › **Be kind and gentle at this time.** Try to give your partner the benefit of the doubt. Let go of grudges and old disagreements. Recognize that everyone is doing the best they can during this time. Try to respond with kindness rather than judgment or criticism.
- › **If arguments escalate, agree to a time out on the topic.** Use the time to calm down and reconnect with one another through light conversations that are unrelated to the argument. Allow yourselves enough time to truly reset before agreeing to return to the issue.
- › **Set boundaries around specific topics that cause arguments or anxiety** (i.e. the pandemic). Decide on a signal or code word for when one of you becomes overwhelmed. Agree that everything comes to a stop once the signal is deployed.
- › **Set a regular time each day to check in with one another.** Maybe it's when the kids have gone to bed, or after the work day. Take turns sharing your stressors, or what is going well. You can brainstorm solutions, or simply listen. Validating emotions – “I understand what you're feeling” – can be a powerful tool to help ease tension and worry.

Together, all the way.®



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