

Things for couples to consider during COVID19 and the easing of lockdown:

Relationships will be very important for getting us through COVID, but self-isolation, social distancing and concerns about issues like finances, children being at home and the health of loved ones may place our relationships under added pressure. Though social connection with those distant and local to you is important; it is those you are isolating with who will have the most impact on your well-being over this tricky period.

There are some things that you can do for yourself and with your partner to help better manage stress and to get through this unprecedented time safely.

1. How we react to the situation

Recognise that people have different coping strategies – be accepting and kind. Some people might,

- Panic/become anxious
- Go into help mode and increase their activity levels
- Become angry/frustrated
- Withdraw
- Go into information overload, both seeking it and spreading it
- Make jokes about the situation
- Deny that there is a problem all together.

These are just some of the coping strategies that can develop as a result of fear, helplessness and loss of control. Whilst these may be different to your coping strategies they are still valid. None of us have experienced this before and so we may all cope differently and that is ok.

2. Practice kindness to each other and to yourself; we get better at things the more we practice.

- If you feel yourself about to snap at your partner or to berate yourself, try the ‘5 second breather’ technique: inhale for 5 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, exhale for 5 seconds.”

3. Try not to make assumptions as to how your partner is feeling

- Do not assume they feel the same way about the situation as you do. Assumptions can lead to anger and resentment and feeling misunderstood.

4. Communicate

Listener	Speaker
Actively listen without judgement	Use 'I' statements if problems arise and make your statements as specific as possible
Indicate your listening through your non-verbal behaviour (nodding, eye contact etc.)	Talk about your thoughts and feelings subjectively – not as absolute truths
Interrupt only to ask for clarification if this is needed	Remember to discuss your emotions
Show that you understand and accept what your partner is saying. Acceptance is not the same as agreement.	When you share negative emotions or concerns, try to include positive feelings you have as well.
Try to put yourself in their place	Speak in paragraphs and give your partner the opportunity to respond to one main idea.
Summarise what your partner has said	Tact and timing
Do not interpret or change the meaning of what your partner has said	

5. Timing

- Consider putting big and difficult conversations on hold while you both deal with the current situation. This is especially true if one of you is ill or thinks they have symptoms.
- If you have been arguing with your partner over a particular issue, consider calling a truce during this period to make living together more bearable

6. Information Exposure

- Limit your exposure to information about COVID19. 24-hour news and online media exposure is unhelpful as it can create additional stress and worry/anxiety. Decide together to watch/listen to the news (online, TV or radio) once a day (jointly or separately) for a set period of time to update yourself and no more. Agree the boundaries around which you discuss this with each other
- 'Audit' your news sources and only use those that are reliable and offer practical, realistic support. Engaging with multiple news sources tends to highlight the most anxiety provoking or contradictory messages.

7. Managing when isolating together

Consider and discuss:

- Personal working space; if you are both working from home, agree where each of you will be working from and when
- Agree personal 'me' space and times for the both of you
- Agree and schedule your together time. Try to keep these times 'special' interesting/fun and regular
- Think about how and when you discuss difficult topics: think tact and timing

- Share household chores – agree who is doing what, when and stick to the plan.
- Try to keep boundaries between work and personal life; we often want to off load after work and this can be helpful. However try to keep this brief (30 minutes at the most) and as close to work time as possible.
- Give time each day to express how you are feeling (no more than 20 minutes). Remember this is time to ‘express’ and not for you or your partner to ‘fix’ the issues you are discussing. Once aired you may both decide to set aside a time to problem solve/action plan on the issues raised, if this is appropriate.
- Give time each day where you express what you are grateful for that day. Remember small things can have a big impact

8. Set up daily routines for you and your partner:

- Routine mealtimes, regular exercise, wake up and bedtimes will make you both feel better support each other with this.
- Exercise; consider new and novel ways to exercise both on your own and/or with your partner. Consider dancing, skipping, cleaning, gardening, yoga, exercise classes on YouTube.
- Alcohol; it might seem like a good idea to start drinking early and/or throughout the day but remember alcohol will make anxiety worse and depression worse.
- Stay active; shared activities that give a sense of pleasure and/or achievement are ideal as these help to raise mood and increase feelings of connection and affection Consider taking an online course, meditate, read, cook, draw, do a quiz (YouTube), watch a film/box set, sing, play and instrument... be creative!
- Sleep- establish daily routines with regular wake up and bedtimes; erratic wake up and bedtimes can lead to disturbed sleep that will lead to tiredness and potentially irritability through the day

9. The small things matter

At times like this everyone is going to feel some stress and or anxiety and so small acts of kindness mean a huge amount. These can be really small but should be meaningful for your partner.

For example:

- Let your partner know what you appreciate about them,
- Send an affectionate text message to your partner (even if they are only in the other room!),
- Make them cups of tea,
- Run a bath for them after their day at work,
- Empty the dishwasher/washing machine without being asked,
- Highlight interesting articles in the paper for them to read....

Tiny gestures can have a huge impact. Do the little things no matter how little they might seem to you.