

# Healthy Relationships and COVID-19



The Defining Moment Foundation

# How To Keep Your Relationship Healthy During COVID-19



When you stop expecting people to be perfect,  
you can like them for who they are.

# Maintain Self-Care and a Routine during COVID-19

Though relationships can offer solace, it's important for each person to take responsibility for their individual health and well-being.

**Self-care is essential.** With everyone's schedule changed, it's important to establish and maintain some kind of a routine. **Stick to regular sleep hours, waking up on time, making the bed and getting dressed each day. Eating nutritious foods is important, too.**

Scheduling breaks, such as a midday yoga video or mediation session, can break up the day and help partners stay grounded.

## Keep the Workday Limited

For couples who are working at home, it helps to set boundaries between work hours and time spent together. The anxiety caused by the pandemic may tempt some people to lose themselves in work, particularly people who invest a lot of their personal identity in their professions. They might miss the routine, the meetings, the structure that go with that.

## Beware Substance Use and Abuse

Increased stress can aggravate habits such as smoking or substance abuse, including drinking more alcohol. Keep an eye on the cocktails. Too much alcohol can set the stage for unhealthy interactions.

People in recovery from substance use disorders may need to be especially vigilant, because being stuck at home without in-person support meetings can raise the risk of relapse.

# Go Outside Together



**Exercising outdoors together can be a powerful way to reduce stress and strengthen positive connections.**

Couples that are used to spending time in the gym might require some changes to keep up with fitness and exercise when you can't work out on machines or take live classes. Partners can go for a run or a bike ride, dig in the garden, or even just take a walk together.

Couples who are more sedentary can start a healthy habit, such as a regular walks outdoors together during this time.

## Work Together to Keep Kids Occupied

Kids sequestered at home during the pandemic create another whole **dimension of family togetherness**, along with **overwhelming stress**, especially when one or both parents are trying to work from home. **It can be all but impossible to do work, attend video meetings, help kids with home school lessons, and deal lovingly with their emotions and behaviors.**

Couples should plan kids' days in advance when possible, and ensure that each partner is taking an equitable amount of time to keep children occupied and content.



## Don't Count on Amazing Sex

**Staying at home to help contain a dangerous, viral pandemic is not exactly a romantic vacation.** Couples should modify their expectations around sexual intimacy. People are distracted right now, and there's a blur between work and home life.

The stress is very real, particularly if one or both people are dealing with **children at home, financial concerns, job loss, or illness affecting a friend or family member.** These concerns, along with a generalized uncertainty about what's going to happen next, can interfere with sexual desire.

## Plan Something Fun

Though couples' pre-pandemic plans may be cancelled or postponed right now, **you can take a drive together, plan a special meal, or, if you have the resources, even make a small purchase that you can both enjoy.**

Apps can help couples virtually get together with friends for dinners, game nights or movies. The important thing is to create things to look forward to, even if they're small.

## Use the Time to Make Things Better

**Couples who were in a good place before COVID-19** will have an easier time withstanding the stress of the pandemic, even partners who were struggling before the stay-home mandates began can use the time to work through some of their problems.

In the context of sheltering in place, couples can find opportunities to **communicate and connect, working through feelings, even those around very painful situations, such as infidelity.**

## Make a Plan for Relationships in Crisis

**For relationships that have worsened to the point of abuse or violence, safety comes first.** This is an example of why maintaining connections with family and friends is so important.

Anyone who feels in danger due to a potential domestic violence situation, should have a plan in place to leave and get to someplace where they won't be harmed.

## Broaden your Support System

**Your partner is just one person**, no matter how amazing, leaning on any single individual for all your emotional needs just because you're under the same roof is not advised.

It's important for both people in the relationship to stay connected with family and friends who can be available for them, especially as time wears on with continuing physical distancing measures.  
**Talk with other people on the phone and use technology to keep your support network intact.**



# Good Relationships Don't Just Happen



They take time, patience and two people who truly want to be together.



# Three C's + One E for Happy Couples

$$3C + 1E = 1HC$$

Whether starting a **new relationship** or **celebrating decades of marriage**, here is a refresher course in the three C's + 1E equation:

## Communication

**Think about how to use communication to make your partner feel needed, desired and appreciated.** Communication is verbal and non-verbal, so actions speak volumes, and remember that listening is a major component of healthy communication. It's not always what is said, **but how it is said**, that's important. If a couple communicates with aggression, the silent treatment or abusive language or actions, it signals concerns that might best be addressed by a professional.

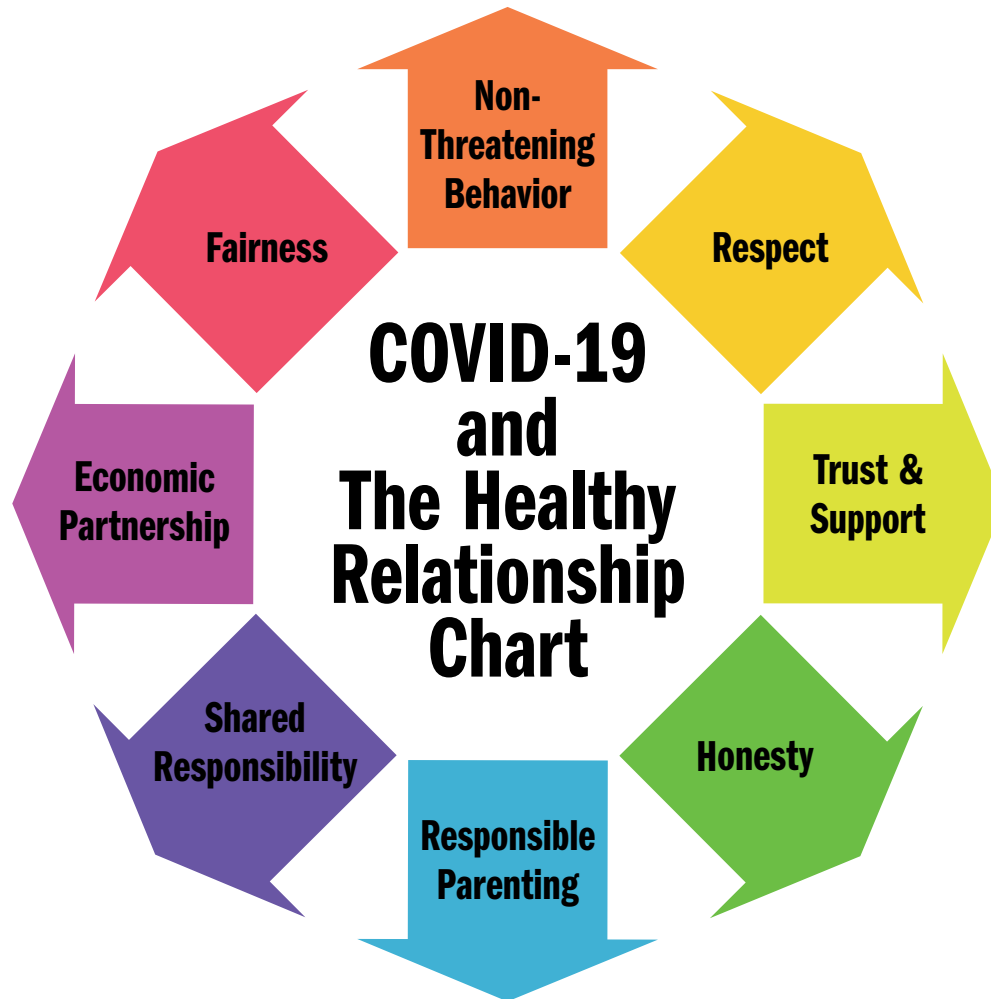
## Compromise

Two people in a relationship bring individual experiences, thoughts, behaviors and personalities to the table. **Finding common ground means expressing opinions, understanding and accepting differences and agreeing on compromise.** If both people feel heard and understood, it helps prevent one person from feeling like they're giving in, which can build resentment over time.



# Commitment

**Commitment means putting each other and the relationship first.** This requires a lot of giving, and certainly some sacrifice, but the payoff is a relationship that brings true joy and fulfillment to each other's lives. Knowing that each person is committed to working through challenges and growing together builds trust and intimacy, and helps release the fears and doubts that hold couples back.



# Energy

**The ability to bring enthusiasm to your relationship everyday, and to express joy when you see your loved one or partner.**

# How to Keep your Relationship Strong During COVID-19



“I exist in two places, here and where you are”

- Margaret Atwood

## Be a Source of Positivity

It's easy to get swept up in the media about **COVID-19**. Every day we find ourselves checking our phones, looking at the news, and scrolling through dozens of pandemic memes across social media.

**They say knowledge is power - but is our intake of pandemic news helping or hurting us?**

If the pandemic is all you and your loved ones are talking about, it may be time to take a step back. It's good to stay informed about what's going on in the world, but don't let that knowledge negatively impact your relationships.

Be a source of good news and positivity to your loved ones instead of adding to anyone's panic or anxiety.

## Talk to Loved Ones Regularly

**One of the best ways you can keep your relationships healthy during COVID-19 is to talk to your loved ones regularly.**

Keep in contact with family via text messages, group chats, or video chat. Using different avenues of communication will help keep the relationship feeling fresh. You'll be able to hear and see one another while still being able to text a quick message or an emoji.

If you're living with your romantic partner during **COVID-19** pandemic, it can be especially challenging to keep the relationship feeling fresh.

Communicating your feelings to one another and continuing to get to know each other, regardless of how long you've been together, will help keep your bond healthy and happy during these stressful times. Establish times to talk to family and friends by keeping an appointment book.

# Learn Something New Together

One way you can keep your relationships interesting during **COVID-19** is to do something new and exciting together.

**Research has found that couples who tried new and exciting things together, such as learning new skills or hobbies, experienced higher levels of satisfaction.**

Learning a new skill with your partner or loved one will keep your lives interesting, and also **expand your minds, improve mental health,** and - best of all - **you'll have a built-in partner to practice with!**

# Take Care of Your Mental Health - Self-Care

When will things go back to normal and what will the world look like? These are two questions on everybody's mind during this worldwide pandemic.

**Stress and anxiety are normal reactions to the unknown, and with COVID-19, the future is feeling obscure right now..**

**Taking care of your mental health is essential.** Reach out to trusted friends and loved ones to talk about how you're feeling or take advantage of mental health apps or online counselors.

Developing new skills and maintaining social relationships will also help keep you in a positive mental health space during these trying times.

# 10 Considerations to Improve Self-Care

1. If it feels wrong, don't do it
2. Say exactly what you mean
3. Trust your instinct
4. Never speak negatively about yourself
5. Don't be afraid to say no
6. Don't be afraid to say yes
7. Be kind to yourself
8. Let go of what you can't control
9. Stay away from toxic people
- 10. LOVE**

# COVID-19 Lessons & Guidelines



Relationships don't last because of the good times,  
they last because the hard times were handled  
with love, respect and care.

# How Do We Enhance Our Relationships Right Now





1. Don't beat yourself up. Be kind to yourself and your partner.
2. It's OK to grieve. We have lost a lot.
3. Kids get stressed when parents argue, so don't scare them.
4. Work through the hard stuff, and show vulnerability, not anger.
5. Be open to adjusting your usual roles in the relationship.
6. Carve up space for time alone and togetherness.
7. Split up housekeeping chores in a way that makes sense.
8. Do things together that you enjoy.
9. Don't be afraid to seek advice or professional help.
10. Stay humble, and connected.
- 11. Everyday tell your loved one or partner you love them.**

**A healthy adult relationship is one where both people give and receive. There is a safe and open exchange of ideas, feelings and thoughts. There is also the freedom to respectfully challenge, confront and strengthen one another.**



# What is a Healthy Relationship?

Different people define relationships in different ways. But in order for a relationship to be healthy, it needs a few key ingredients!

## COVID-19 Healthy Communication

**Open, honest and safe communication is a fundamental part of a healthy relationship.** The first step to building a relationship is making sure you both understand each other's needs and expectations—being on the same page is very important. **That means you have to talk to each other!** The following tips can help you and your partner create and maintain a healthy relationship:

- **Speak Up.** In a healthy relationship, if something is bothering you, it's best to talk about it instead of holding it in.
- **Respect Each Other.** Your partner's wishes and feelings have value, and so do yours. Let your significant other know you are making an effort to keep their ideas in mind. Mutual respect is essential in maintaining healthy relationships.
- **Compromise.** Disagreements are a natural part of healthy relationships, but it's important that you find a way to compromise if you disagree on something. Try to solve conflicts in a fair and rational way.
- **Be Supportive.** Offer reassurance and encouragement to each other. Also, let your partner know when you need their support. Healthy relationships are about building each other up, not putting each other down.
- **Respect Each Other's Privacy.** Just because you're in a relationship doesn't mean you have to share everything and constantly be together. Healthy relationships require space.

# Healthy Boundaries

**Creating boundaries is a good way to keep your relationship healthy and secure.** By setting boundaries together, you can both have a deeper understanding of the type of relationship that you and your partner want. Boundaries are not meant to make you feel trapped or like you're "walking on eggshells." **Creating boundaries is not a sign of secrecy or distrust - it's an expression of what makes you feel comfortable and what you would like to happen within the relationship.**

## Healthy Relationship Boosters

Even healthy relationships can use a boost now and then. You may need a boost if you feel disconnected from your partner or like the relationship has gotten stale. **If so, find a fun, simple activity you both enjoy, such as going on a walk, and talk about the reasons why you want to be in the relationship. Then, keep using healthy behaviors as you continue dating.**

Remember relationships don't just include your significant other and you. Think about all the great times you've had with your parents, siblings, friends, children, other family members, etc..

Try connecting online with the people you love and care about the most - watch movies together, take a day off from your busy life and just enjoy being you! If it helps, also talk about your feelings about the relationships in your life. If you just want them to listen, start by telling them that. Then ask what makes relationships good and what makes them bad?

**And don't forget, the relationship you can always boost up is the one you have with yourself!**

There may be hard moments for you as a couple, but it's also a great gift to go through something like this. Go into this with humility. You don't have all the answers. You will discover a lot about yourself



# Communicate

# Appreciate

## How to Keep a Relationship

Communicate: Talk about things, the good and the bad. Build trust. Be honest. Be faithful. **Be there for one another.** Make time for one another. Leave the past in the past. Know that having arguments is normal. Know that you won't always be happy. Appreciate the flaws. Appreciate each other. Become best friends. Lastly, love each other unconditionally.

# What Isn't a Healthy Relationship?

Relationships that are not healthy are based on **power and control**, not **equality and respect**.

If you think your relationship is unhealthy, it's important to think about your safety now. Consider these points as you move forward:

- **Understand that a person can only change if they want to.** You can't force your partner to alter their behavior if they don't believe they're wrong.
- **Focus on your own needs.** Are you taking care of yourself? Your wellness is always important. Watch your stress levels, take time to be with friends, get enough sleep. If you find that your relationship is draining you, consider ending it.
- **Connect with your support systems.** Often, abusers try to isolate their partners. Talk to your friends, family members, teachers and others to make sure you're getting the emotional support you need. Remember, our advocates are always ready to talk if you need a listening ear.
- **Think about breaking up.** Remember that you deserve to feel safe and accepted in your relationship.

**Even though you cannot change your partner, you can make changes in your own life to stay safe. Consider leaving your partner before the abuse gets worse.**



**There are no excuses for abuse of any kind.**

# Final Considerations for a Healthy Relationship and COVID-19

1. **Practice gratitude.** Showing gratitude and appreciation for your spouse or partner. A sincere “thank you” will bond you much more than criticisms of what didn’t get accomplished or performed correctly. Talk together about what you’re grateful for.



2. **Keep your sense of humor.** Lastly, inject humor and keep things light when you can. Find silly things to laugh about. Social media can be a saving grace for keeping a sense of humor and staying connected.
3. **In the time of COVID-19, life isn’t going to be perfect. The value of a relationship is that you stick by each other for better or for worse. This pandemic isn’t a permanent situation. Try to stay focused on the good things that are happening.**

# Do Something Extraordinary



We have a chance to do something extraordinary. As we head out of this pandemic we can change the world. Create a world of love. A world where we are kind to each other. No matter what class, race, sexual orientation or religion. Let love, respect and kindness be our roadmap.