

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Communicate effectively

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Generally the purpose of communication is to exchange information with each other, and to build positive feelings in our relationships with other people.

The challenges associated with COVID-19 can add an element of complication to our communication with others, however there are steps we can take to make it easier to maintain strong connections with our family and friends.

Here are some tips on how to communicate effectively during COVID-19:

- **Adapt to new forms of communication**

While face to face communication is usually considered the most effective mode of communication, many of us now need to use the telephone, video chat platforms, emails and texts more than ever to communicate and stay connected with other people.

- **Where possible, try and use face to face online communication**

The benefit of face to face communication is we can easily see others' body language and hear the tone of voice and words. In combination these elements help us accurately interpret the meaning of what another person is trying to communicate.

The more delicate the communication, the more important it is to see or hear each other. Save texts and emails for communicating basic information, not for conducting relationships.

- **Understand the importance of listening**

Listening is imperative in effective communication. When we are truly present and listen to others without distraction, we are showing them we value and respect them. We are more likely to get all of the information they are trying to share and accurately hear what their needs are.

We can show a person we are listening by:

- Acknowledging the person speaking with nods and smiles if they can see us on video chat, or by using verbal cues such as 'I see...', 'right...', 'okay...'. These are examples of active listening.
- Summarising back what they are saying with a statement like 'what I'm hearing you say is.... have I got that right?'. This also gives the person speaking a chance to clarify what they are saying if we have misinterpreted anything. These are examples of reflective listening.
- Giving the person space to tell their story, by avoiding interruption and allowing them the time they need to express themselves.

- **Listen with empathy**

Empathy refers to our ability to understand the experience from their perspective. This means suspending our judgement of the problem or situation, however it is important to note it does not mean we need to agree with them. We are simply accepting their perspective as they share their story and feelings, and working to gain an understanding of that while simply being attentive and present for them.

- **Avoid trying to fix the problem**

We may believe that offering a solution is the right thing to do to help someone when they have a problem. We often experience the urge to just 'fix it' so that our friend or family member can stop feeling negative or painful emotions. Offering or pushing for a solution may actually do the person who is expressing the problem a disservice. It can disempower them as they may believe they don't have the skills or knowledge to resolve their own issues. It may also remove an opportunity for them to come up with a creative solution.

If you are tempted to offer solutions, ask the person instead what they think different options might be and support them in coming up with possibilities. This is more likely to empower them and help them build their resilience.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Communicate Effectively** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.

