

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Together forever: establishing a relationship

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.

A relationship begins with love, exploration and hopes for a bright future. Establishing a new relationship is an exciting time for couples. For many, thoughts of a life together become focused on wedding plans and new homes, with many hours of preparation to ensure that these elements are as close to perfect as possible.

The introduction of COVID-19 into the mix has changed many of our plans and may have injected an element of stress into these new beginnings. Now, there may be distress over the wedding plans that have had to change or be abandoned all together, financial difficulty due to changes in or loss of jobs, health concerns, and myriad other challenges. No matter what the reason, the focus is often taken away from what is required to build the foundations for a lasting, stable relationship.

The following tips will help in establishing a stable relationship no matter what outer conditions prevail:

- **Know and like yourself**

A good relationship begins with knowing and liking yourself. This means that you take the time to ask yourself what it is that you believe, feel and need in life and you like what you discover.

Once this has been established, it is important that you take prime responsibility for meeting your own needs. Sometimes you may want to ask for your partner's help - asking is important as your partner is not a mind reader. However, meeting your needs is still primarily up to you.

- **Treat your partner as you would your best friend**

The first step in doing this is to increase your knowledge and understanding of them, by being curious and asking questions. As you begin to take more notice of your partner, focus on the things that you really admire and appreciate about them and remember to express your gratitude to them.

When showing love to your partner, it is important to do this in the way that is the most meaningful to them. Some people like you to tell them that you love them, others prefer to be shown through acts of kindness and others through physical touch. One sure way of showing love is by responding to your partner when they show that they need something from you.

- **Develop trust and commitment**

Trust and commitment increases in relationships when you prioritise nurturing your relationship and you do what you say you are going to do. When difficulty arises, avoid the temptation to compare your partner with someone else. Be committed to working with your partner on what you have in the present, not some fantasy that may or may not exist outside. It is especially important to be on your partner's side in a difficulty – you are a team acting together.

- **Regulate, share and validate emotions**

Unfortunately, when emotions are mismanaged, trust and intimacy in the relationship can be damaged. Expressing emotion appropriately increases feelings of trust and closeness. To do this:

- Recognise and share your emotions appropriately.
- Learn to soothe your emotions, such as counting to 10 and being present by noticing what is around you.
- Take time out (at least 20 minutes) when your emotions become too volatile.

Encourage your partner to share their emotions, appropriately. One effective way of doing this is to validate your partner's emotional expression. Phrases like – *“That must be difficult”* or *“Tell me more”* can be useful.

- **Work on your communication and connection skills**

Feelings of connection in a relationship often come about via effective communication skills, especially in times of difficulty. Firstly, seek to understand all the elements of a challenge; this includes - observations, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, hopes etc. The ability to do this comes through good listening skills which include - nodding, asking questions and checking in for meaning.

It is also important to bring up issues in a gentle way by focusing on neutral descriptions and the impact that the issue is having on you – i.e. *“I feel frustrated when we don't talk about the difficulties we are having with money.”*

- **Work together on problems**

Your partner is not the problem – refrain from blaming them or yourself for the problem. Try to see the problem as outside of your relationship, something that you can work on together. There may be challenging behaviours that contribute to problems, so be specific and work on those. Difficult situations may call for the ability to negotiate and compromise in order to manage in ways that will support the relationship.

- **Develop positivity in the relationship**

Ensure that the benefits you see in the relationship outweigh the costs. Good relationships aren't built by trying to solve problems alone. Make time for doing things you enjoy together – watch a good movie, cook an enjoyable meal, give each other a massage. Good relationships are built by having good times together and focusing on those good times, especially when times are difficult.

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 ***Together Forever*** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.