

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Working & Living from Home

TIP SHEET

In these surreal times of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the world for many couples has shrunk to the confines of their home or living space - where they are working, schooling, and being a family.

The usual preferred outlets for socialisation or individual time and space are no longer accessible, and the support of extended family and friends is in many cases reduced to video calls and Whatsapp conversations.

It can be difficult under these 'pressure cooker' conditions of co-sharing the home space for partners working and living from home. These strategies below will help couples and families set up healthy boundaries in response to the current climate, and manage the additional stresses, so that their relationships and families can emerge stronger and more resilient.



Healthy boundaries

Boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates for themselves to define where they end and the other begins. They help a person decide what types of communication, behaviour and interaction are acceptable.

They are of extreme importance in times of crisis, as disruption and loss of control lead to increased levels of stress and will eventually impact health. It is important for people to maintain some sense of identity and control where possible.

- Have honest conversations about boundaries with your partner.
- Ensure that each person is able to state their needs and limits fully, without being challenged.
- Say 'no' simply and firmly to something you do not want to do.
- Don't be offended if your partner can't hang out with you during the work day.
- Give an 'I' message - "I need some quiet time to myself when the work day is over".
- Create clear physical boundaries: no business in the kitchen, or no talk about the children during office hours. If you can, separate your working space from your living space, and when work is

over for the day, turn off the computer and go into the living space.

- Set hours for no disturbance times.



Sharing the work space

It's important to identify the needs and limits of everyone you are living with. Be sure to consider the physical (space, noise, routines), emotional (management and expression of feelings) and mental (thoughts, values, beliefs, information) spaces.

These tips will help couples work out how to share the home space and know when not to disrupt each other.

- Set up organised office 'desks' - wherever you have suitable spaces.
- Respect each other's different working styles - who needs quiet, who will use headphones because they like music, turn off annoying keyboard clicks, tone down loud talking on the phone, close doors for quiet or privacy.

- Be flexible and adaptable where possible
- Share your daily schedules – and your respective deadlines, and decide who will use which space for different tasks eg conference calls, concentrated report writing etc.
- Understand that your partner's 'Work Self' may be different from the one you know. Be aware and respectful of each other's different work habits.
- Consider all the needs first and then focus on solutions. Brainstorm all the options – no idea is a bad one
- Test things out for a time– then re-evaluate. If things aren't working out, make changes when needed.

Managing Conflict

The most important thing to remember when it comes to conflict is to make amends. Disagreement, which can lead to being upset, brings loss of control and feelings of disconnection.

- Keep the scale of the problem as small as possible – look at specific behaviours, don't generalise to the person.
- Avoid "spillover" – that is when a disagreement about one aspect of your lives becomes an excuse to bring up everything else that's bothering you.
- Remember, mostly, everyone is trying their best.
- There will be breaches and misunderstandings; be prepared to build bridges through apology, compromise and seeing another's point of view.

- After difficulties reach out and connect through hugs, spending time together and other pleasurable activities.
- Identify and appreciate what is going well. It is important to focus on the positive. This will increase feelings of trust and safety.

Parenting while working

This is an unprecedented time, and everyone in the family will be feeling new, unfamiliar emotions. Take time at the end of each day to check in with everyone's feelings, and to recap and discuss what could be done differently.

- Together create family guidelines and stick them somewhere visible.
- Create family/couple/individual schedules including exercise, meals, play, work times, home school, and personal time. Put schedule up so everyone knows what's going on for each person.
- Schedule time for the children – work a roster – which parent is caring for the children at any one time.
- Give children a daily routine, but don't over supervise them.



Seeking Help

If you are feeling low in your mood, and you can't shake it off after several days in a row, please seek help.

RAWA is continuing to deliver support services for people across Western Australia during this unprecedented and difficult time and are providing support services over the telephone, video conferencing or online to clients.

If you need immediate support, please contact:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Suicide Line on 1300 651 251

Mensline on 1300 78 99 78

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800