

Building better relationships

TIP SHEET

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

Intimate relationships can be both rewarding and challenging. A crisis situation will often push an intimate relationship to its limits.

Luckily, we can turn to relationship science for help. John Gottman has been observing relationships for over 40 years. He has researched what tears a relationship apart and what we can do to strengthen it so it withstands the difficulties all couples face.

Here are some suggestions that can help you build a better relationship:

1. Minimise behaviours that damage relationships

Gottman has identified four behaviours that are damaging to a relationship. They include criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling. Try instead to bring up difficulties in a respectful manner, take responsibility for your part in any problem, see your partner as an equal and practice calming down when you get upset.

2. Nurture your friendship

It is important to see your partner as your best friend. The number one way of strengthening friendship is through expressing love and admiration. Take time every day to show and express love to your partner, notice what they do and thank them.

3. Strengthen your commitment and trust

The old promise goes; for better or for worse. Commitment is about the promise of being with your partner and having no comparisons or wishes about how they should be better or different. Trust is about being there for your partner when they need you – in good times and in difficult times.

4. Have a positive perspective about your relationship

When you are in a crisis situation, don't let negativity swamp your relationship. Try to isolate the difficulty by focusing on it at specific times only. Otherwise, focus on the ways in which your relationship is strong and how you are working well together to handle the challenge.

5. Manage conflict

The challenges and difficulties many couples face may seem overwhelming and even unresolvable. The focus should not be on solving the problems, but rather managing the conflict interactions so the relationship is not damaged. Start discussions gently, speak respectfully about your position, listen to what your partner has to say, consider all options and be prepared to find a win/win. If a win/win isn't achievable at this point in time, focus on trying to keep the discussion going through respectful communication.

6. Make and accept 'repairs'

Everyone makes mistakes and has bad days, but mishandling these can damage a relationship. It is important to recognise your errors and difficulties and reach out to your partner to make amends. When your partner reaches out to you, meet them halfway, accept the repair attempt and move on.

7. Create shared meaning

The quality of a relationship is determined by the quality of the time that is spent together. Time is made meaningful by creating routines and rituals that will make your relationship richer. These could include candle-lit dinners, reviewing your values as a couple, exploring healthy lifestyles and improving your relationship skills.

If you follow these tips, you will not only be building a relationship that can survive a crisis, you may also build the type of relationship that lasts a lifetime.

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 are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

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