

Communication for couples

TIP SHEET

Relationship 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.

Difficult times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can present extra challenges for many relationships. When difficulties loom, poor communication skills are often a contributing factor to relationship tensions. A lack of good communication can also fuel a sense of disconnection between couples.

Here are some tips to help you increase feelings of connection with your partner, through quality conversations:

1. Listen

The goal here is to be interested in what your partner has to say. When your partner is speaking, give them your undivided attention. Show them that you are paying attention by making eye contact and confirming what you have heard.

2. Show empathy and validate what your partner is experiencing

Empathy is the attempt to understand the other person by getting to know their thoughts and feelings. Empathy starts with listening, followed by validating your partner and their experience. Phrases like, "That is hard" and "I'm here for you", will build emotional connection, which is just what we need in difficult times.

3. Ask quality questions

Quality questions will help to open a conversation and allow you to get to know our partner better. They usually begin with words such as what, how, when, or which. Instead of giving your partner your opinion in a conversation, try asking an open-ended question and find out how much more you learn about them.

4. Manage your emotions

During a crisis, your emotions may feel very raw and the slightest thing can send your conversations spiralling out of control. It is helpful to be aware of this. When you begin to feel overwhelmed, call a halt to the conversation and take time to soothe yourself. Once you are calmer you can proceed with the conversation.

5. Take responsibility

A difficulty many of us face is the tendency to blame others, especially when things are difficult. Blame keeps us defensive and powerless. Take responsibility by identifying where you have contributed to the difficulty and where you can respond and act differently.

6. Use 'I' Statements

All relationships have challenges that need to be addressed. It is important to bring challenges to your partner's attention without a full-blown attack. One way you can do this is by using "I" statements. This is a short neutral message about what you have observed, how this behaviour has affected you and a request for what you think would be more helpful.

For example: "When I am interrupted while I am talking, I feel ignored. What I would really like is to be listened to until I have finished speaking."

7. When in doubt, a hug can do wonders

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, words can just divide us more. Since a connection is what you are aiming for, try not saying anything and just hold on to each other. Hugging releases the bonding hormone, which is often what we needed anyway.

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 **Communication for Couples**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.