

Maintaining Positive Relationships in Difficult Times

As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues, couples around the world may be feeling the pressure of being isolated with their loved ones. As much as we love our partners and usually enjoy their company, being together 24/7 is not always easy to navigate. If the pressure is starting to build in your relationship (or has already escalated), remember you are not alone in feeling this way and help is at hand.

Even prior to COVID-19, relationship issues, was one of the main reasons people sought counselling. To support you with this, we've put together a few tips to keep in mind during this difficult time.

Routine, boundaries and respect

Daily routines are important, whatever the circumstance. Whether you are working from home or not, it is important to have structure in your life. This may include setting working hours, daily exercise, time for ourselves, as well as time with our loved ones.

It is helpful to agree boundaries at the start of the day. You could ask your partner, *"what is your plan for the day? Which room will you be working in?"* or *"Are there any times during the day where you can't be interrupted?"* Once you have agreed how you will set your day, respect what you have agreed to.

Mutual support

The current situation is stressful for many people. It may bring up a range of feelings, which could impact how respond to each other. You may find you're snapping more than usual, or your patience is thin. Communicate openly with your partner. Give each other the opportunity to talk about any issues affecting the relationship or about any feelings and concerns you're having at this time.

Importantly, take turns being the Speaker and the Listener. When being the Speaker try to be kind in the words you use to explain how you're feeling to your partner, using lots of "I" statements to denote how you feel rather than how your partner is behaving. When being the Listener, try to actively listen and let your partner tell the whole story, rather than jumping in with solutions too quickly. Be empathetic in your responses and try to truly understand their point of view. Then, come up with solutions together and accept that compromises may have to be made on both fronts.

Connect with friends and family

Don't forget about keeping connected with others! Have a virtual coffee (or wine/beer) with a friend. Call a family member you haven't seen in a while. Write a letter to someone. Have a virtual quiz night with friends. With technology there are so many ways we can connect and stay engaged with our broader social circle.

Focus on your wellbeing

Looking after your health and wellbeing is an important part of keeping your relationship on a healthy path. You might want to take the [Assure Stress and Wellbeing Self-Assessment](#) as a starting point. If you recognise that you're not feeling yourself or your partner may be struggling, it's important to get help quickly. This could be speaking to a friend, contacting your GP, or booking a counselling session with the Assure team.

Make memories

This is a great time to make memories and have fun with our partners. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- ◆ Dinner in – get dressed up, order take away or cook together, and set the table to enjoy a meal in each other's company
- ◆ Create a game night you can both enjoy
- ◆ Art and crafts – pick something to paint or make together, and have a competition to see who makes/paints it best
- ◆ Exercise – try some form of exercise together, even if it is just going for a daily walk
- ◆ Create a treasure hunt in the house
- ◆ Create a home spa and pamper each other
- ◆ Watch your favourite childhood film together
- ◆ Learn a new skill/language together

Take some time alone

Taking time out for yourself can be a helpful strategy. Try to set aside some time that can be just about you. Whether it's going for a walk, reading a book, speaking to a friend or just having quiet time, it's important to ensure you have space from each other.

Use this time as an opportunity to reset

Communicate with your partner about the changes you'd like to see in your relationship and what new routines you'd like to put in place. Use this time to work together to start planning your "new normal".

Ask for help

If you need help or would just like advice on some strategies you can try, don't hesitate to reach out for help. The Assure team are here for you and we have great experience in relationship building. Getting some coaching early might give you the opportunity to make some positive and long-lasting changes to your relationship.