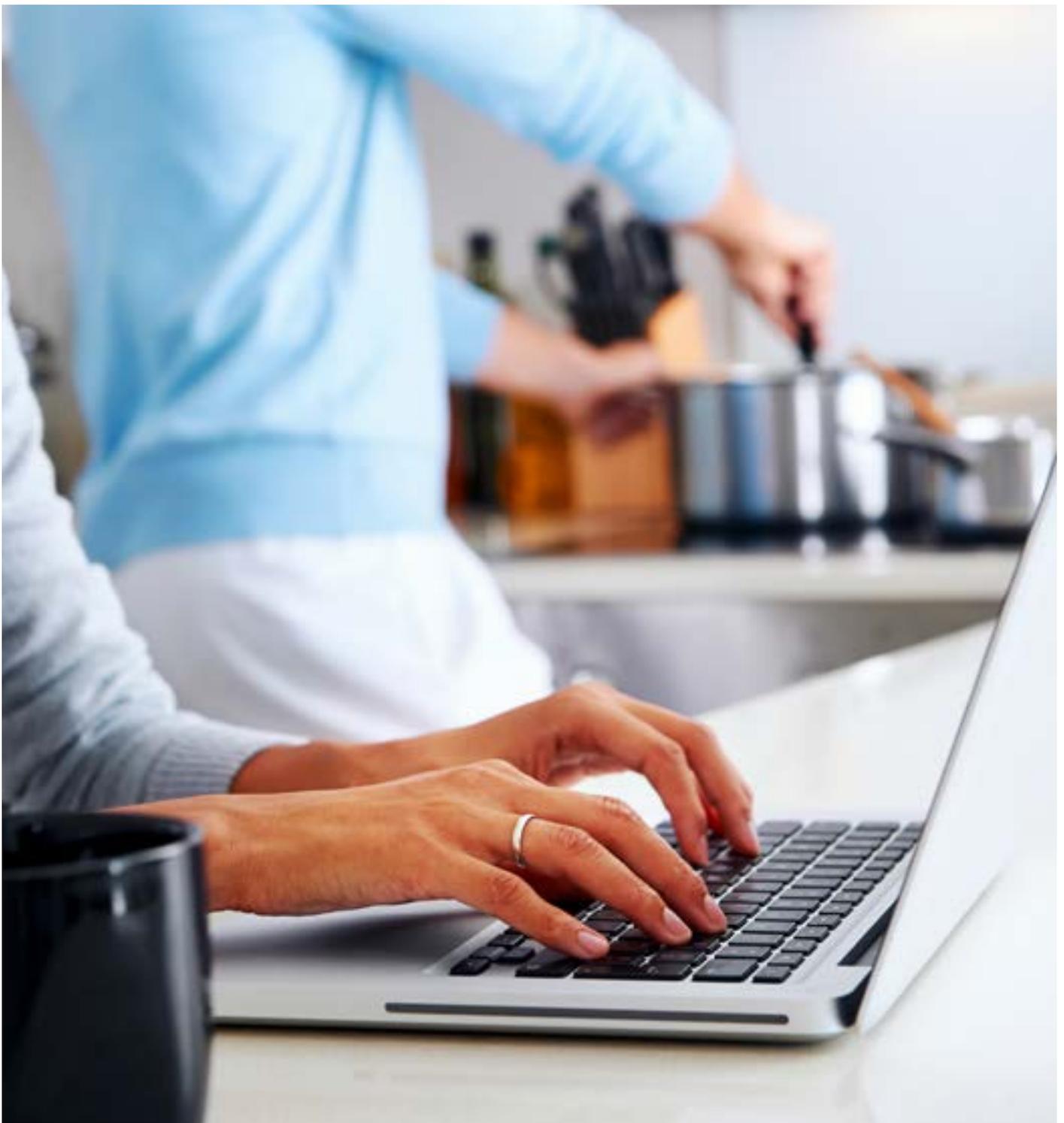


We are here to help you.

Covid-19: A new world of 24/7 relationships



Changes to both our personal and professional lives have forced us all to establish what our 'temporary new normal' looks and feels like. Whether this has involved looking inwards, or reflecting on our relationships with partners, family, friends, housemates or children, it's been tough going for many of us. With constant news, change and ongoing worry about COVID-19, it's no wonder some of us have struggled at times. And then adding to that heavy list of worries, the fact that many of us aren't used to spending quite so much time at home or together every day.

Love and relationships are 24/7, but usually our days together and physical time isn't. In many households, cabin fever has been setting in. Layered on top of this 24/7 proximity and the pressure may be building around this. Some of us may have found that our roles and identities within our relationships have also changed.

Whether it's home schooling whilst working, feeling more isolated if you live alone or you took the decision to move back home for the time being with parents or close family members - whatever situation you're in, remember you're not alone in feeling the strain of social distancing measures on your relationships, both with yourself and others. The good news is, we're starting to see light at the end of the tunnel with the government's latest update and phased plan to start to ease some of the current lockdown and social distancing measures.

This'll undoubtedly provide many of us with some positive hope for the future. In the meantime there are still some proactive steps to keep our relationships with ourselves and others healthy, to avoid them buckling under the pressure.

Take a look through this article for some helpful hints.

1. Being on our own

You're spending more time alone than ever with no distractions and, for some of us, this might be really tough. Having so much time with our own thoughts can for some mean they are constantly thinking about the situation and could create an unhealthy relationship with your mind if not kept in check. You may be used to spending lots of time in your own company at home, but this is a whole new level. Feeling isolated and disconnected can be hard, so try and put measures in place to keep those negative thoughts at bay.

Keep a routine

This can be really helpful in terms of organising your day and bringing focus and structure to it. It's also a great way to distract your mind from any negative thoughts or overthinking.

People tell us starting their day with a positive mindset and plan of action works well for them - a morning routine.

Be kind to yourself

Don't put pressure on yourself to do better or compare how you're coping to how your friends and family are. We're all different and you know yourself best, so look out for your own warning signs.

It's ok to not want to learn that new skill, skip the virtual call and do nothing!

Prioritise your own wellbeing

Keeping nourished and focusing on keeping yourself well can help greatly. Whether it's paying particular attention to what you're eating and drinking, doing some exercise or making it a priority to have an early night.

Putting yourself first and taking a few small steps towards the above is likely to have a positive impact on both your physical and mental health.

Connect with friends and family

Communicating and connecting with people might really help if you find you're spending too much time with your own thoughts. Regular catch ups in the diary might give you routine to look forward to.

Don't forget to talk to others in the same boat as you too! It may help to share experiences and tips for getting by.

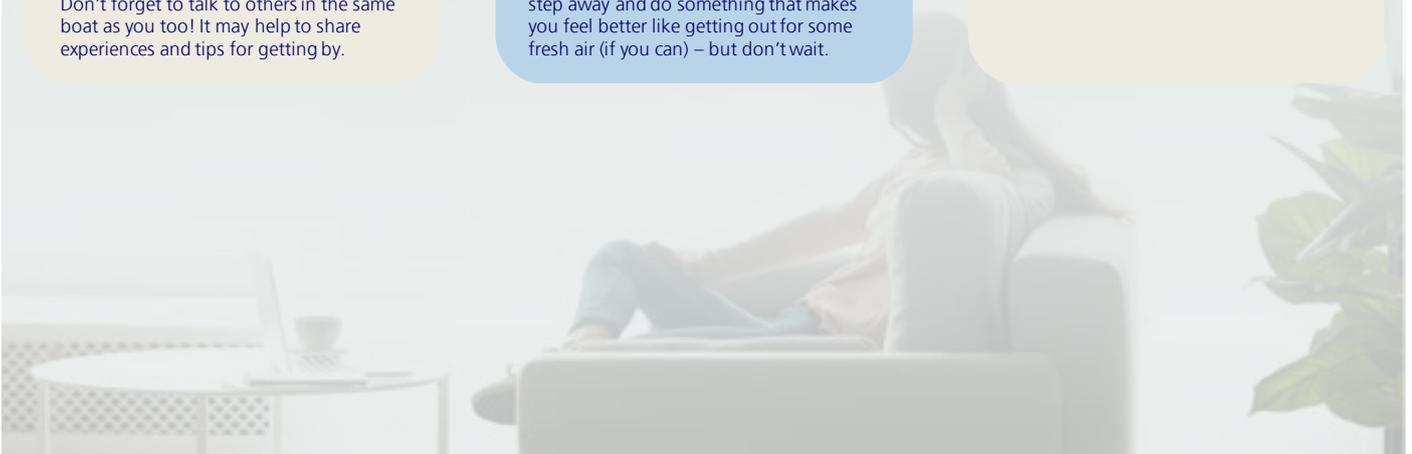
Seek out help when you need it

If you find yourself stewing over something or finding things tough for whatever reason, on any particular day, seek some support.

Pick up the phone, drop someone a line, or step away and do something that makes you feel better like getting out for some fresh air (if you can) - but don't wait.

Find ways to distract yourself

People tell us they find something to do that'll distract them in moments when they find their thoughts spiralling in the wrong direction. Whether it's connecting with someone, having a cuppa, reading a book - find something that works for you.



2. Being at home with dependents or children

Whether you're a single parent (including a co-parent) or in a partnership, being at home all day is difficult and we all need some down time. Add to the mix the fact you've got little people or teenagers at home and it's easy to see how tensions might be rising.

We've all taken on a new role with children on the schooling front, but we might also find our roles at home are changing from what we're typically used to, which could in turn change the dynamics for your children too.

You may have started to see spikes in undesirable behaviour or siblings bickering more than usual. The truth is, they may be struggling too. With large spells of their days at school and often separate from each other, suddenly out of the blue they're thrown together all the time. It's natural that they might be finding it hard.

With the latest news of a potential phased approach to returning to school, you might feel this gives you some sense of a return to some normality to work towards. Or you might be feeling the opposite – apprehension and/or worry.

Accept that different days will bring different challenges. Appreciate the good days and know that your best is good enough. Focusing on the wellbeing and happiness of your child/children is going to be more important than pushing them too much. So, if it's not happening at home today - take a break or call it a day and reset.

If you're in a partnership, **work together** to agree how things will work at home and plan what the day looks. How will you manage the school work between you? How will you get things done around the house? Who is preparing the meals?

Spending a little bit of time upfront planning and aligning will save time and take away some of the stress.

Communication is key. Open communication can help everyone navigate through these times of uncertainty and extra pressure. Many people are telling us spending more time with each other as a family has been really positive. It may be those moments where you sit down together for lunch for instance – this might not have happened before. You all need your own time too so make sure you're honest and upfront about this.

Carve out some alone time

Relationships are better when there is a healthy balance between spending time together and having some time apart. Creating that separate space is even more difficult right now especially when you're all at home but it's still important to find some time in the day when you can all do this.

Focus on the short term and come up with some plans together.

It's useful to remind yourself to take one day at a time. Work together to come up with a plan. As the situation changes with COVID-19, so might your plans need to. Getting a handle on the day-to-day activities up front will help reduce some of the anxiety and frustrations.



Give each other some leeway, which might mean biting your tongue!

Siblings falling out, partner having an off day... or is this you today? It's important to remind yourself that at times of prolonged stress, ups and downs and mood changes are common. Things that might once have been endearing could be starting to niggle at you. If tensions are mounting over something you'd normally just let go - take a few moments to yourself and take a step back. Remind yourself that everyone's doing their best amid the chaos, just as you are.

Make time for fun

If your children/teenagers are missing spending time with friends and finding the school work hard going, plan some time for fun activities to demarcate the school learning from home life. Some parents have also told us using technology so children can see their friends can also boost moods. Grandparents reading stories and playing virtual game. But it's not all about technology – so many people have gone back to basics with good old traditional board games.



3. Relationships with our partner

As we continue to navigate through difficult times, this could be placing pressure on your relationship or magnifying issues you'd normally overlook. You could even find yourself having moments of doubt about the long term prospect of your relationship more generally. The current circumstances and increased tension will undoubtedly have impacted even the strongest partnerships. Add into the mix already troublesome or broken-down relations and it could be disastrous. But there are some things you can do to help survive these difficult times.

Carve out some alone time

Relationships are better when there's a healthy balance between spending time together and having some time apart. Creating that separate space is important and it may be you take the opportunity to get out more where you can for exercise and to find some time in the day for you! The key ingredient is communicating when you need alone time and not feeling guilty about taking time for yourself. Use the time to do something you enjoy.

Communication is key

Open up when things aren't working or you're having a bad day. Depending on how well you know your partner, you may expect them to pick up the signs of a bad day. You might also find you or your partner may be reacting differently to normal and displaying new emotions. Regular honest communication about how you're feeling will help you get through this. If your partner isn't asking you about your day, it doesn't mean they don't care, they may be having a hard day themselves. If you open up about how you're feeling, they'll potentially reciprocate and open up themselves.

Focus on the short term and come up with some plans together

It's useful to remind yourself to take one day at a time. Work together to come up with a plan to help you get through the situation. As the ongoing situation changes, so might your plans. You might need to meet halfway on certain things but having a plan will help reduce some of the anxiety and frustrations.

Give each other some leeway and sometimes bite your tongue!

Has your partner had a bad day, are they on edge, lethargic or just a bit grumpy? Or has this been you? It's important to remind yourself that in times of prolonged stress, ups and downs and changes in mood are common. What once may have been endearing may have become something of an irritation when together 24/7. If you're feeling the strain, and tensions are mounting over something you'd normally just let go, take a few moments to yourself, take a step back and remind yourself that your partner is doing their best amid the chaos, just as you are!

Be clear and upfront

Be clear with your partner about how your day is looking, when you might be under added pressure on the work front and points when you can do stuff together. There may be days when you want to get up earlier or start work later. Being clear with your partner about when this is will help them understand when they could take some alone time themselves or when you may need more support.

Make time for fun

Some people tell us they set a regular time each week for a 'date' or 'cinema' night or have taken up hobbies together to keep an element of fun in their relationship and still do some of the activities they might previously have enjoyed.

It's essential to understand you're not alone. The feelings you're experiencing - whether this is fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, or something else entirely - all are normal and okay. That said, it's crucial not to let your emotions dictate how you treat, or how you react to your partner. This is a time for pulling together and drawing on the unique strengths of your relationship.

What if relationships aren't so healthy

Much of the advice applies above but the current situation could exacerbate difficulties, for instance for those whose relationships had already broken down but who find themselves stuck in the same house together. If you're struggling at home, reach out for help.

Perhaps chat to a family member, friend, colleague – but talk to someone. If you're in a place where home isn't a supportive or safe environment for you and things are difficult or you feel in any kind of danger, we know this brings about a whole new set of challenges for you but reach out to others for help where you can.

4. House sharing relationships

Maybe you lead separate lives but all live together in shared accommodation. You'd normally be used to your own space but recently it has been harder to escape each other. The good news is we are starting to see the roadmap out of lockdown. For you this might mean being able to have a bit of extra alone time and space by getting out more for exercise and fresh air (if you can), or meeting a different person outside of your household in an open space.

Focus on the short term and come up with some plans together

Healthy relationships are based on good communication so work together to think about what's coming up for people during the week to avoid clashes and allow everyone the breathing space they need.

Be clear and upfront

Recognise that living with friends or colleagues is different to living with loved ones or partners. It may be that your housemate doesn't know a lot about how you work or the work that you do, you may find that talking about this helps you find better working practices.

Carve out some time for yourself

Just because you're all together it doesn't mean you can't try and have your own space. The key is communicating with each other, setting out points when you might have some time to yourselves, whether it is using the kitchen or lounge space for exercise or a virtual catch up with friends.

Give each other some leeway and sometimes bite your tongue

Being thrust upon each other so much more than usual can affect us all, living in each other's pockets is hard. Be more mindful of small things like keeping your living space tidy and clear helps. Find space in whatever means to try and defuse any potential issues. Just as you're doing your best right now – so are others.

Recognise your shared experiences/what you have in common

Neither of you can see family right now so you may find yourselves missing family members or loved ones. Recognise this and talk about it, you may find it helps you understand each other's behaviour and/or general mood.

Show you care

If your housemate is having a bad day or week, you may find that a simple gesture goes a long way and means more than having a conversation about how they're coping. You could cook a meal for them or just check in with them during the day. And the chances are they might reciprocate when you need it too and your relationship will grow stronger.





5. Key Workers

You may be reading this as you're still working out on the front line. Or you may be in a relationship or live with a key worker.

Our relationships will inevitably feel the strain of this. You might be worried about those close to you putting themselves at risk on the front line, or as a key worker yourself going through heightened stress worrying about contracting the virus yourself or passing it on to those you live with. Add to this potentially long working hours and the possibility that there might be children at home, it's easy to see how the mood may vary from day to day.

And finally, not forgetting, for some – the relationship may have become more distant (physically), if loved ones or those close to them are living in temporary accommodation to avoid any risks of infection being taken to their home. Whatever your personal circumstances, there are some things you can do to help keep your relationship healthy. Take a look at the tips in this section but don't forget some of the guidance in other sections might be relevant to you too.

Communication is key

With heightened stress and tensions potentially running high, it can be hard to keep dialogue open but storing things up will potentially create bigger issues in the long run. Talking might feel difficult or daunting but will often release that feeling of weight on your shoulders. Equally, it's ok to say when you're finding it difficult to talk about something or you need some time. Come back to the conversation when you feel ready.

Acknowledge your feelings

Whether you're out working or you live with somebody who is, it's understandable to feel worried, anxious or stressed. It may be because you or someone close is being exposed to high risk environments or there's worry about contracting or spreading the virus to others. It's ok to feel like this and you don't always have to be strong for everybody else. Accepting that these are perfectly normal emotions will help.

Reach out for support

Acknowledging that it's ok to feel worried, angry or upset about the situation and reach out for support if you need it. If it's hard to talk to a loved one or someone close, you could seek support from a friend, trusted colleague in the same situation as you or your manager.

Avoid making comparisons to others

It's useful to remind yourself to take one day at a time and recognise everybody's experience is different. Drawing comparisons on how you are coping against others (including those closest to you) is unhelpful and likely to lead to more stress. Be kind to yourself and acknowledge that you and those around you are doing the best they can right now and everybody has a different journey.

Give each other leeway and bite your tongue

You might be finding things harder than most right now and tension is normal but people say it's best to avoid venting and avoid any big discussions or arguments right now. Instead, if you feel things might bubble over, take some time out and come back to any discussions that might be needed when things are calmer.

Being kind and take time to listen

If you live with a key worker just being there to listen if they want to talk about what's happened in the working day or shift will be appreciated – similarly if you're a key worker reach out to those around you when you need to talk rather than bottling things up. Finding time to spend some quality time together will also help, so even if there are long working hours look for opportunities and prioritise this.

External Support



Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. Available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.



Check out the Mind website for support.



Relate are the UK's largest provider of relationship support. Take a look at their website for more information on the services they can offer.

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