

Bringing couples together during a global pandemic is easy, but maintaining a strong relationship can be challenging

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Couples can be facing challenges in their relationships as they potentially find themselves spending their days together due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Unsplash

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought people together, but that immediate and forced togetherness can cause issues for couples, even in the strongest of relationships.

A Purdue University [social scientist](#) who studies marriage and [family therapy](#) says it's important to give space to one's significant other while also maintaining that relationship.

Cezanne Elias, a clinical assistant professor in [human development](#) and [family studies](#) in the College of Health and Human Sciences, reminds partners to keep the relationship strong and not become bogged down by common stressors such as work or financial-related issues, intimacy or communication difficulties.

"While more time together can be great, it can also come with challenges," Elias says. "For example, conflict that existed before the pandemic might seem amplified, one partner's level of concern might not be the same as his or her partner's, partners may be more irritated and annoyed, and some partners may want more space while others want more togetherness."

- Plan activities that interest both people: Elias says couples can plan activities that are the equivalent of dates, such as watching online streaming services together, virtual get-togethers with friends, checking in between web meetings or eating lunch together. "The most important aspect of this time is that work is put aside, the latest news headlines are not rehashed, and that couples are able to focus on positive time together," she says.
- Balancing alone time and togetherness: "Individuals need time together, but they also need time apart in order to recharge," Elias says. "Couples should approach what together and alone times will look like over the next few months." The takeaway is that couples should give one another space for separate activities.

- Rearrange chores: Small acts of pitching in or modifying routines as needed can benefit [couples](#). Instead of doing what worked pre-quarantine, [partners](#) should talk about what works now and leave room for flexibility when work or child care schedules shift.
- Self-care for the benefit of the couple: Elias says many routines have been disrupted over the pandemic. "Disrupted routines or canceled activities can lead to conflict in a relationship, so [self-care](#) is important. Self-care might be taking a walk as a couple, as a family or alone; preparing healthy snacks; talking on the phone with friends or family; meditation; or journaling," she says.
- Acknowledgment: Partners should acknowledge when they are feeling upset, bored, frustrated or sad. It also is important to recognize that this is a time of uncertainty in which no one is expected to have all the answers and can apply to people during the time when restrictions are lifted. "Try hard not to judge yourself and/or your significant other too harshly. Remember that both you and your partner may be more sensitive right now and trying to operate from a place of good intent," Elias says.
- Seek help: Elias says to reach out if usual strategies to address issues are not working. In some instances, staying at home with a partner who has become abusive or increased alcohol or substance use is not the answer. Resources such as the National Domestic Hotline at 800-799-7233 or the Crisis Text Line—text HOME to 741741—can be used.

Provided by Purdue University

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