

# 18 TIPS TO MAKE SURE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SURVIVES THE CORONA VIRUS

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You love each other. You have been together for several years. You are each other's soft place to land when the world is against you. And now you have to be together 24/7 for an indefinite amount of time.

That is the situation many are in. For some it is fine or even wonderful - for others it is difficult. All of a sudden you no longer have the choice - you MUST be together.

And there may well be a few pitfalls that it would serve you well to pay attention to. So, here are 18 points you can use to make your new life easier or at least get the best out of it.

## 1. Recognize your emotions

It is important that you each recognize each other's feelings as they arise. Nothing creates more conflicts than unrecognized feelings. Therefore, it is a good idea to practice saying, I am happy when - or I get upset when, etc.

Notice that I do not write "You make me happy when -". That's because it's of no use to give others the responsibility for our own feelings. That responsibility is ours alone. It also means that it's significantly easier to change behaviour when you know that something you do could have a specific effect on another. It does not mean that you are wrong - it is what you DO that is counterproductive. It results in fewer suppressed emotions and fewer quarrels.

## 2. Create your own private pauses

You love each other and have been together for years. Yet, you may still need that bit of space that is just yours. One might like to read in total peace, whereas the other loves to watch youtube videos from old Formula 1 races. Make sure you have a daily life where there is room for both. Not necessarily at the same time, but it may be that one can sit in a room for himself and hear the happy sound of engines - while the other is home-schooling the children or preparing shopping lists.

## 3. The positive intention

It's very rare for people to be deliberately mean and fortunately those who are tend to be locked up somewhere. In other words, it may look like your partner is doing something to annoy you whereas the

truth probably is something. Firstly, the likelihood of it is very low (what would be the point?) Secondly, there is usually a good intention behind whatever we do. And you need to find out what it is and then you get an understanding of what he / she is doing and you can have a much more equal and adult conversation.

#### **4. Deal with conflicts while they're insignificant**

When you are limited to being in a lot less space than you usually are, it is incredibly important that you deal with potential conflict quickly. This means that instead of not mentioning anything, you might just notice and say "I'm a little bit irritated by what just happened. What can we do instead?" If you go and hold something in for too long, you run the risk of blowing up, and there is just no room for that at the moment. This time is about getting the best out of a difficult situation. Conflicts do not contribute positively to it. So: Talk quietly about the little things instead of yelling and screaming later.

#### **5. Different needs**

You may be a well-matched couple, but you each may need something that your partner may not be aware of. It may be that you need more hugs and more physical closeness in this time than you usually do. It may be important to you that the day is well planned. It may also be important for your partner that the house is tidy. It would serve both of you well to notice these things about yourselves and tell each other. You cannot deliver what you want if you don't know what it is.

#### **6. Mood Swings**

When your life and circumstances change, it's normal for your mood to fluctuate. The challenge here is in accepting that it'll probably happen and then be that partner who makes sure that it doesn't go anywhere destructive. Sometimes it can be a good idea to say "I feel sorry today / irritable / scared" – if you don't your partner may not know that you need support. And vice versa.

#### **7. Open questions**

A really good way to clarify situations is to ask open questions. Those are questions that you can't just answer with a yes or no. These are typically questions that begin with wh-: what, where, which, how, how long, etc. Try to avoid the word 'why', because it may tend to increase a level of conflict and whoever hears it, will often feel tempted to go into a defense mode. And that doesn't resolve anything.

#### **8. Think long term not short term**

You know the phrase "winning the battle and losing the war". It is simply about looking at what is good for us and our situation in the long run. Most often, it doesn't matter in the long run who put the knife in the

wrong drawer - it may be more important to clarify how you share doing the cooking or the laundry if both of you work full-time. Or how to organise your everyday life. Or how you spend your money.

### **9. View the situation from your partner's point of view**

It will always increase the understanding of a situation if both parties are given the opportunity to explain it. Therefore: If your partner is doing something that you think is silly, remember there's usually a positive intent behind and ask what that is. It may be that your partner is thinking further ahead than you - that there is an ill-construed act of love behind it or something else. So, try to step back from your own perspective and look at the situation from your partner's point of view.

### **10. Forgiveness**

In all long-term relationships, forgiveness is a key element. And forgiving isn't confronting your partner with something he / she did and then loudly declare: "It was stupid and I forgive you." That just escalates a conflict, because then he will say - angrily: "Well, I haven't done anything" - and then you have a full-blown conflict.

Forgiveness is an act - it is a decision that this cannot be allowed to affect me anymore. It's not okay, I don't think it's a good idea, I don't like it - but it shouldn't take up space in my mind and heart anymore. And then just read the section on nipping conflicts in the bud again.

### **11. Accept**

In a situation where you and your partner need to be at home for most of the day for an indefinite amount of time, there are some things you have to accept and decide for yourself that they shouldn't bug you. It may be that your partner never completely closes the drawers, that it's always you putting stuff in the dishwasher or whatever it may be. That doesn't mean it's okay - but it does mean that it's a part of living with your partner right now. So, the situation as such does not change – it's your attitude about it that changes. And you're the one who benefits from that.

### **12. Plan**

This point should probably have been mentioned earlier. Something that can bring peace and quiet for some people could be that there are plans and a schedule for what will happen when. That's why it's a good idea to get a new routine up and running - with breakfast, lunch, dinner, walk, etc. Who home-schools the kids when? Who works best at what times? Some are morning people - others are not. Use it to your advantage here.

You may also agree to construct meal plans and shopping lists for every 5 days, for example. For many people it can lower the anxiety levels when you have those kinds of plans in place. Maybe it works for you guys?

### 13. What are you grateful for in your partner

A good exercise is to take 5 minutes everyday to look each other in the eye and tell what you have appreciated by your partner that day. It strengthens the bond between you, and yes, you may as well continue to do it "on the other side" of corona.

### 14. What have you handled well today / this week - what has the other handled well?

Every evening go over what you think you've handled well together during the day and what you think the other has done well.

### 15. Laugh together

Although it may be difficult, try and find something you can laugh about together. There's a lot of black jokes going around at the moment and it helps us all to keep our anxiety levels down.

### 16. Cultivate the joy hormones!

There are 4 hormones that create joy and that you can use to your advantage. They are:

- **Endorphins:** It is nature's own pain hormone. It is triggered by two things : High-intensity exercise and spicy foods.
- **Serotonin:** It generally makes us happier and more sociable. It is triggered by:
  - Happy memories
  - Sunlight
  - Low intensity exercise
  - Milk and corn, which, together with carbohydrates, are converted into serotonin in the body
- **Dopamine:** It is our reward hormone and is triggered when we work towards a goal and it gives us a kick when we reach that goal (and that's why some of you just love a nice competition. You go for that dopamine kick). Here's how to trigger it in yourself:
  - Set daily goals - let them be specific, measurable and realistic

- Exercise with a goal in mind: Running x km - cycling y distance in z minutes, etc.
- **Oxytocin:** It is our love hormone and it is triggered by physical contact. It increases the feeling of love and trust, and you trigger it by making sure to give and receive hugs and kisses or other forms of touch. You can also get a massage. But it is probably easiest when you are “locked up” to give hugs and kisses. Even if you don't feel like it.

### 17. Make nice things together

Be proactive in establishing what would be good things for both of you – and possibly your kids – find fun and enjoyable. You may like to dance, to play board games, to watch old movies, etc. It may not be obvious what it is, but you probably figure something out.

### 18. Talk to other people!

Your world easily becomes very small if you only have one other person to talk to. And it may be that you're confined to your house, but there are actually plenty of opportunities. I just heard about a small German village where you ring your neighbour's doorbell for a chat - and then the neighbour comes out onto his balcony on the first floor and then you get a good chat. That story I heard in a video call with a good friend in Germany. Make good use of what's technically possible. Put the camera on and call friends and family via whatsapp, zoom, Skype, Messenger, Facetime - there are LOTS of options. And use them. You've enjoyed this person's company so far - you may as well continue. Have a Friday afternoon beer online, watch TV together via Facetime etc etc. Use your imagination and the many options that you have.