

COVID-19 and Sexual Health Relationships



NATIONAL COALITION FOR
SEXUAL HEALTH

How can I keep my relationship(s) strong during COVID-19?

With COVID-19, some of us are spending a lot more time together, while others are spending a lot more time apart. In either case, this can put some stress and strain on your relationship(s). However, you can take steps to keep your relationship(s) strong.

- **If you and your partner(s) are living apart under stay-at-home orders, this can be really tough.** It's important to keep in touch and connected. Talk with each other about the best ways of doing so. Options could include phone calls, texting or sexting; online video date nights; watching movies or TV together; playing online games; or even cooking together.
- **Carve out time for yourself.** Many of us are spending much more time with our partner(s) than usual. And, maybe with other family members, too. So, be sure to spend some time on your own, and do things that you enjoy. For example, taking a walk, reading, doing art, talking with friends, or just watching a favorite TV show or movie.
- **Don't forget quality partner time, too.** Whether your partner is long-distance or with you every day, it's important to check in with each other, and spend quality time together. You could plan an at-home "date night," a walk together, watch a movie, or an online "date night" to stay connected.
- **Empathy and kindness.** We're facing a stressful time with COVID-19, most of us are living in close quarters, we might be anxious, and our daily lives have changed in a big way. Remember to be patient and forgiving with both yourself and your partners.
- **It's normal to disagree from time-to-time,** but you can avoid real damage by arguing in a fair way. This means calmly explaining why you are upset and focusing on specific behaviors or examples. Check out the Five Action Steps for more tips: <https://www.fiveactionsteps.org/4>.
- **It's ok if your sex life is not all you want it to be even with extra time on your hands.** You might want to talk about your desires and fantasies and try something new. Or, if you have mismatched sex drives – one wants more and one wants less – it's important to talk about solutions. For more ideas, go to: <https://www.fiveactionsteps.org/4>
- **If you are struggling in your relationship and want more support, consider online or phone counseling.** To find a counselor, check these sites: <https://www.aasect.org/referral-directory> or https://www.aamft.org/Directories/Find_a_Therapist.aspx
- **If you feel unsafe in your relationship and/or your partner is being abusive, seek help right away.** You can chat online with NDVH: <https://www.thehotline.org/what-is-live-chat/>.

What if I'm in an abusive relationship and on stay at home orders?

- If you're in an abusive relationship, being on lock-down with your abuser(s) can be even more challenging and risky. This is also true if your family mistreats you because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- If possible, try to make a plan to minimize your risk. For example, find the safest room or area in your living space that you can escape to if there are signs that violence or verbal abuse may occur.
- If possible and safe to do so, put some space between you and your abuser. Things like taking walks, driving to the store or sitting in the stairwell of an apartment building will give you some relief from the situation, even if only temporarily.
- Think about putting a buddy system in place. Designate one or two trusted people outside of the home that you can contact with a code word to warn when you are in trouble and need help.
- Prepare a safety plan and have an emergency bag hidden in your home should you need to leave quickly. (<https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/safety-planning/interactive-safety-plan/>)
- If you have access to a phone, internet and/or social media, stay connected with family and friends. If you know someone who may be living in a dangerous situation, reach out to them often.
- Most importantly, remember, if you or your loved ones are threatened with violence or feel unsafe, call 911 for immediate help.
- Carefully consider how you communicate during lockdown when your privacy might be limited. It could be risky to make a call if your abuser can hear the conversation. Consider texting and online chats instead. However, if your abuser has access to your phone or computer, you might want to delete your history.
- For support and counseling, you can live chat with the National Domestic Violence Hotline: <https://www.thehotline.org/what-is-live-chat/>.