



# 8 ways to maintain a healthy, romantic relationship

Relationships affect our lives on a daily basis, and they all require effort to stay healthy. While starting a romantic relationship can be hard, building one for the long-term can be an even bigger challenge. Events inside and outside of the relationship make it necessary for both individuals to adapt and grow while also respecting, caring for and compromising with the other person.

Consider these strategies to maintain a healthy, romantic relationship:

1. **Embrace change.** Your relationship will undoubtedly evolve with life events, unexpected transitions and family changes. Consider change as an opportunity to make your relationship stronger rather than a cause for it to crumble.
2. **Have check-ins.** Talk with your partner about their relationship expectations and personal goals. Checking in with one another through regular dialogue establishes a good routine rather than crisis management.
3. **Know the family.** Families are unique and so are their ways of coping with stress and conflict. While your family might tend to be emotionally distant, your partner's family might like to engage in conflict and confrontation. Consider what coping styles you and your partner inherited from your families. Then, look for ways to work together to resolve conflict.
4. **Pick the right time.** Dealing with a problem in the heat of the moment may not be the best time to hear one another. Take a few minutes to cool off and gather your thoughts, as this opportunity allows you to listen to your partner's perspective.
5. **Be responsible.** Everyone has needs and wants in a relationship, but it's important to remember, some expectations may be unrealistic or unfair for your partner to meet. Consider what things you're able to do

for yourself and be responsible with them.

6. **Listen and speak up.** Are you so focused on trying to win an argument that you're unable to hear what your partner is saying? When you show respect for the other's opinions, they're more likely to listen to you. Also, make sure you both verbalize your relationship desires to manage expectations.
7. **Accept differences.** There are things about your partner that may never change, and the same is true for you. When you learn to accept this, you can begin to work together to change what you would like to be different.
8. **Respect rights.** You and your partner both have the right to enjoy your respective interests, friends, feelings, personal goals and opinions. When you have outside things that inspire and bring joy, you will both enjoy the relationship more.

Even in the current environment, building a relationship that lasts is possible. Small acts of kindness, such as physical or verbal gestures, really do make a difference. With some thought and patience, you'll find that simple strategies build a strong foundation for your relationship.

# How to support your spouse through difficult times

Caring for a spouse who's sick at home can be a challenge for both people. From the actual care to a shift in financial situation, the caregiver can find it hard to do it all. These days, more than ever, people are asked to ensure not only their own health but the health of everyone at home as well.

When a spouse becomes ill, it's important to have a plan in place to help them — and yourself — through it. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

**Prevent the spread of illness in the home.** This can be achieved through the following:

- If possible, make sure your spouse is in a different room from everyone else in the home. If that's not possible, maintain your distance when in the same room, wear a mask and wash your hands after leaving.
- Provide good air flow throughout the room where your spouse is located. If possible, open windows to give them fresh air.
- Do not allow visitors in the home until it's confirmed that everyone in the home is healthy.
- If possible, make sure that you (or whoever is caring for your spouse) have no underlying health conditions. Avoid allowing multiple people to care for your spouse.
- Designate different items to your spouse, including dishes, utensils, linens and towels. Do not share these items with anyone else in the home.
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces touched by your spouse.
- All members of the household should regularly wash their hands, whether or not they're in contact with your spouse.
- Collect your spouse's trash in a strong closed bag before throwing it away.

**Act with compassion.** Dealing with an illness can cause anyone to become irritable, stressed or even depressed. Check in with your spouse to make sure their emotional needs are met and that they feel heard throughout the duration of their illness. Also, remind them that you love them and are there for them.

**Consider your finances.** Any illness can cause financial hardships due to medical bills and time spent away from work. If needed, check in with local and national programs and services to see what types of financial assistance are available.

**Organize your medical information.** While a lot of people are able to be heal from illness at home, it's important to have all health information ready should your spouse need medical support.

**Focus on your own health.** Don't forget to check in with yourself and your own needs. If you're feeling stressed or aren't taking care of yourself through diet, exercise and getting enough sleep, it can impact your emotional health. If your own well-being is off balance, you may be less successful at supporting your spouse.

**Talk to a friend.** Your spouse is focused on trying to heal. If you're stressed, you may need to reach out a friend or another family member to talk through how you're feeling. They may also be able to help you run errands or take

care of other tasks that you're currently unable to do yourself.

**Seek additional support.** If you find yourself in need of help beyond a call with a friend, reach out to your doctor or a mental health professional. You may also have local community support group access, which can help you get in touch with people going through a similar situation.

**Give yourself some grace.** Supporting a spouse during a time of sickness is extremely stressful and emotional. Make sure to take a moment to give yourself some credit for all that you do.

### Sources

Caregiver Action Network: 10 tips for family caregivers.

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<https://www.cdc.gov/women/caregivers-covid-19/index.html>

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# Build successful in-law relationships

When we agree to spend the rest of our lives with our partner, we sometimes forget that their parents come as part of the package. And while many people enjoy wonderful, warm relationships with their parents-in-law, it's just as common for friction to occur between them. We've got some advice to help you to build on your relationship with your in-laws and try to find common ground.

## The importance of a positive in-laws relationship

Our parents are usually an important part of our lives, however well or badly we get along with them. A commitment to work on your relationship with your in-laws is an extension of your commitment to your partner.

It's likely that you will be sharing parts of your lives as a couple with your in-laws. And as your lifestyle changes, for example, if you have children, or if one of your in-laws becomes vulnerable and needs support, you may need to spend more time with them. So you need to try to enjoy the time you spend together and try to resolve any big sources of friction.

Our partners may also display the traits we find difficult in our in-laws. Learning to deal with our in-laws can help strengthen our relationship with our partners.

## Show your in-laws a united front

If any issues arise with your in-laws, it's important to deal with them as a couple. Any message to an in-law that isn't reinforced by your partner will become diluted and easy for them to ignore. Work together to decide what you do and don't find acceptable feedback, such as them criticizing you for your cleaning skills versus your parenting skills.

These conversations may be difficult, and you'll need to practice your communication skills, such as active listening and how to be heard. It might also be helpful to compromise.

## How to deal with difficulties

To help you deal with some of the more common issues, we have some suggestions:

- **Unwanted advice** — Your in-laws may have very different ideas about how they think things should be done. Open communication with your in-laws about how you feel might be appropriate, depending on your in-law. It can also help to clarify when you would like their advice and when it's not appreciated.
- **Spending time together** — Some families are used to seeing each other daily, while others may only visit a couple times a year. Friction often arises if one half of a couple feels constantly invaded by their partner's family. This needs to be discussed with your partner so you can find ways to get in personal time or time alone with your immediate family.
- **General irritation** — We're all likely to become irritated by people when we spend a lot of time with them, especially if it doesn't feel like our choice. It might help to think about why certain habits irritate you so much — is it because you're feeling criticized? Do they remind you of someone else? Decide which habits you can put up with and which you need to discuss with them. Your partner might be able to give you advice on how best to approach their parents.
- **General negative feelings toward your in-laws** — You may find yourself disliking or feeling irritated by your

in-laws and not really understanding why. Family relationships are complicated, and it might help you to spend some quiet time thinking this through or talking with a neutral friend. If you know why you're feeling negative, decide how you'll deal with the situation.

- **Coping with "big" days** — Weddings and holidays are often a time when differences between families emerge. If possible, plan ahead and make sure that everyone knows what will be happening. Empathize with your in-laws if they are unhappy.

No one said that family life was easy. But developing a good relationship with your in-laws over the years can become a way for you to get extra support — and a source of great enjoyment — for all the family.