

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Healthy conflict in relationships

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Conflicts are generally caused by differences, either of opinion or ways of doing things and are normal in relationships.

We often blame our difficulties with each other on our conflicts. It is not the differences or the conflicts that are the problem, rather it is the way in which the conflict is handled that causes the damage.

In times of crisis our levels of stress are higher and our difficult emotions seem to surface more readily. This not only leads to more conflicts, it also leads to more mismanaged conflicts. This can increase stress and emotional outbursts, it also gives rise to the feeling that our relationship is falling apart.

The following tips will help you manage conflict more effectively:

- **Have a helpful attitude**

It is helpful to see a conflict as a discussion with a friend, rather than a war with an enemy. In a war we are trying to destroy the other person along with their perspective, in a discussion, we are interested in their point of view and of finding ways to move forward together.

- **Manage emotions**

When we feel as though we are at war with our partner, we become more defensive and our emotions become heightened. These reactions interfere with our ability to handle the conflict effectively. It is important to be aware of our emotional state and when things become difficult, suggest a 'time out.' Come back to the discussion when you both feel calmer, usually after at least 20 minutes.

- **Create safety in the conversation**

It is important to create an atmosphere in which a constructive dialogue can take place. This includes speaking and listening with respect, reserving judgement and assumptions by maintaining curiosity, keeping the discussion on topic and giving each party the opportunity to speak.

- **Make and accept repair attempts**

Most conflict discussions go off track and end in a quagmire of emotion. In a large part this can be avoided by making and accepting repairs. When we make repairs, we are taking responsibility for our part of the difficulty and are acknowledging our partner's point of view. When we accept repairs, we acknowledge that we have heard and are willing to let go of the hurt and move forward.

- **Seek for a Win/Win**

Once each person's point of view has been considered, it is time to work toward a solution. Ideally a solution can be found that meets each person's needs. This is not always possible and then the difference must be managed so that forward movement can occur. This management could include ongoing negotiation and compromise.

- **Keep conflict in perspective**

It is vitally important that the feeling of friendship is maintained in spite of an ongoing difficulty. The issue is the difficulty and not the person that we are in a relationship with. In times of crisis we need all the support we can muster, let's keep our relationship conflicts quarantined so they don't overwhelm the feelings of trust and safety we have with our partner.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Healthy Conflict in Relationships** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.