

Starting Together, Staying Together

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA have developed a range of tips sheets as a free resource. We encourage you to share this with your community.

A relationship begins with love, exploration and hopes for a bright future. Establishing a new relationship is an exciting time for couples. For many, thoughts of life together start to focus on wedding plans or new homes, with many hours spent organising these elements to ensure it all goes smoothly. However, it's also important to focus on building the foundations for a lasting, stable relationship.

Often, once a couple settles into the regularity of being together, difficulties begin to emerge. When we don't have the skills to handle difficulties we begin to think feelings of love and hope are fading away.

The following tips will help to establish the foundations for a healthy relationship, and enable us to manage difficulties:

1. Treat your partner as you would your best friend

The first step is to increase your knowledge and understanding of your partner, by being curious and asking questions. As you begin to take more notice, focus on the things that you admire and appreciate about them and remember to express your gratitude.

It is important to show love to your partner in the way that is most meaningful to them. Some people like you to tell them you love them, others prefer to be shown through acts of kindness and others through physical touch. One sure way of showing love is by responding to your partner when they show that they need something from you.

2. Develop love and commitment

By prioritising nurturing your relationship and actioning what you say you are going to do, you can increase trust and commitment. When difficulty arises, avoid the temptation to compare your partner with someone else. Be committed to working with your partner on what you have in the present, not some fantasy that exists in the past or outside the relationship. It is especially important to be on your partner's side in times of difficulty – remember, you are a team acting together.

3. Regulate, share and validate emotions

Expressing emotions appropriately increases feelings of trust and closeness. To do this:

- Recognise and share your emotions appropriately.
- Learn to soothe your emotions, such as counting to 10 and being present by noticing what is around you.
- Take time out (at least 20 minutes) when your emotions become too volatile.

Encourage your partner to share their emotions appropriately too. One effective way of doing this is to validate your partner's emotional expression. Phrases like – *“That must be difficult”* or *“Tell me more”* can be useful.

4. Develop effective communication skills

Developing effective communication skills can enhance feelings of connection in a relationship.

- Good listening skills are an important facet of communication and include nodding, asking questions and checking in for meaning if you don't understand something.
- Seek to understand all the elements of a situation - this can include observations, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and hopes.
- It is also important to bring up issues in a gentle way by focusing on neutral descriptions and the impact that the issue is having on you - i.e. *“I feel frustrated when we don't talk about the difficulties we are having with money.”*

5. Work together on challenges

Refrain from blaming your partner or yourself for a problem. Try to see the problem as outside of your relationship, and one you can work on together. There may be challenging behaviours that contribute to problems, so be specific and work on those. Difficult situations may call for the ability to negotiate and compromise.

6. Maintain positivity in your relationship

Ensure the benefits you see in the relationship outweigh the costs. Good relationships aren't built by trying to solve problems alone. Make time for doing things you enjoy together - watch a good movie, cook an enjoyable meal, give each other a massage. Good relationships are built by focusing on those good times, especially when times are difficult.

By building strong foundations for your relationship, it has an increased chance of not only surviving but thriving.

If you would like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on [Starting Together, Staying Together](#) or any of our other courses, please book online, email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call (08) 6164 0200.