

Couples should work as a team, make plans for the future during coronavirus lockdown, experts say

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Couples trying to cope with the coronavirus lockdown should work as a team and make future plans to keep their relationship strong during the

crisis, experts have said.

Making use of any additional spare time to build friendship, having realistic expectations and trying to see the best in your partner despite the difficult situation will also help those struggling with the change in circumstances caused by the virus outbreak.

Academics from the University of Exeter working on the Shackleton Relationships Project—backed by high profile divorce lawyer Baroness Shackleton—have developed practical tips people for surviving self-isolating with their partner.

Professor Anne Barlow, who is leading the project, said: "New COVID-19 measures restricting our freedom to go out are bound to put [couple relationships](#) under pressure, even when family members are not ill. Yet keeping your closest relationships strong is even more important in a time of crisis.

"Over the past few years our research has shown what helps [long-term relationships](#) to thrive and we hope this further advice helps people during this difficult period."

The experts advise people to:

1. Approach the issue as a team: As we face possible illness or illness of a loved one and potential money worries, pulling together as a team is vital to maintaining a strong and enduring [relationship](#) with your partner.
2. Build your friendship: Make good use of the additional time you have by setting aside time to build your friendship—go for a walk together; cook a nice meal for your partner; be creative in making time for fun.
3. Use the time to make plans: This enforced isolation will not last

forever. Use the time to make plans for your future to keep you both positive.

4. **Keep your expectations realistic:** We are living in stressful times. Tempers will fray. Household budgets will be stretched. Don't expect things to be plain sailing.
5. **Try to see the best in your partner:** Acknowledge that you are each trying your best in difficult circumstances and try to be tolerant. Don't overreact to small irritations.
6. **Show you care:** Show your partner you care through small gestures—a cup of tea for a partner who is working online shows that you're thinking of them. Divide household chores fairly if you are both working from home.
7. **Keep communicating:** You are both likely to be anxious. Talk about how you're feeling. Listen to and acknowledge your partner's concerns.
8. **Commit to working through this time together:** Looking to a positive future together will help you to work through these uncertain times.
9. **Be flexible:** As government advice changes, the restrictions on how we live our life together may change. Try to be flexible and accommodate your partner's changing needs or concerns.
10. **Get support:** Try to stay connected with family and friends for support and encouragement. Don't rely solely on your partner.

Dr. Jan Ewing, a member of the project team, said: "People's lives have changed dramatically in a short period of time, and couples will be trying to cope with this, as well as worries about money and family and friends. As much as it will reinforce how much people depend on and love their partner, being together so much will be new, and difficult for many. We hope our advice will be useful for all those coping with stress, change and illness."

Experts working on the Shackleton project interviewed ten divorce

lawyers/mediators and two judges to ask them the key reasons why relationships fail. They also interviewed 45 couples married for 10 years, or who had separated during this period, and ten other couples in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, who had been living together, married or in a civil partnership for at least 15 years.

The study found long-term relationships last when they are built on friendship, respect, realistic expectations, shared interests and humour. Academics identified the ten key aspects of a relationship which couples can use to reflect on to see if they are likely to thrive and stand the test of time. Continuing to ask the ten critical questions can also help couples build their relationship.

Provided by University of Exeter

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