



# THE EAP CONNECTION

## Safeguarding Your Marriage Against COVID-19 Stressors

If you're like many couples, the pandemic and social distancing measures may be making this a trying and difficult time for your marriage. Social isolation, financial burdens, job loss, homeschooling, health concerns, and uncertainty for the future are all contributing to increased mental health challenges, with marriages often taking the brunt of this negativity. Here are some things that you and your spouse can do to get through this situation with your marriage intact.

### Be Patient and Understanding

You and your partner are under greater pressure than you may have ever been before. With tensions running high, it's important to show compassion and patience for the special person in your life. They are probably doing the best they can to navigate this unprecedented situation just as you are, and inevitably they won't always be able to keep it all together. Be there for them in the tough moments with an understanding and caring attitude. With increased stress, it can also be common to get more easily annoyed or frustrated with your partner, resulting in harsh, negative communication. Remember to positively communicate your feelings and needs by using *I statements*.

### De-stress Together

External stressors, such as work issues or a global pandemic, can creep into your marriage in negative ways and cause marital conflict. Being able to guard against the harmful effects of stress strengthens your partnership. According to The Gottman Institute (2013), having stress-reducing conversations with your spouse is beneficial. These conversations involve taking turns talking about your stress while the other partner actively listens.<sup>1</sup> It's important to note that listening doesn't mean offering advice or fixing issues, rather it's about showing understanding and support for your partner's feelings.<sup>1</sup> Regular check-ins and emotional investment in your relationship can help build your bond and prevent stress from making damages.

### Give Each Other Space

Isolation at home can feel suffocating, especially when spending every moment with your partner. There is something to be said for the old adage that separation makes the heart grow fonder. Plan time for doing activities on your own, such as reading a book, going for a run, watching a movie, or taking a bubble bath. If possible, create separate spaces in your home for each of you to go when you need a break. Connecting virtually with friends and family is another great way to cultivate meaningful relationships and build your support network. You'll also probably find you have more to talk about after some time apart.

### Connect with a Counselor

For some, COVID-19 and social isolation may be magnifying issues that you have had for a while. For others, you may be experiencing new relationship issues brought on by the pandemic. No matter the situation, every relationship can benefit from the guidance and support of a trained counselor. Your ERC Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has telehealth counseling options (telephonic and video) to support you and your spouse even during social distancing and stay-at-home orders. All services are HIPAA compliant and follow strict confidentiality practices. Call 1-800-222-8590 to make an appointment.

Note: If your spouse is causing you to feel unsafe or in danger, call a domestic abuse hotline (such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233) or reach out to us at 1-800-222-8590.

1. Lisitsa, E. (2013). *How to have a stress-reducing conversation*. The Gottman Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.gottman.com/blog/how-to-stress-reducing-conversation/>.

## HOW TO USE YOUR EAP BENEFIT:

ERC: Counselors & Consultants is your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. For additional information, visit our website [ERCincorp.com](http://ERCincorp.com) or call 1-800-222-8590.