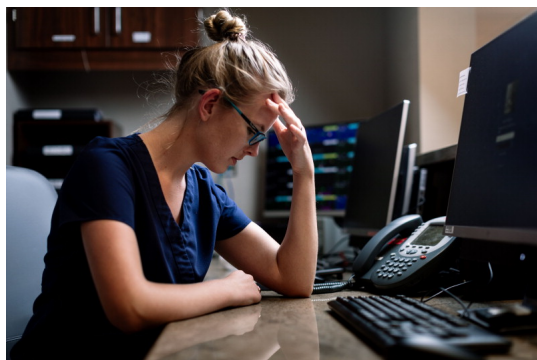


Managing Stress and Anxiety While Working From Home With a Partner

Written by Dr. Cynthia Stonnington

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Due to the spread of COVID-19, your home has likely become your office. And if you are living with your significant other, it is likely becoming theirs as well. While couples spend a lot of time together, they normally don't work together, and the sudden change may put strains on your relationship. However, try these methods to keep the peace.

Maintain your routine. Most of the time, our and our partner's work and life are separated, but being forced to work from home mixes the two and will cause you to see much more of each other. This is never a bad thing, but too many changes at once can overwhelm us. Try to keep your routine as normal as possible, even if that is working in separate rooms.

Practice good communication. When tensions are high, we may become frustrated and communicate poorly with one another. Good communication is essential in any relationship and especially in a time where you will see more of each other. When practicing good communication, consider the following:

- Listen and take to heart what they say. When you're in a disagreement, it's hard to accept your partner's feelings about the disagreement; in fact, your partner needs to know that they are being heard. Simply listen, and consider what they say before chiming in.
- Stay engaged. When we are only half-focused on a conversation, we may miss the broader message our partner is communicating to us: Voice inflexions, eye movement, and other body cues may help us understand and better communicate with our partner.
- Explain what is bothering you. If something is upsetting about their behavior, try to make "I" statements instead of "you." For example, instead of, "you're bothering me when you do this," consider, "When I see you do this, it makes me upset." You are still being direct about how you're feeling, but the language is less inflammatory and may be accepted better.

Lend an ear. Talking about your anxiety often relieves it. With an ever-evolving situation and uncertainty found at every turn, it is easy to let anxiety prevent us from opening up to others about how we are feeling. In this crucial moment, lend an ear and a shoulder to cry on for your partner. Try to avoid minimizing your partner's feelings, judging, assuming their reactions are just the same as yours, or telling them what they need to do to fix the problem. Honor each other's emotions, ask questions, and problem solve together.

Remember what you love about that person. No one expected a pandemic to hit us this hard, and yet, this is the hand that has been dealt to us. The set of circumstances leaves us anxious, on edge and irritable when we interact with our partner. In fact, it may even cause us to lose sight of why we fell in love with our partner to begin with or forget the moments and memories we have with them. In a time where stress is high, remember to pause, take a deep breath, and reflect on what you value most in your partner. If tensions are high at your household, it is likely because you both care and are trying to make things better. Minimize conversations about who is right or wrong and take the time to share those memories with one another.

You can also reduce anxiety by doing the following:

Wind down with a hobby or two. Whether you love to knit, bake or read, enveloping yourself in something familiar and fun soothes the soul and can take our minds off of our anxiety. The time at home gives you time to also pick up a new hobby or skill you've always wanted to learn but have put off.

Limit exposure to news. With the world around us constantly changing, try limiting your exposure to the news. Try limiting your news consumption to 15- or 30-minutes doses. That way, you are still well-informed on what's happening in the world, but you are not overwhelmed.

Surround yourself in the familiar. We all have that one song that brings us back memories, or that old sitcom that makes us laugh. During this time, listening to music or watching television can serve as a de-stressor. In a time that is uncertain, re-watching a favorite show or movie can provide comfort.

Get some fresh air. Social distancing does not confine us to staying indoors at all times. Staying active can relieve our stress, and a brisk walk or spending some time in the sun can rejuvenate us. Take advantage of any hiking trails nearby, while practicing proper social distancing of course.

A good thing to keep in mind is that you and your partner are not alone. This is uncharted territory for many of us, and we're all in this together. Practicing good communication skills and hearing one another out is essential for maintaining a healthy relationship with your partner during times like these.

Dr. Cynthia Stonnington is the chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Psychology at [Mayo Clinic](#) in Arizona and Director of Learner

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Wellbeing at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science's Arizona campus. Dr. Stonnington has over 30 years of experience treating patients with anxiety and mood disorders.