

**THE MOVING FORWARD
TOGETHER PODCAST:**

Managing Relationship Challenges During COVID-19



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On the fourth episode of the Optum Moving Forward Together podcast, Dr. Dylan Ross spoke to Dr. Julie Gottman and Dr. John Gottman – researchers, clinical psychologists and co-founders of the Gottman Institute. They discussed the challenges that relationships may be facing during COVID-19.

As people spend more time at home – often in close quarters with family – they can become increasingly depressed and irritable. At the same time, they can feel lonely because they miss seeing friends and, if they're working from home or they've been laid off, their co-workers.

Based on four decades of working with couples and families, Dr. Julie and Dr. John offer several suggestions for getting through this unique time with our relationships intact.

- **Be aware and patient.** At the moment, many of us are seeing our family members more than usual – 24 hours a day, in some cases. Not being able to have time for ourselves can be stressful. And small disagreements can escalate quickly. Try to understand how COVID-19 is affecting those around you, and be patient when they get irritable. Bear in mind additional stressors, such as financial worries, that may also be affecting your loved one's mood.

- **Appreciate the good.** One issue that Dr. Julie and Dr. John often see when couples are having trouble is a shift towards criticism and focusing on the negative. Instead, it's important to look for what your partner is doing right. Create a culture of appreciation and respect by pointing out what's positive and saying thank you. And don't forget little physical moments too, such as holding hands or cuddling. During this stressful time, those actions may be more important than ever.
- **Set aside time for serious conversations.** While it can be tough to have important, private conversations if you have kids in the home constantly these days, it's still essential. Set aside a time to talk about the issues on your mind. Make sure that you start in a way that makes your partner feel open, not attacked. "I feel" sentences are one good way to introduce a tough topic. Ask your partner to listen and confirm what you said. Then, do the same in reverse. When you truly understand each other, it's easier to come to a compromise.
- **Seek support.** While online medical visits and therapy sessions have been available for years, COVID-19 has quickly ramped up their popularity. If you could use support during this time – individually or as a couple – be sure to use one of the many available resources to connect with a therapist.

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