

## How to Handle Your “New” Co-Workers

By: Kiersten Philpott, Health Educator

As a human race we need social connection, and we thrive on physical interactions with others. We also crave diversity within specific social spheres. We develop many types of relationships including familial relationships, friendships, acquaintances, and relationships with employers, employees, and co-workers. Each relationship looks different and requires a different “version” of yourself. Our language and social interactions adjust as we enter different environments that require unique types of communications. A large part of who we are stems from these purposefully varied interactions.

What happens when we suddenly are thrust into a world where our interactions are limited? What happens when you now share your office space not with a casual work friend but rather your significant other? What happens when you no longer say “hi” to that gal down the hall because that gal down the hall is your five-year-old daughter? What happens to relationships when there is no longer a separation between work, home, and play, and you only interact with the same small number of people every day? These are the questions that we are being forced to face. The question that I want to focus on is how to keep a relationship healthy when there is no reprieve.

Relationships of any kind take energy and work. Perhaps the most important type of work in any relationship is open and honest communication. The American Psychological Association emphasizes in their definition of communication it is both verbal and nonverbal, and it is essential to the transmission of “ideas, knowledge, feelings, and experiences.” Thus, without strong communication skills, relationships can and will suffer. As we all work to balance our lack of social connections with our surge of new relationships, I offer these tips.

1. **Take a deep breath.** Oftentimes, our frustration can overtake us in the moment, and we can say or do things that can harm important relationships in our lives. For example, when your child barges in the door during the middle of a conference video, or your significant other yells at the dog while you are trying to work on an important email, or you get a call that you have to answer and the baby is crying, take a deep breath. Remember this moment will pass and that yelling, speaking sharply, or slamming the door will not benefit the situation; it will only add more stress.
2. **Carve out time.** Set aside intentional time to talk and create memories with those in your home. Whether it be 15 minutes to watch funny YouTube videos or 15 minutes to go on a walk and talk. Find those moments and carve out the time to have a genuine and quality experience with those you live with.
3. **Laugh.** Laughter brings us closer together. Search for the good things in life and find joy in them. We are surrounded by negative voices from our own inner voices dragging us down or the media. Find ways to drown them out and ignore the temptation to feel

bogged down by the weight of the situation. Laugh often and laugh with those who share your home.

Remember this pandemic will not last forever. Our relationships at home are too important to let a strange time in our history destroy them. Continue to work on open communication because there will be a day where we return to the office and begin to develop those other essential relationships again. We do not want our frustration in the moment to destroy--or hinder our current opportunity to grow--relationships that can help us in the future.