

# The Gottman Institute

## Keeping it Together While Social Distancing

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With the COVID-19 pandemic, each passing moment brings a strange and new reality. I want to offer some things to consider with social distancing and quarantine in mind. My hope is to give some ideas to solidify and strengthen an existing relationship or continue to get to know someone if you're in the dating/getting to know someone phase of a relationship.

Luckily with the Gottman Method, we have many tools and tips that you can put to work for you. And most of them are free—you can't beat that!

### **Quarantined with a Partner**

First, I would like to address how to handle a scenario where you are in quarantine or social distancing with a partner. Please consider using this time to really focus on rebuilding your Love Maps. You can use questions from the free [Gottman Card Decks app](#). The first two card decks within that app are called Love Maps and Open-Ended Questions. These are designed to help you increase your knowledge of your partner's internal world. Even if you think you

know your partner really well, I would almost guarantee that if you do both of those Card Decks you will learn something new about your partner. Take this opportunity and the time with your partner to really build this portion of your relationship. We know from many years of research that the Masters of Relationships have a solid foundation of Love Maps, which means they know each other's hopes, dreams, fears, interests, and feelings on a deep level.

This is also an opportunity to really focus on the things you appreciate about your partner. We know that the Masters of Relationships have a culture of appreciation. They also share fondness, admiration, and respect. In this trying and chaotic time, use this opportunity to really focus on and share the good things about your partner.

Notice the ways they contribute to your relationship, notice the things they do right—for you, and for others. Catch them doing something right and then comment on that. Imagine walking into the room and scanning the environment for things they do right and make those known.

Within the app, there is a deck for appreciation so use that if you need ideas.

### **Dating from a Distance**

If you are just getting to know someone or newly in the dating phase, the open-ended questions deck is invaluable. Ask the other person to download the app then you can each take turns sending each other open-ended questions via text message, or asking them on the phone or FaceTime. Maybe plan to do that once a day, where you send one question every day or set a time limit and ask each other questions for 20 minutes.

Another idea is to read *Eight Dates*. This book guides you through eight essential conversations with different questions to ask on many different topics including sex, money, and adventure. This is a great way to get to know someone. This is an idea for anyone in any phase of a relationship! So even if you are at home with your spouse you can use this book as well. This one's not free but is a great resource!

### **Dating from Home**

Here are some date ideas if you are quarantined or isolated with somebody that you are already in a relationship with. I know that for the most part, these ideas will be dates that you could do either in or near your home but I also know that some people live in an area where they could more easily go for a walk or a bike ride in nature. You can do a [nature-based scavenger hunt](#) or a [photography scavenger hunt](#). Or, if you're able to exercise, you can do [bodyweight workouts](#) together. Doing new and interesting things together is relationship-enhancing.

If you are in different places from the person you're trying to have a date with, try [watching a movie at the same time](#). Decide on a movie and then start it at the same time. Take a break an hour in and talk about what you like or don't like about it so far. What were the funny parts or what were the scary parts? Then at the end, check in again and talk about the movie—of course, you could do a phone conversation or FaceTime while you watch. You could even try dressing up for your date if that makes it more fun!

If you are at home with a partner, try taking turns cooking a new type of cuisine—watch a YouTube video and maybe even try cooking a new meal together. A lot of couples can find

joy cooking in the kitchen together. This would also be a fun one to dress up for. If you are having a special dinner, then find the fanciest thing in your closet and both get dolled up. Or, better yet, make it a costume party and raid the Halloween costumes. You could even make it so that you get to pick the costume your partner has to wear and vice versa. Why not have fun and be silly? It's certainly needed right now.

Another idea would be to create a box with memories and things you treasure about your partner. Find a shoebox and then fill it with memories: pictures, ticket stubs, notes, words that remind you of the other person. Then have a picnic on the living room floor or in the back yard and share your creation with your partner. The more creative the better—paint it and glue things on the inside lid. But no matter what, even if you are not a creative genius, it's the idea behind it that counts, which is that you are creating a special treasure box that reminds of fond memories and of what you love and honor about your partner.

### **Managing Conflict in Quarantine**

If this time in your relationship feels rife with conflict and tension, you can also use this as a time to seek out online therapy. I provide online couples therapy and many other Gottman therapists do as well. We do a full assessment of your relationship before beginning the treatment process. This really helps us understand the strengths and areas of concern in your relationship and gives you a clear set of goals to work on to improve your relationship. We want to help you become Masters of Relationships. Look on the [Gottman Referral Network](#), click the “online therapy” box on the Services panel and you will get a list of therapists who meet that criteria in your state.

Of course, you can also read some of Dr. John Gottman's books and do this together as an exercise in improving your partnership, or access the [Art and Science of Love couples workshop, now available online](#).

One last suggestion is to end the day with a [ritual of connection](#), where you share something your partner did or said that you appreciated that day. Think of how they really stepped up for you that day and share that. Then end this connection ritual by asking your partner what you could do the next day that would help them feel supported and loved.

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