



# 5 Ways in Which COVID-19 Quarantine Can Improve Your Marriage

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Two to three months of [quarantine due to the global pandemic](#) will test the strongest of relationships. Even people who have wonderful marriages are concerned their spouses may drive them crazy by the end of it.

Instead of that worry, I want you to improve your marriage, by imagining as **emerging from self-isolation this summer with a marriage that is stronger than ever before.**

You can strengthen marriage by following a few inventive steps to a better marriage. I know because I'm a [divorce mediator](#). I'm also a divorce coach, where I focus on keeping couples from needing a mediator. Every day I see the ways [couples take their relationship for granted](#), and what they can do instead to strengthen their bond.

Also watch:



Here are five tips to improve your marriage, feel secure in your marriage, overcome emotional distancing in marriage and **keep a marriage strong throughout the COVID-19 isolation and avoid the “last straw” syndrome.**

Here’s the ultimate rescue plan to improve your marriage.

### 1. Avoid the four relationship killers

*“There are times, even in the happiest marriage, when your spouse annoys you or makes you angry.”*

Feeling these emotions is healthy.

Using **criticism, defensiveness, contempt, or stonewalling** to manage your emotions will make an already tense situation worse and thwart your attempts to improve your marriage.

The other day a friend called with a story that I think provides a good illustration:

Her husband offered to go to the store to get provisions. She assumed that meant he would come home with milk, bread, and (if lucky) toilet paper. Instead, he came home with two gallons of olive oil—which they didn’t need.

She realized she had a choice that could have a long-range impact on her marriage during (and after) the quarantine:

- She could say “olive oil? What are you thinking? What am I going to do with two gallons of olive oil? How could you be such an idiot?”
- She could say “thank you, honey, I appreciate that you ran that errand.”

She chose the second option because choosing the first option would have been a fast route to my office. In choosing that option, she was also practicing tip.

## 2. Practice compassionate empathy

Before you get upset with your spouse, try and put yourself in their shoes by practicing compassionate empathy.

**Emotional Intelligence expert Daniel Goldman** says: **“With this kind of empathy, we not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them but are spontaneously moved to help if needed.”**

My friend realized her husband’s response had to do with his fear and inability to “control” the situation. For some reason that came out as deciding, they needed gallons of olive oil.

When **practicing empathy**, keep in mind that everything your spouse does during the quarantine will likely stem out of how men and women approach stressful situations. This insight will go a long way if you want to improve your marriage and circumvent unnecessary **relationship drama**.

**Men are problem solvers or fix-it guys. They are looking at the big picture.** They are likely staying completely up-to-date with the news and the economic situation. They may be making big gestures and taking on big projects as a way to protect the **family**.

- **Women do what needs to be done right now.** They likely don’t want to look at the big picture because they’re taking care of the immediate details. They’ll be listing everything that needs to happen right now.

## 3. Understand that your spouse is scared too



*“Everyone is scared right now.”*

Everyone. Even if they don't say it and/or pretend they're not. Fear comes out in many ways, and despite the right intent to improve your marriage, both you and your spouse will experience one, or maybe more, of these typical emotions:

- **Anger**
- **Depression**
- **Increased anxiety**
- **Emotional numbness**
- **Hyper-focus on work**

If you notice your spouse is acting extremely in any of these ways, pause before you say anything. This is likely how their fear is showing up. And remember, you may be reacting this way yourself. Work on noticing how both of you are reacting, and possibly overreacting, to normal situations like doing the laundry, cleaning the house, noise levels during work hours, and so on.

#### 4. Know this is a big test your relationship

We are living in an incredibly weird and frightening time, and that makes it the biggest **test your marriage** has ever had—and will likely ever have. To intentionally improve your marriage, **communicate about what you need**, and give your spouse space if they need it.

- **Find a space for each of you to call your own.** When your spouse goes to that space, honor their need to be alone. If you live in a small apartment where you can't create your own space, devise a way to get that alone time, such as wearing noise-canceling earphones. Let there be some space in your relationship, it can really improve your marriage. Space in your relationship is not selfish, it is an act of self-preservation and self-enhancement.
- **If you see your spouse is depressed, anxious, or numb, think of some small thing you know they love.** Draw them a bath, bake cookies, light a candle. Small acts of service make a big difference. Thoughtfulness can improve your marriage, notwithstanding the crests and troughs of married life.
- **Set up times to talk about how you're doing.** Ask each other specifically what you need to keep sane.
- Pay attention to all the things your spouse does, appreciate them and tell them you are grateful.

#### 5. Be a good listener to your partner

Talking about your needs is important. Listening to your spouse is equally important.

**If your spouse says something that annoys or upsets you, don't respond immediately. Take the time to understand your response—are you under- or overreacting?**

- Is what your spouse is saying a reflection of their fear right now?
- How can you show empathy?

This is a good time to [start journaling how you feel](#), what you think, and how to respond. Marriage is an adventure. Practicing each of these five tips will improve your marriage and strengthen the **love** bond more than you ever thought possible.



# The Divorcee's Holiday Survival Guide

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Holidays are filled with emotional landmines.

We can't recapture the excitement we had as children, but we'll never forget it, either. Add in the divorce that stripped you of your daily joy, and that's a recipe for the holiday blues.

There are ways to safeguard holiday joy during and after divorce. You just have to shift your expectations. (Yes, again. Divorce is doing that to you a lot, huh?)

**Here are a few ways to hold on to the “merry” you were hoping for:**

## **1. Build some new traditions**

When a divorce has you off-balance, it's hard to recreate the happy holidays you knew as a child.

So stop fighting. Relax. Create new traditions for your children. Try dividing the holidays between parents, or compromise by celebrating the holidays over two days.

When you do, expectations change. You can slow down. You needn't frantically defend old ways in a time of extraordinary change.

A lot of kids like doubling up on holidays, and can handle two days of celebrations better than one hurried dash.

Parents are less stressed, which is a great gift to your children (and you).

## **2. Put things into perspective**

If you anticipate a gloomy holiday, plan ahead to volunteer your time. Give something back to receive the gift of perspective.

Spend time with a lonely neighbor or shut-in to hear reminiscences of Christmases long past. Or check with local nursing homes, hospitals, or senior centers to see if you can help with carol sings.

Bring small gifts in beautiful wrappings to create joy; the happiness you share will reflect back on you, too.

Hard to find a better cure for Grinchy feelings than that!

## **3. Reassess the finances**

It's not just hearts that are broken in a divorce, your household budget will probably take a hit, too and the holidays are usually a time of excess.

So think about what's important.

Simplify and make thoughtful gifts instead of buying fancy things. Go green. Without that spouse, you can abandon traditions you never liked anyway.

Now you can customize the holidays to suit you.

If you have children, they already know the holidays won't be like last year. Try to avoid a buying competition with your ex.

Your time and attention are the most precious presents your kids will unwrap, so plan outings and activities that they'll remember long after the fad gift is forgotten under the bed.

## 4. Allow happiness



You're entitled to feel low during or after a divorce, but make sure you're not avoiding happiness.

Accept the help of family and friends this holiday season. Grab a winter cocktail with a friend or see the lights with family. If you discover you're smiling, don't hide from it. Let those good feelings flow.

### **Consider divorce as a fresh start**

Divorce can truly be a fresh start, even if you didn't think you needed one.

The holidays are a good time to let go of pain and guilt and maybe mend some fences if that's needed. Allow yourself to feel excited about the new life ahead. Envision how you will do things differently and better.

Everyone deserves to be happy. That includes you, too.