

Bridging the Gap with Love and Communication: Overcoming Challenges of a Long-Distance Relationship

#WellbeingWarriors

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Is the lockdown putting strain on your romantic relationship? Do you find yourself far from the person you love because of factors outside of your control? Is the distance making you feel disconnected from your partner? Any distance (geographical, physical, or even emotional) can put a strain on a relationship. Geographical distance can limit emotional and physical intimacy and as a result, might be the toughest one to deal with during this time. However, not all relationships are strained by distance, as it has some of its own advantages.

We are all social beings who need to love and feel loved. Different types of relationships give us different experiences in life and also fulfil us in different ways. People enter into romantic relationships for different reasons. Romantic relationships satisfy various needs, such as the need for certainty and comfort; validation and a sense of belonging; feeling wanted and needed; love and connection (to feel understood); and lastly, emotional support.

Maintaining a relationship requires time and effort, which may also be challenging as a student, mainly because of the academic demands placed on you. Being able to see your partner on campus made it easier to spend time with them. Now, it might be harder to balance academic work, chores at home, and staying in touch with that special someone. Not being able to spend time with your partner could cause a rift between you two. The emotional impact of the long-distance could result in feeling isolated from your partner, or feeling like you might be losing your relationship. Technology does not always make things easier, for instance, the sincerity of a message can be lost in text, or a person may feel that their partner neglects their emotional needs. Whatever the issue, essentially, there are many challenges to long-distance relationships.

Quote by Sanjay Mitra: "Falling in love is easy, but staying in love is difficult."

Why long-distance works for some and not for others

The physical distance between partners makes it vital to maintain communication. This means that preserving communication is maintaining the relationship. Communication allows partners to feel heard, allows a couple to get to know each other better and enables partners to build and maintain a trusting relationship. However, not all relationships can withstand the test of time and physical separation. Spending time apart from a loved one can be hard and also feel emotionally painful. However, dating and relationships in the modern world have the advantage of technology. From texting to facetime, couples can spend time together, apart. The following is about effective communication that could make being apart more bearable and fun.

Communication is key

Our words can be used as a weapon; our words can allow for reconciliation; our words can also burn the bridge or bridge the gap. Communication is an essential element of maintaining any type of relationship. It ensures that people are on the same page. Essentially, communication is conveying a particular message from one party to another. It sounds easy to do and easy to maintain. However, is it effective?

Effective communication includes conversing with the other person clearly, and most importantly, also hearing the other person. Usually, when we speak, the aim is to convey a particular message to others. Do you sometimes find yourself feeling unheard by your partner, no matter how many times you say the same thing? Ask yourself if the communication in your relationship is effective. To convey a clear message, take ownership of your words. That way, the person listening can do so without feeling the need to defend themselves. Active listening is a crucial part of communication; this means paying attention in a non-judgemental manner and responding without defending. The following link provides helpful tips for [effective communication](#) in a relationship.

Quote by Hans Nouwens: "In true love the smallest distance is too great and the greatest distance can be bridged."

Resolving conflict together while apart

One of the challenges of a long-distance relationship is addressing conflict without seeing one another or through virtual means. It is important to consider how people react to conflict, not every person feels comfortable addressing it. When faced with conflict, some people want to discuss it immediately before it leads to something worse, while others prefer to let things cool down before addressing the issues. Partners need to discuss this so that when a conflict arises, both parties feel heard and respected. Follow this link for guidelines on [how to fight fair](#).

Quote by Dee King: "Love will travel as far as you let it. It has no limits."

Remind each other

Reassurance in any kind of relationship is vital. Let's compare physical hygiene to reassurance; bathing once a month is not as effective as washing every day. The more you practise physical hygiene, the more effective it is, much like reassurance. The more you reassure your partner, the stronger the bond is within your relationship. Reassuring each other communicates that you are both on the same page. Reassurance involves talking about what you appreciate about each other and your relationship, what you love about your partner, and being there for each other (even if it's not physically). It also involves engaging with what your partner is interested in and being supportive of their efforts in general.

Keep it fun

The time spent apart is a perfect time to get to know each other better. Use this as an opportunity to engage in topics with your significant other to find out what drives them, their goals and ambitions, their likes and dislikes, or their favourite things. The following are tips on how to stay connected while keeping it fun:

- Play couple games such as *truth or dare* or *never have I ever*
- Take the [love language test](#) (talk about your love language)
- Plan [virtual dates](#) (have a video call date)

And always remember that “Relationships last long not because it was destined to be but because two brave people decided to keep fighting for it” (Anonymous). This means that Warriors fighting for the same cause, have each other’s backs.