



Since the pandemic was declared,
eating disorders have been on the rise.

You're not alone.
Together let's break the isolation.

GUIDE FOR EATING DISORDER (ED) SUFFERERS AND THEIR
FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC:
GOOD COMMUNICATION IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

National Eating Disorder
Awareness Week

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NATIONAL EATING DISORDER AWARENESS WEEK

FEBRUARY 1st - 7th 2021

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PREPARED BY

- Charli e Blais-Pouliot, Social Worker, Maison l' claircie
- Pascale Thiboutot, Social Work Intern, Maison l' claircie
- Jonathan Cuillierier, Volunteer, Maison l' claircie

- Jos e Lavigne, Education and Prevention Coordinator, ANEB Qu bec
- Karine Pendleton, Youth Worker, ANEB Qu bec
- Laurence Th rien, Intern, Education and Prevention, ANEB Qu bec

REVISION, TRANSLATION AND CONTENT CONTRIBUTION

- J r me Tremblay, Clinic Coordinator, ANEB Qu bec
-  milie Savard, Auditor and Volunteer at ANEB Qu bec
- Marie- ve Cliche, Auditor and Volunteer at ANEB Qu bec
- Lee Heppner, Translator and Volunteer at ANEB Qu bec
- Debbie Dubrofsky, Translator and Volunteer at ANEB Qu bec

GRAPHIC DESIGN

- Activities Guide and adaptation of poster : Alex Boisclair
- Poster, Cosette, Creative Marketing and Communications Agency

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GUIDE FOR ED SUFFERERS AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC :

Good Communication in Intimate Relationships

The pandemic and the uncertainties it creates can be stressful for some people. Studies conducted show that in this unusual period when many are confined to their homes, anxiety may take over our lives. In people with an eating disorder, confinement may cause more stress than usual, require greater adaptation and have negative impacts on recovery.

For those who are in an intimate relationship during this difficult period, the additional stress caused by the pandemic may build up tension and lead to relational difficulties. In this time of adversity, if we fail to properly communicate our dissatisfaction, emotions and personal needs to our partner, it could result in a sense of isolation even within the relationship.

That's why this little **survival guide for intimate relationships during a global pandemic** will focus on the development of healthy communication habits in intimate relationships as a tool to help improve relationship satisfaction despite this unusual context.

GUIDE FOR ED SUFFERERS AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC :

Isolation in intimate relationships

It's possible to feel isolated, even when you're in an intimate relationship, and confinement may contribute to this feeling. Indeed, being with your partner 24 hours a day can lead to its share of challenges. For example, if you want to assert your needs to your partner, but you're not communicating effectively, it could lead to conflict or make you feel even less connected to your partner.

Such difficulties may cause a person to abandon their intimate relationship. Or the stress created by the pandemic can lead to increased tension in the relationship, possibly causing emotional estrangement between the partners, which would further contribute to feelings of loneliness. In addition, some factors related to eating disorders can have a negative impact on the feeling of isolation. For example, being confined with a partner who does not fully understand our reality can make us close off even more and prevent us from expressing our emotions to the other person.

People with EDs may also fear intimacy. This could be due to the fact that they have concerns about their body image or experience negative affects such as depression and anxiety, or to the fact that they tend to place great importance on what others think of them.

Fear of intimacy can lead people to distance themselves from their partners and feel even more isolated in their intimate relationships. In brief, whether you live with your partner or not, confinement adds additional barriers to a relationship and can make communication more difficult.

Why not take this unusual moment as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship and reduce your sense of isolation? Communication seems to be one of the most important factors contributing to intimacy in a relationship. Different types of communication exist within intimate relationships and some are more beneficial than others. How do you know if you have good communication in your relationship and what impact it has on the relationship ?

GUIDE FOR ED SUFFERERS AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC :

Healthy communication

The basis of healthy communication in intimate relationships is to express your needs in the right way. There are four types of self-affirmation: assertive, passive-aggressive, aggressive and manipulative.

- **Assertive :**

Expressing to the other person, in a clear, frank and appropriate manner, your emotions, thoughts and opinions so as to defend your rights while respecting those of others. Assertiveness is the healthy way to express yourself in your interactions with others.

- **Passive-aggressive :**

Not asserting your needs, thoughts and feelings or to do so indirectly, inappropriately and at the expense of the other's rights.

- **Aggressive :**

Expressing your needs, thoughts and emotions in a direct way in an attempt to enforce your rights, but inappropriately and at the expense of the rights of others.

- **Manipulative :**

Expressing your thoughts, needs and emotions to defend your rights, but dishonestly and indirectly, thus at the expense of the rights of others.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Behaviours like passive-aggressive, aggressive and manipulative all have short-term advantages, such as pleasing others, avoiding conflict and getting what you want. But they have longer-term negative impacts: causing frustration, dissatisfaction, anxiety, a feeling of being misunderstood, social difficulties and depressive affects.

Assertiveness may require more effort and energy in the short term when you are not used to expressing yourself in this way, and may require you to deal with unpleasant emotions like fear of offending, being rejected, etc. Long-range, however, it will let you get what you want in an efficient way and in a way that preserves your relationships. It increases self-respect and self-confidence and enhances the respect other people have for you.

GUIDE FOR ED SUFFERERS AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC :

Strategy for healthy communication

To make sure we are well understood during conflicts with our partner, this strategy can be used to formulate the request :

1. When... (explanation of the situation)
2. I feel... (explanation of emotions, thoughts, needs)
3. Because... (details about the situation)
4. I would like... (resolution)

Using this wording ensures that the other person understands what you're trying to say. It's important to take the time to explain how you feel about this situation., because our feelings are our own and no one can argue with emotions, thoughts or perceived needs. In addition, talking in «I» statements is less confrontational for the person receiving the request. Telling the person what you expect by giving a concrete solution empowers the person in the situation.

*Note: the person is not obliged to accept your request. Keep in mind that you just made a request, you did not give an order. If the person refuses, ask them to explain why, and listen to the answer. You can then try to find a compromise between the two positions.

- Compromise is the preferred solution to conflict. Through compromise, you find common ground that suits everyone and ensure that everyone's rights are respected.

GUIDE FOR ED SUFFERERS AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY DURING A WORLD PANDEMIC :

Strategy for healthy communication

Resources at your disposal

Note that conflicts can have different levels of intensity. Being in a pandemic does not in any way justify violence. If you don't feel comfortable or safe in your relationship, please get information and consult the resources at your disposal. Here are a few of them:

S.O.S. Violence conjugale : Offers a toll-free hotline, 24/7

Phone : 1-800-363-9010

Website : <http://www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca/>

Shelters : Some shelters for victims of domestic violence remain open despite COVID-19.

Website : <http://maisons-femmes.qc.ca/maisons-membres/>
<http://fede.qc.ca/>

Violence info : Offers a telephone line, information and referral as well as individual and group help sessions

Phone : 418-667-8770

Website : <https://www.violenceinfo.com/>

Centre de solidarité lesbienne : Offers intervention and support groups for lesbian victims of domestic violence.

Phone : 514 526-2452

Website : <http://www.solidaritelesbienne.qc.ca/>

ACTIVITY 1

Identifying how I communicate

MATERIALS

- Printer and paper
- Pencils for participants
- TBoard and chalk or pencil
- Appendixes 1.1 «Four types of assertiveness», 1.2 «My self-affirmation» and 1.3 «Group discussion»

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Anyone wishing to develop healthy communication habits in their relationships (intimate or otherwise).

HOW IT WORKS

- Presentation of the different types of assertiveness (Sheet 1.1)
- Identifying one's own types of assertiveness (Sheet 1.2)
- Group discussion and conclusion (Sheet 1.3)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Print out the table of assertiveness types beforehand (Sheet 1.1) and Sheet 1.2
2. Distribute a copy of the table to each participant and read the contents of Sheet 1.1
3. Distribute Sheet 1.2, read the instructions aloud and allow 10-15 minutes to complete the chart and answer the question.
4. Invite participants to volunteer their answers to the questions in Sheet 1.3, and record the answers on the table. Complete with the answers provided on the form if any are missing.
5. Conclude the activity by reading the conclusion at the end of Sheet 1.3

This activity will allow participants to identify their own communication habits in their relationships using a chart and to understand the impact of different types of assertiveness.

ACTIVITY 2

Pave the way to healthy communication

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Anyone wishing to develop healthy communication habits in their relationships (intimate or otherwise).

This activity will allow participants to develop their understanding of what forms the basis of healthy communication and its importance.

MATERIALS

- Board and chalk (or pencil)
- Logbook (e.g.: Canada notebook) and pencils for the participants.
- Appendices 2.1 «8 key elements to foster healthy communication» and 2.2 «How I felt when...»

HOW IT WORKS

- Presentation of the 8 elements for healthy communication (Activity Sheet 2.1)
- Individual reflection on these elements
- Group feedback and conclusion (Activity Sheet 2.2)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read the content of Activity Sheet 2.1 to participants. You can use a table to record the keywords for each element (bolded words) to provide visual support.
2. Then invite participants to take a few minutes to reflect on a current situation where they would like to tell someone (partner, family member, friend, etc.) how they think, an emotion or a need.
3. Once they've identified a situation, invite them to record in a logbook how they are going to proceed, keeping in mind the 8 key elements discussed earlier.
4. Return to the full group and ask the questions in Activity Sheet 2.2. Invite participants to volunteer responses. Read the conclusion at the end of the activity.

ACTIVITY 3

Conflict scenarios

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Anyone wishing to develop healthy communication habits in their relationships (intimate or otherwise).

This activity promotes the development of healthy communication habits for dealing with conflicts in interpersonal relationships

MATERIALS

- Board with chalk/pencil
- Pencils for participants
- Appendices 3.1 «Making a Request», 3.2 «Practising Healthy Communication in Conflict Situations» and 3.3 «Practising Healthy Communication in Conflict Situations - Answers»

HOW IT WORKS

- Introduce the strategy for making a request (Activity Sheet 3.1)
- Distribute the scenarios to the participants and allow time to complete the exercise (Activity Sheet 3.2)
- Group feedback on the scenarios (Activity Sheet 3.3) and conclusion of the activity

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Print a copy of Activity Sheet 3.2 for each participant ahead of time.
2. Using Activity Sheet 3.1, present the strategy for making a request and write the four key elements of a request on the board as a visual aid.
3. Distribute Activity Sheet 3.2 and give the participants a few minutes to complete the scenarios (15-20 minutes).
4. Ask the participants to volunteer their answers and use Activity Sheet 3.3 to fill in any missing answers.
5. Conclude the activity

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.1

Four types of self-affirmation

The basis of healthy communication in intimate relationships is to assert your needs in the right way. There are four types of self-affirmation: assertive, passive-aggressive, aggressive and manipulative.

1. ASSERTIVE

Expressing to the other person, in a clear, frank and appropriate manner, your emotions, thoughts and opinions so as to defend your rights while respecting those of others. Assertiveness is the healthy way to express yourself in your interactions with others.

Example :

2. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE

Not asserting your needs, thoughts and feelings or doing so indirectly, inappropriately and at the expense of the other's rights.

Example :

3. AGGRESSIVE

Expressing your needs, thoughts and emotions in a direct way in an attempt to enforce your rights, but inappropriately and at the expense of the rights of others.

Example :

4. MANIPULATIVE

Expressing your thoughts, needs and emotions to defend your rights, but dishonestly and indirectly, thus at the expense of the rights of others.

Example :

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.1

Four types of self-affirmation

You can print this summary table and distribute it to the participants. or display it on a screen for them

FOUR TYPES OF SELF-AFFIRMATION

TYPES OF SELF-AFFIRMATION	EXPRESS YOUR NEEDS, THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS... ÉMOTIONS...	CLEARLY	OPENLY	APPROPRIATELY	WHILE STANDING UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS	AND RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS
ASSERTIVE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE	NO	NO	-	NO	NO	YES
AGGRESSIVE	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
MANIPULATIVE	YES	NO	NO	-	YES	NO

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.2 : My self-affirmation

In the first column, identify 1 or 2 upsetting situations that have ever happened to you in your interpersonal relationships.

In the second column, explain what you did to remedy the situation (words used, actions done or not done).

In the third column, describe what the result of your actions (or inactions) has been and give a score out of ten to indicate how well you achieved the desired result (0 = not at all what I wished for and 10 = exactly what I wished for).

In the fourth column, enter the emotion(s) felt at that time.

In the last column, indicate the type of behaviour to which your reaction corresponds (assertive, passive-aggressive, aggressive or manipulative).

SITUATION	ACTION TAKEN (verbal or behavioural)	RESULT OBTAINED AND SCORE OUT OF TEN	EMOTION(S) FELT	ASSERTIVENESS TYPE
SITUATION #1 :				
SITUATION #2 :				

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.2 :

My self-affirmation

If you did not obtain the desired results, what do you think would have made it different?

Does this reflect a healthy assertiveness?

If you obtained the desired results, what have been the strong points of your actions and what are the points to be improved to promote healthy communication?

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.3 : Group discussion

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of being passive-aggressive, aggressive or manipulative?

SELF-AFFIRMATION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE		
AGGRESSIVE		
MANIPULATIVE		

Answers

Short-term benefits :

To please others, avoid conflict and get what you want.

Long-term disadvantages :

Causing frustration, dissatisfaction, anxiety, a feeling of being misunderstood, social difficulties and depressive affects.

ACTIVITY SHEET 1.3 :

Group discussion

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of being assertive?

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES

Answers

Short-term disadvantages :

May require more work and energy when we are not used to expressing ourselves in this way, and may require dealing with unpleasant emotions like fear of offending, frustration over a rejection, etc.

Long-term benefits :

Allows us to get what we want in an efficient way and while preserving our relationship with others. At the end of the day, assertiveness increases self-respect and confidence and also makes others respect us.

Ask participants what they learned from this activity. Conclude that it's better to use assertiveness because it has more long-term benefits than the other three types of assertiveness.

ACTIVITY SHEET 2.1

8 key factors to promote healthy communication

Here are 8 elements that are best put into practice to encourage healthy discussion

1. Have a good **attitude**: choose a time when you will have a positive and calm attitude.
 2. Use **«I»** language
 3. Choose a **time** that is conducive to discussion: Opt for a time when the other person will be able to listen to you.
 4. **Choose the right place**: A quiet and private place.
 5. Think about the **main message** that you want to get across: How will you make sure the other person remembers the important points you want to make? Are there any topics to avoid that would make you lose sight of the essence of your message?
 6. Think about your **wording**: How are you going to put your emotions, thoughts or needs into words? Remember to express yourself clearly by describing: the situation, the emotions felt, specify your experience and identify the desired solution.
 7. **Listen** to what the other person has to say in return.
 8. If you have different views on the situation, what is possible, find a **compromise** that will satisfy everyone.
-

ACTIVITY SHEET 2.2

How I felt when...

QUESTION 1

A. Have you ever had someone suddenly yell at you or verbally insult you? If so, how did you feel at that moment? If not, how do you think you would feel in that situation?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FROM PARTICIPANTS :

Assaulted, intimidated, attacked, not wanting to argue with the person, wanting to respond aggressively, feeling that the other person does not care about our emotions or our point of view, etc.

B. Which basic communication need is not being met, in the above situation?

ANSWER : 1. Have a good attitude

QUESTION 2

A. Have you ever had someone express their displeasure to you by accusing you of all sorts of things ? (e.g., You always do that., You never understand anything, You make me react like this., You never listen to me., etc.). If so, how did you feel at that moment? If not, how do you think you would feel in that situation?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FROM PARTICIPANTS :

Attacked., misunderstood, incompetent, accused, inadequate, not knowing what to do about it, not understanding what the other person really wants, etc.

B. Which basic communication need is not being met, in the above situation?

ANSWER : 2. Use «I» language

ACTIVITY SHEET 2.2

How I felt when...

QUESTION 3

A. Have you ever had a situation where someone didn't choose the right moment, or the right place to discuss an important topic with you? (E.g: Your partner starts discussing your budget and personal expenses over dinner with friends). If so, how did you feel at that moment? If not, how do you think you would feel in that situation?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FROM PARTICIPANTS :

Feeling «pushed to the wall», not being focused on the conversation, worrying about being watched or listened to, feeling humiliated, refraining from saying whatever you want to say for fear of other people's judgment., etc.

B. Which basic communication need is not being met, in the above situation?

ANSWER : 3. Choose a time for discussion and 4. Choose the right place.

QUESTION 4

A. Have you ever wanted to discuss an important topic with someone and found that the other person didn't understand what you really wanted to say ? If so, how did you feel at that moment? If not, how do you think you would feel in that situation?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FROM PARTICIPANTS :

Being disappointed in yourself, being angry, having a bad memory of this discussion, feeling a weight on one's shoulders, being angry at the other person because they didn't understand, feeling powerless, running out of ideas, etc.

B. Which basic communication need is not being met, in the above situation?

ANSWER : 5. Think about the main message you want to get across, and 6. Reflect on the wording of the statement.

ACTIVITY SHEET 2.2

How I felt when...

QUESTION 5

A. Have you ever had someone express their dissatisfaction with a situation, but not give any importance to your opinion about it? If so, how did you feel? If not, how do you think you would feel in that situation?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FROM PARTICIPANTS :

Not feeling important, feeling that the other person only cares about their own needs, feeling misunderstood, feeling forced to think like the other person, feeling frustrated, etc.

B. Which basic communication need is not being met, in the above situation?

ANSWER : 7. Listening to what the other person has to say in return, and 8. Finding a compromise that satisfies everyone

It's important to pave the way to good communication in our relationships by incorporating these basic healthy habits into our interactions.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.1

Making a request

To make sure we are well understood during conflicts with our partner, this strategy can be used to formulate the request:

1. When... (explanation of the situation)
2. I feel... (explanation of emotions, thoughts, needs)
3. Because... (details about the situation)
4. I would like... (resolution)

Using this wording helps the other person understand what you're trying to say. It's important to take the time to explain how you feel about this situation, because our feelings are our own and no one can argue with emotions, thoughts or perceived needs. In addition, talking in «I» statements is less confrontational for the person receiving the request. Telling the person what you expect by giving a concrete solution empowers them in the situation.

*Note: The person is not obliged to accept your request. Keep in mind that you just made a request, you did not give an order. If the person refuses, ask them to explain why, and listen to the answer. You can then try to find a compromise between the two positions.

- Compromise is the preferred solution to conflict. Through compromise, you find common ground that suits everyone and ensure that everyone's rights are respected.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.2

Practising healthy communication in a conflict situation

Making a request:

1. When... (explanation)
2. I feel... (emotions, thoughts, needs)
3. Because... (details)
4. I would like... (solution)

Scenario # 1

You've been working from home for a month and a half now. Your spouse continues to work outside the home, and you feel that she doesn't understand your reality, since she often makes comments implying you're on vacation. You feel misunderstood, as well as abandoned because she leaves you at home alone. It makes you angry, because in your opinion working from home is much more demanding than at the office. You'd like to talk to her about it, but you feel guilty and you're not sure why.

By using the request formulation technique seen earlier, how will you go about expressing your thoughts and feelings to your spouse?

When ... _____

I feel ... _____

Because ... _____

I would like ... _____

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.2

Practising healthy communication in a conflict situation

Scenario # 2

You have an eating disorder and feel that your partner does not understand your reality. They try to help you, but are not going about it the right way. You feel they put pressure on you to eat and give you compliments whenever they see you putting something in your mouth. You feel watched, and meals have become an even more stressful time because you are more confronted with your eating disorder.

You'd like your partner to stop making comments about food and just offer a receptive ear when you feel the need to talk. You hesitate to discuss it with your spouse because you're afraid they'll take it badly, but you know you have to because the tension is mounting in your relationship.

By using the request formulation technique seen above, how will you express your thoughts and feelings to your partner?

When ... _____

I feel ... _____

Because ... _____

I would like ... _____

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.2

Practising healthy communication in a conflict situation

Scenario # 3

Your mother often makes comments about your physical appearance, and it makes you uncomfortable. Even though you know she's trying to give you a compliment, it has the opposite effect because you feel like everyone is looking at you, and you start to analyze every little detail of your body.

You never know how to respond to these comments, because you feel uneasy. You'd like to let her know how you feel so that she stops commenting on your appearance.

By using the request formulation technique seen earlier, how will you express your thoughts and feelings to your mother?

When ...

I feel ...

Because ...

I would like ...

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.3

Practising healthy communication in a conflict situation - Answers

Scenario # 1 - Answer

When I'm working from home and you comment on my workload, **I feel** alone, misunderstood, abandoned and angry, **because** I feel like you don't recognize the difficulties I'm going through, when I having to work twice as hard because working from home is very demanding for me. **I'd like you** to try to make an effort to understand my situation, please.

Scenario # 2 - Answer

When you comment on what I eat, **I feel** watched and confronted with my eating disorder **because** it's already a situation that dominates my thoughts and when you talk to me about it, it makes me more stressed. **I'd like you** to stop talking to me about food and offer me a non-judgmental listening ear in the moments I find more difficult. That's really what would help me the most to get over the eating disorder.

Scenario # 3 - Answer

When you compliment me on the way I look, **I feel** judged and I start to observe all the details about my body, **because** I'm confronted with my physical appearance and I feel like that's all anyone ever sees. **I'd like you** to stop making comments like that, even if they're positive, because it would save me from the discomfort I feel with my body.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.3

Practising healthy communication in a conflict situation

Conclusion

Ask the participants to share what they're taking away from the meeting in general, and then conclude by offering these suggestions:

It can be difficult to put a new behaviour into practice when you've been used to acting the opposite way for years. Learning a new behaviour, such as having healthy communication habits, may be time consuming and require practice.

Try to take it one step at a time and don't put too much pressure on yourself. Communication in your relationships won't become perfect overnight. It's normal to fall back into old habits from time to time. The important thing is to recognize it and try to do better next time.

It may require more effort at first, but you'll gradually find that there are benefits to practising healthy communication habits, whether in your intimate relationships, with your friends and family or with yourself.