

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Managing Conversations About Money

TIP SHEET



Having the tools to have healthy and respectful conversations with your partner about your joint financial situation is important at all times, but particularly so during times of increased financial uncertainty, such as the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Research conducted by Relationships Australia has found that financial distress is the number one cause of separation and divorce in Australia. Being able to be transparent, raise concerns and work through issues with your partner, however, can help to prevent financial issues from escalating to such a point as to negatively impact your relationship.

The following tips can help you to prepare for and manage conversations about money with your partner.

1. Don't avoid the topic of money

The first step sounds obvious but is often a struggle for many; it's simply to not avoid having conversations about your finances, particularly when times are hard. Most couples avoid such conversations because they evoke strong emotions, which can get in the way of reaching productive resolutions. Ignoring conversations about your finances won't solve any issues though, or help you to plan for the future.

2. Be aware of different experiences

Before starting conversations about your family's finances with your partner, try to keep in mind your partner's and your individual experiences. The families in which we all grow up and the ways in which our families managed finances, has often strongly impacted on our own personal perceptions of how to manage our money. With that in mind, proceed with any conversation with empathy and understanding.

3. Make a time to meet

Don't start financial conversations during a disagreement or when one person is frustrated about money, as this could lead to further arguments or blaming. Rather, set a mutually agreed time and come prepared to have a productive conversation about your current situation in a calm manner. You could even set a goal for the conversation. e.g., "By the end of our conversation we will have a budget drawn up".

4. Prioritise needs and set goals

If your family's financial situation has been impacted by COVID-19, it's a good time to re-evaluate expenses, prioritise what's important and set achievable goals which you both contribute to and agree with. This might mean making decisions about how you can reduce expenses, or trying money-saving activities such as meal planning and buying less takeaway, tracking your spending, and using credit cards less to save on interest repayments.

5. Be flexible

The changes you make to your family's budget may be temporary or long term depending on your individual circumstances. Keep re-evaluating your situation and remain realistic, so you can be flexible and secure the financial health of your family.



6. Avoid the blame game

It's easy to get frustrated when you and your partner aren't on the same page about money, but blaming one person for your family's financial stress won't lead to change or progress. When establishing your joint priorities and goals, try to stay focused on the numbers (your finances) and talk about each other's attitude to money, ensuring both of you are involved in the discussion.

7. Be a team

Be mindful of the language you use when discussing money and try to use shared language by using terms like "our money" rather than "your money" and "my money". As you're both making changes to your budget, encourage and support each other, including during the more difficult or stressful financial times.

8. Budget, budget, budget

When developing a budget, clarify what you're choosing to prioritise and sacrifice, and discuss any concerns and hesitations you have. Be clear as to why a budget is needed and commit together to this new way of spending money. Once you're both in agreement, stick to your new budget diligently, and set a time in the future to review how you're tracking and to discuss any changes that might be needed.



9. Get financial help if needed

There are a range of services and online resources available to assist you with your finances.

- The Moneysmart website has information on budgeting and other financial matters, as well as a budget planner, savings goal calculator and simple money manager. It also includes information specific to the COVID-19 situation. Visit moneysmart.gov.au.
- Talk to your bank about how they can assist you with mortgage payments or loans during COVID-19; most banks are offering some type of assistance.
- Find a financial counsellor by contacting your local government or community health centre.
- The Australian Government is offering JobKeeper payments to people who have lost their jobs, or whose businesses are affected by COVID-19.
- If you or your partner have a gambling problem and are experiencing financial issues, you can access free and confidential support, 24/7 through the Gambling Helpline. Call 1800 858 858.

Need support?

Relationships Australia Victoria has more than 70 years' experience supporting Victorians. We're still providing counselling and other services during COVID-19, including through telephone and video appointments. [Contact us](#) for more information.

To access all our available tip sheet resources, visit www.rav.org.au/COVID19-Resources