

# Study identifies behaviors that helped couples weather the pandemic

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Many couples were unprepared for the impact COVID-19 could have on romantic relationships, but those who were able to adjust by creating new routines and adopting a positive attitude were more likely to

weather the storm, according to a [study](#) by Rutgers researchers.

"Our results suggest that [couples](#) should prioritize building [resilience](#) behaviors into their [relationship](#) as a routine source of relationship maintenance, so when they are faced with difficult experiences in the future, they have a foundation of resilience behaviors they can fall back on instead of having to build them from the ground up," said Jennifer Theiss, professor in the School of Communication and Information and a study author.

"Some of these resilience behaviors can include increasing the quality of support one offers their partner and creating new routines that are unique for individual couples," she said.

In the study published in the *Journal of Adversity and Resilience Science*, researchers examined five types of resilience behaviors that people might enact in relationships to buffer the experiences of uncertainty, disrupted patterns of interdependence, and turmoil.

Maintaining old routines, creating new routines and focusing on positivity and feeling lucky were behaviors that would help couples cope with difficult life experiences, researchers discovered.

Telling [jokes](#) about the situation and using humor as a coping method, however, did not help.

"Keeping routines created pre-COVID, positively reframing conditions caused by the pandemic, and seeking ways to 'reset' all proved as useful forms of resilience to help lower turmoil in relationships," Theiss said.

"Interestingly, the only form of partner resilience that did not help lessen individuals' experiences of turmoil occurred when one's partner used jokes and humor as a resilience method to cope with conditions

associated with the pandemic," she said.

"Jokes and humor may not have been useful resilience strategies in this context if people felt that making light of the situation was an inappropriate response to the severity of the pandemic and the level of risk associated with COVID-19 at that time. It also may be the case that joking was not beneficial for reducing uncertainty about the relationship itself, but it might have been helpful for coping with the circumstances of the pandemic more broadly."

In the study, researchers recruited romantic couples from across the United States living together from late March to May of 2020. A total of 302 individuals (151 couples) completed a series of four weekly surveys measuring relationship characteristics and assessing the impact of the pandemic on their personal lives.

Their results showed that many couples were potentially unprepared for conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and, therefore, did not have the appropriate interpersonal skills and resources needed to enact resilience behaviors that would help them navigate challenges created by the [pandemic](#), such as working from home, balancing childcare and schooling, being forced to stay at home together without any alone time, and adopting healthy practices to safeguard against the virus.

Their results also advance academic research on resilience, Theiss said.

"Most resilience research explores how resilience functions at the global, group, or organizational level. Our results show how resilience can function in micro, socio-relational contexts," she said.

**More information:** Hannah E. Jones et al, Examining Actor-Partner Effects in the Associations between Dyadic Resilience and Conditions of

Relational Turbulence During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Adversity and Resilience Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s42844-023-00107-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-023-00107-y)

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