Technology makes the world smaller. New rules during long absences make the heart grow fonder.

While COVID-19 has made meeting a potential partner in person a less likely occurrence, people had already turned to coupling online long before 2020. In addition to interfering with meeting prospective mates, the pandemic also has complicated long-distance relationships. People who find themselves unable to meet up, for whatever reason, depend on technology to stay in touch. Virtual dates, text messages and forms of social media allow couples to kindle and maintain their relationship without being physically in touch.

Even before modern technology, though, couples didn’t allow physical distance to get in the way of romance. With limitations on connecting in person, distance dating requires a different kind of commitment than a standard relationship, and a whole new list of rules of engagement.

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**Long-distance relationships**

Couples have many reasons for being in a long-distance relationship (LDR). If you’re considering starting an LDR or going long distance in an existing relationship, be prepared, because this type of relationship is not necessarily easy. Not being in the same place as your partner means these relationships often require compromises, major communication and a lot of trust.

Quality time is essential to keeping a relationship afloat, so be flexible and available for each other. This may entail scheduling times to call each other, whether on the phone or on a video call service.

You may be tempted to make up for the lack of physical presence by staying in constant communication, but remember that as with any relationship, boundaries are key. Setting expectations early about how and when you will communicate with each other is crucial. This may involve a little prioritization, but it is critical for you and your partner to agree on shared goals for the relationship and that each of you fully understands the implications of those goals from the get-go.

Distance can have different effects on different people. For partners with abandonment issues from their past, distance can really trigger emotions. If their mate tends to feel more secure in the relationship, or even feel more comfortable with some distance, this can be a recipe for the relationship to feel off kilter. Communication and empathy are extremely important in navigating this territory.

Just a word of advice: Take advantage of technology, but don’t rely on it as the only way to make your relationship work. For example, you might keep clothes that smell like your partner or switch up your regular online meetups with an old-school letter or package in the mail.

**Dating during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The 2020 outbreak of COVID-19 around the world imposed some serious obstacles on the dating world. People in established relationships had to get accustomed to seeing each other less often due to travel and gathering restrictions. People who were trying to meet someone to establish a relationship, or even to just have fun, had to employ creativity, such as figuring out how to navigate a virtual dating phase before meeting in person in order to maintain as much safety as possible.
In either of these scenarios, caution remains paramount, from abiding by recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during any possible dates to carefully selecting partners whose behaviors and comfort levels are aligned with your own. For example, if you maintain social distances, wear a mask and limit your social circle, you likely want a partner who does the same.

In this way, COVID-19 has led to greater communication about safety, as people have had to establish ground rules early.

**Distance doesn’t have to keep you apart**

If you’re new to distance dating, remember that patience is key. The sense of immediacy that you may be used to from a past relationship may not be there, but plenty of ways exist to make it work. Technology is on your side, with tools to help you communicate easily even if you aren’t in the same place.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is to find the right partner, one who’s willing to meet you halfway. But COVID-19 or not, this is true with any relationship. The pandemic may have turned everything upside down, but the mechanics of dating, even long-distance dating, are pretty much the same: Find someone you like, be yourself, communicate clearly, be kind and respect the boundaries of yourself and the person you are dating.