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5 healthy ways to handle money problems in your relationship

Money problems are often a common trigger for relationship issues. As the cost of living crisis looms over more households, experts share their tips to help couples stay united in the face of financial stress.

How does financial instability affect relationships?

We've endured a tough few years: the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stress and now the [cost of living crisis](#), creating financial instability in thousands of households. Money matters can have a detrimental effect on mental wellbeing:

"Financial security is an important human need, and so money problems can be extremely triggering," says Dr Elena Tourni, consultant psychologist and co-founder of [The Chelsea Psychology Clinic](#).

"As we grow up, we're often reminded of the importance of budgeting and being responsible for our finances. So, when we think we don't have financial control, it can cause high levels of anxiety, as well as [low self-esteem](#) and feelings of inadequacy."

Someone's poor mental health can put pressure on romantic relationships and stress in marriage. However, the link between money and relationships is particularly intertwined. Long-term partners often rely - to varying degrees - on each other's financial health to achieve certain joint life goals. This makes financial issues a mutual problem.

The 2022 Love and Money Report¹ found that:

- 57% of surveyed adults say the pandemic has increased financial stress in their relationship.

- Among partnered millennials and Gen Z's - those born after 1980 - this was as high as 66%.

How to deal with financial stress in marriage or long-term relationships

The following expert tips can help couples come together and remain united in the face of money problems.

1. Rely on honesty and trust

According to our experts, being open and willing to talk about money problems is an essential first step. Relationship coach [John Kenny](#) believes that trust is key:

"I have worked with many couples who have come to a stalemate because one has made decisions without the other's consent or keeps their finances secret. I am not suggesting that you discuss and inform each other of every purchase but keeping your partner in the dark about money is a no-go in most circumstances.

"There needs to be some communication around what you think about money too. What are your beliefs and fears? How important is money? What could create issues in your relationship?"

This may sound simple enough, but many of us find talking about money difficult. In fact, 39% of adults avoid this subject with their partner, despite 58% of us saying we would end a relationship if our partner was being dishonest about money¹.

2. Use supportive language

Being open and honest doesn't mean you should bluntly place blame onto your partner, even if you feel they have habits to change. Instead, establish a supportive connection, as this has been shown to help lower stress levels in a variety of pressured situations².

Dr Touroni explains that the language you use is important here: "Avoid any blaming language, such as 'you spend too much', or words like always and never, which tend to be triggering and unhelpful. Criticism and blame are two ways of being in a relationship that can have a very damaging effect.

"Instead, focus on using 'I' statements where you can. For example, I feel worried about how much money we're spending or I'd like us to talk about it."

3. Budget together

Financial advisors will tell you that you need to assess your financial situation, set goals, and create a budget. The world of budgeting can seem scary, but there are many useful [budget planning tools](#) to help you.

For long-term and married couples, it's healthy to navigate this task by working together as a team. To help manage any stress and keep the conversation light, you could choose a casual setting, such as your favourite coffee shop to talk about money problems.

Framing the conversation around short and long-term goals can help flip a potentially negative and stressful topic into a more positive one. While money problems can take a lot of joy out of your relationship, goal setting gets you thinking about the exciting things you want to work toward together.

4. Make time for fun

"Don't forget to make space for activities that will bring you together and provide you with a sense of fun and well-being too," advises Dr Touroni. "It's even more important to stay connected through challenging times."

Sadly, low self-esteem and stress as a result of money problems can make us feel like we can't afford – or perhaps don't deserve – to share fun times with our partners. Prioritising these times is one of the healthiest things we can do – for ourselves and our relationships.

There are plenty of free or low-budget activities couples can enjoy, including:

- Nature walks and picnics.
- Bike excursions.
- Themed movie nights.
- Nearby free attractions – like art galleries, castles, and museums.
- Making a new meal together.

- Sports games in the park.
- Creating photo albums of memories.

5. Take one day at a time

Once you've established that you're in this together, try to live in the present as much as possible. "Take it one day at a time," says Dr Tourni, "don't try to predict the future or consider the most negative outcome. Put the focus on what you can control now, together."

Focusing your mind on what is happening in the present is a practice known as [mindfulness](#). Studies have found mindfulness can help calm emotional struggles and improve self-compassion³.

When to seek extra support

If you feel that your financial problems are too big to handle as a couple, a financial advisor can provide expert guidance. They can help you form form plans to tackle financial problems and reach better money-health.

If trust has been broken or there's anger and blame between you and your partner, it can feel impossible to discuss money issues in a healthy way. Relationship counselling, by placing an unbiased mediator in your conversations, can help to steer them away from heated exchanges.

Further reading

1. [Daily Capital: Love and money 2022.](#)
2. [Martino et al: The connection prescription: using the power of social interactions and the deep desire for connectedness to empower health and wellness.](#)
3. [Janssen et al: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on employees' mental health: A systematic review.](#)

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