Navigating COVID-19 Conversations with friends and family

Identify your boundaries
- Communicate your boundaries clearly and non-defensively
- For example: “I am comfortable with gatherings that are outdoors, distanced, and BYOE (bring your own everything).”
- “I am comfortable attending indoor gatherings, or outdoor gatherings where people are within close proximity.”

Be confident
- Resist the urge to over-explain your decision-making – this often invites the other person to question your reasoning
- Rehearse your wording beforehand – this allows you to remain confident as opposed to flustered or defensive
- Have a script ready for different situations, such as when someone approaches you without a mask.

Learn when to say “no” and when to propose alternatives
- Assess the situation. Ask yourself, “Is there a way to adjust these plans so that they fall within my boundaries?”
- If so, work together to come up with an activity that fits both party’s needs!”I really appreciate the invitation and I would love to spend time together soon! Right now, I don’t feel comfortable seeing people in person, but could we schedule a Zoom date so we can catch up?”

Talk with Friends & Family about Their Boundaries and Risk Assessments
- Use strategies that foster an exchange of ideas in a way that both parties can hear each other and share information
- Ask permission: “Would it be okay if I shared some concerns I have about the pandemic?”
- Gain buy-in for the conversation: “I would like to hear your views on the pandemic also.”
- Avoid being judgmental/overly critical
- Keep in mind your short-term and long-term goals (e.g., for the communication and for the relationship)

Understand your gut feelings
- Ask yourself: “If I ignore others’ opinions, with what level of risk am I comfortable?”
- “Am I considering both my own health/safety and others’ health/safety as I assess the risks associated with each situation?”
- “What is my gut telling me? What fears are coming up based on each option? Am I influenced by social pressure, or am I making this decision based on my own values and comfort level?”

The uncertainty of the pandemic has increased the intensity of many of our emotions. Everyone has their own comfort levels and there is no perfect solution, but you can try some of these tips to begin conversations with some of your loved ones.

Want to know more? Check out these resources from Emory.

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