

A Young Persons Guide to ~ Relationships ~



A Peer Counselling Handbook

Relationships

Humans are social beings – we live and survive as part of groups. These groups might be small like two friends or very large as in an extended family.

Think of examples of social situations where we have a group of :-

Two people	Small group	Large group

Types of relationships

Our relationships with others within these groups can be of many different types. We can have relationships within the family or outside the family; at school or work; and in society at large. The relationships can be based on family ties, friendship, love, shared interests, and could be sexual or non sexual. We will take on different roles and feel differently depending on the type of relationship. For example – I might be a mother to my daughter but at the same time I am also a daughter in relation to my mother.

Fill in the details in the possible relationships in the following table -

Other Person's role	My role in relationship	Relationship based on
Father		
Teacher		
Employee (worker)		
Brother		
Husband (wife)		
Girlfriend (boyfriend)		

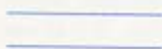
Closeness of relationships

Relationships are on varying levels of closeness depending on how well we know the person, our feeling for the other individual and our bonding with them. Obviously we have a different level of relationship with someone who we may just meet when we buy a loaf of bread from them in the morning, or just say hello to in the street than we do with the person who sits in the seat next to us every day. With some people we can get to know them quite quickly, they may be fairly open, chatty, tell us about



themselves and so a relationship can develop quickly. Other people are more withdrawn or closed up and we may know them for years without learning much about them. A relationship with that kind of person can stay distant and shallow.

The deeper and closer the relationship – the more feelings we have for and about the person and the better bonding we have for the person. The way this closeness develops is a two way process. It depends on both sides – it is not just the other person who has to be open and want to be close – it is also ourselves – we need to be receptive to the other person and to want to be closer. We can think of this like a radio or TV transmission. To build a relationship each person has to transmit (send out) communications and the other person has to receive them.



As we get to know each other better and to share experiences and feelings, a bond develops between us.

Development of bonding

The first bond we make is usually between a baby and its mother. Later in life we develop bonds with others which are built on the experience we had as little children developing bonds with adults. So if we had good experiences with our parents and learned to trust. Then we will be able to trust other people who we develop relationships with later.

Safety and Security

Developing trusting relationships also gives us security. As babies we needed to feel safe in our mothers arms and secure that our parents would not leave us. If we feel safe and secure at home or with people we love – we can say that we have a 'safe base'. And if we have a safe base - we can feel confident to explore the world around us and to leave that safe base knowing it will still be there for us.

If we have a secure relationship with someone we can trust – we feel safe to be apart for a while knowing they will still be there for us when we return. If we don't trust them, we are insecure and need to keep checking up on them – this is not a comfortable relationship.

Level of closeness

In a relationship – both people need to feel comfortable with the level of closeness that they have. If one person tries to get too close – the other may feel suffocated and taken over – they may feel like breaking away. But if the other person is too distant and the other needs more closeness – it may make them feel rejected, unloved or abandoned. So it is important to have a balance of closeness and distance in a relationship.

Too Far
feel abandoned
Rejected
Unloved

Balanced
feel supported
Cared for
appreciated

Too close
feel suffocated
overwhelmed
invaded

A relationship which is too close can mean that each individual does not have a life of their own – they become ‘dependant’ on each other and cannot manage without each other. We all need someone to be close too – but we also need space so that we can develop as individuals – as people in our own right.

We need to be interested and involved in what our partner or friend does – but we don’t want to live our lives only through them – we need our own affairs to occupy us too.

An example – Monica had a boyfriend who took drugs. He would steal to get the money for his drugs and so she would work to give him money to stop him getting in trouble. She would worry all the time about where he was, who he was meeting, was he getting drugs, what mood would he be in when he came home. ... He ended up in prison. She had devoted so much energy to his problems that she had not looked after herself and she was in debt, thin and ill. She was trapped in a dependant relationship.

Can you think of an example of a dependant relationship?

What would make it into a balanced relationship?



Getting what we want from a relationship

Sometimes we can be in a relationship and we can try hard to make it work well – but we don't think about our own needs. It is easy sometimes to think about what we can GIVE in a relationship and we may forget what we need to GET from it. A relationship is only balanced if both sides have their needs met.

What do you need in a relationship? – make a list of your needs.

Sometimes we can get into the wrong sort of relationship because we confuse our needs with the other person's desires. This can often happen in a sexual relationship.

Sometimes all we want is closeness and affection and we can confuse that with sex. Some people think that to get a hug or feel close – this means you have to have sex – or want sex – or need sex. That is not necessarily so. Sex alone does not solve loneliness. So we need to decide do we want closeness, do we want affection, or do we want sex. A close relationship or even an intimate relationship does not have to be a sexual relationship – we have a choice in that and that is another way that we need to look at our own needs and what we really want.

Communication in a relationship

Communication is very important – we need to talk about how we feel, what we need, what we want. It is easy to think that our friend or partner knows what we are feeling – but they can get it wrong – so we need to make sure we say it clearly.

Communicating our feelings has to also be based on trust – we need to trust the other person with our feelings – trust that they will accept us and the way we feel, not put us down, not betray our trust.



We have said that it is important to talk about our needs in a relationship – it is also very important to talk about sexual needs and what we like and don't like in a relationship – including what behaviour we may find unacceptable from a partner. In a sexual relationship we also need to talk about and come to agree on contraception, pregnancy and what to do about wanted or unwanted pregnancies.

When things go wrong

When a relationship does not prove to be what you wanted it to be – you need to be able to make changes – this could mean breaking up with that person – or could mean changing the relationship – from a close one to a more distant one – seeing the person only occasionally – maybe not living together any more. For some people and some relationships this is easy – both decide to move on and there is little upset. But in other circumstances it can be very painful and sometimes it is easier to stay in a harmful relationship because it is too hard and frightening to do anything else – this can be very damaging.

Have you or a friend ever been stuck in a harmful relationship?

Describe it or make up a story.



RELATIONSHIPS-QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a useful questionnaire to discover how you feel about relationships and whether you are the sort of person who could get trapped in a dependant relationship.

Try to answer the questions with yes or no and then a little sentence to give an example of why you answered the way you did. There is no right or wrong answer but if you find yourself saying yes to most of the questions – then maybe it would be a good idea for you to think a bit more about yourself and your own needs whether it is in a relationship with you family, your friends, or a boyfriend or girlfriend.

1. Do you look after other people in a way that you wish you had been cared for yourself?
2. Do you think you can change a cold distant person by loving them enough?
3. Are you scared of being alone and so do anything to keep a relationship going?
4. Do you put everything you can into your relationships, time, effort, etc and keep trying harder to please?
5. Do you feel you do not deserve happiness but must work for it – earn the right?
6. Do you need to control your relationships for fear of losing them?
7. Are you living in a dream world – imagining what the relationship could be – rather than what it is?



