

relate ni  
the relationship people



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**Relationships**  
Week 2021

5-11 July

#LoveYourself  
#RelationshipsWeek

## LOVE YOURSELF

Survive, Grow & Thrive in Post-Pandemic Relationships & Life

# About Relate NI

Relate NI is passionate about enabling good quality relationships and that's why our mission is to make expert information and support for healthy relationships available to everyone. Through our experience of working with people throughout Northern Ireland, we've come to understand that relationships not only give our lives meaning, they are of vital importance to our happiness.

For the last 70+ years, we have been supporting the health and wellbeing of children & young people, individuals, couples, and families through our therapeutic services because we know how important our relationships are to our health and wellbeing.

That's why every year in July we celebrate #RelationshipsWeek! This year our theme is #LoveYourself - building self esteem to get by, grow and thrive in relationships & life.

Relate NI continues to provide support services at this time, in order to ensure that people and communities have access to high quality, professional health and wellbeing support and relationship support.

Visit our website for more information on how relationships week 2021 as well as tips & ideas on how you can learn to Love Yourself!

[www.relateni.org/relationshipsweek21](http://www.relateni.org/relationshipsweek21)



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**Last Year, 85% of people related Relate NI services as either good or excellent**

Client Survey 2020/21

tel. 028 9032 3454  
[www.relateni.org](http://www.relateni.org)

# Introduction

As we continue to emerge out of the pandemic, many will be looking forward and grabbing every opportunity to get back out into the world and invest time and energy into relationships, which are fundamental to our health and wellbeing.

However, the lockdown conditions may have exacerbated relationship tensions in so many ways - including within our friendships or even our relationship with ourselves.

The re-opening of society post-lockdown may be leading us to feel under pressure. There may be pressure on us to socialise and unrealistic expectations around how quickly we can return to work. Lockdown conditions may have led to some physical or other changes, and this may have been leading to self-esteem issues or lack of confidence. Even if you feel like dating again, you may still feel out of practice or worried about catching the virus while being intimate with a new partner.

This is an uncertain time for both adults and children as we're all trying to navigate as safely, effectively and calmly as possible.

As we prepare our homes and our workplaces to move forward, it is equally normal for us to seek relationship support to prepare ourselves for the pressures that a "return to normal" may bring, and to help us build the self esteem and confidence to get back out and invest in building healthy relationships.

This book aims to provide ideas on how you can **Relieve the Pressure** on yourself and your relationships so that you can learn to Grow & Thrive in post pandemic relationships & life  
#LoveYourself



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# Where We Are Now

The most important relationship that any of us have is the relationship we have with ourselves. It's the relationship that is with us 24/7, and the internal voice that we talk to ourselves with throughout the day.

The pandemic has placed pressure on all of our relationships and none more so than our relationships with ourselves. As we begin to transition away from the pandemic, the pressures it has already brought can be exacerbated.

A pandemic, isolation, financial insecurity - it feels as though we lost the usual supports that sustain us with the closing of gyms, hairdressers, restaurants & bars not to mention the distance between families & friends.

People have tried to follow the guidelines in the hope that they will keep their loved ones safe from infection though those very safety regulations have added to the relationship pressure.

We are thinking everyday of how to keep safe, maintaining social distancing, washing our hands, disinfecting everything, wearing our masks. We listen to the news & read articles on social media, the suffering of those infected, the impact on their loved ones. Some of this may not be changing as fast as we would like it too. For others, it may be returning to normal which is giving us anxieties.

Perhaps we know people who have been impacted directly by Covid 19, perhaps we have been unwell ourselves or maybe we have lost a loved one through this virus.

Even if we have escaped untouched, we continue to be impacted by the event. Our health, both physical & mental is connected. We know this in NI from our recent history of the 'Troubles' that trauma is shared among the community & down through generations.

We try to find ways to support each other & ourselves. Some of these are healthy & helpful - we try to eat well, get outdoors & be close to nature. Some are less supportive - drinking too much alcohol, staying up very late & sleeping later so disturbing our routine, eating takeaways every night because we're too busy again & unmotivated to cook.

Loneliness & isolation has been the experience for many during the pandemic. Older people in our community have been particularly affected by loneliness especially if physical health is already compromised.

And so we have responsibilities for others to help them combat loneliness as we emerge from the pandemic, including a partner, children, older relatives as well as our friends & colleagues and this can also be a source of pressure.



# Love Yourself

We need to support ourselves by thinking about our recovery long term. Our mental health is fundamental to our recovery.

There are a number of grounding exercises that can help us in the short-term if we find that our anxiety is rising

## **7 - 11 breathing**

Breathing techniques produce a bodily response that lowers your anxiety in a very physical way. Deep breathing techniques all have one thing in common, they work by stimulating what is known as the Parasympathetic Nervous System.

You may have heard of the 'fight or flight' response, the Parasympathetic Nervous System is simply the opposite of that ('fight or flight' is the term for the activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System) - instead of getting you ready for action, deep breathing activates a natural bodily response that can be described as 'rest and digest'.

Out-breaths decrease your blood pressure, dilate your pupils and slow your heart rate - lowering emotional arousal in the process. Practicing a breathing technique a few times a day will lower your overall stress levels in the long term.

It's important to realise that it's the out-breaths that stimulate the response, so it stands to reason that a breathing technique with longer out-breaths than in-breaths will be more effective at lowering emotional arousal.

Breathing techniques in which the out-breath is the same length as the in-breath, or during which you focus on your anxious thoughts are generally less effective at quickly lowering the physical symptoms of anxiety, despite being a good way of being mindful or entering into a relaxed state.

Here is how you do it, and it is as easy as it sounds:

- 1 - breathe in for a count of 7.
- 2 - then breathe out for a count of 11.

Make sure that when you are breathing in, you are doing deep 'diaphragmatic breathing' (your diaphragm moves down and pushes your stomach out as you take in a breath) rather than shallower higher lung breathing.



If you find that it's difficult to lengthen your breaths to a count of 11 or 7, then reduce the count to breathing in for 3 and out to 5, or whatever suits you best, as long as the out-breath is longer than the in-breath.

Continue in this way for 5-10 minutes or longer if you have time - and enjoy the calming effect it will have on your mind and body. 7-11 counting is a distraction technique which can help whether you're feeling stressed or anxious, suffering from panic attacks or having trouble concentrating or sleeping.

# Staying Grounded

Grounding techniques help control feelings of panic by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment.

## 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Try to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.



**What are 5 things you can see?** Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.

**What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.

**What are 3 things you can hear?** Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.

**What are 2 things you can smell?** Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.

**What is 1 thing you can taste?** Carry gum, sweets, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavours.

While these techniques do not take away the challenges we face they do help to settle us, so we are better equipped to manage our anxiety.

We are in this together. If you feel you need to remain physically distanced, think about sending cards, writing letters as well as the phone & zoom calls & WhatsApp messages. Reach out and let friends know that you might still need more time before meeting them in the pub again but suggest other options for you to spend time together.

We at Relate NI are here for you too. We can offer you a safe place to come & reflect on your experiences. We can support you in taking some time for yourself to think about all that you've been through already & how to look after your mental health & well-being.

You don't have to be in a crisis. You don't have to be in a relationship with anyone. You just have to be you.

Relate NI's team of skilled and professional counsellors can help people with their issues, whether big or small. In fact, 85% of people who use our services have told us they wished they'd attended sooner.



# What Next

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you manage the pressures on you and your relationships, allowing you to love yourself so that you can survive, grow and thrive in post-pandemic relationships & life. Relate NI's team of skilled and professional counsellors are also available to help people and their relationship issues, whether big or small. Your relationships doesn't need to be at a time of crisis to benefit from Relate NI services. In fact, 85% of people who use our services have told us they wished they'd attended sooner.

Use the details below to contact us to find out how we can support you.

**Relate NI services continue to be available at this time. If you would benefit from speaking to one of our trained counsellors, contact us at:**

**028 90323454**  
**[office@relateni.org](mailto:office@relateni.org)**

## **Relate NI Services:**

- **Adult Relationship Counselling for Individuals & Couples**
- **Family Counselling**
- **Counselling For Children & Young People**
- **Sex Therapy**

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