

relate ni  
the relationship people



**Relieve the Pressure**

*“Take A Breath”*

*With Your Children*

# 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 parents and children 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.

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

Visit our website for more guidance on how to 'Take A Breath' in order to Relieve The Pressure on you and your relationships.

[www.relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure](http://www.relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure)



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LAST YEAR  
89% OF PARENTS RECEIVING  
COUPLES COUNSELLING SAW AN  
IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR  
CHILDREN

2020/2021  
CLIENT  
SURVEY

# Introduction

Many people find that Christmas and the wider winter period puts their relationship under pressure, including our relationship with our children and their relationships with others.

Additional pressures including requirements to perform at school, breakdown in parent or family relationships, a change of routine or grief following the loss of a loved one may build up on children.

Eventually, the pressure may become too much and begin to affect them personally as well as creating unhelpful conflict in their relationships with others.

Children may still be experiencing the effects from the pandemic and the previous lockdown conditions, which may have compounded existing issues, and created further barriers in our relationships.

This is an uncertain time for both adults and children as we're all trying to 'navigate' back to some sort of normality as, effectively and calmly as possible.

As we prepare for a busy festive period, it's important to recognise the pressures this time can have on our children and their relationships.

This book aims to provide ideas on how you can use this time as an opportunity to **Take A Breath** in order to Relieve the Pressure on yourself and your children.



# Children & Young People Under Pressure

Children & young people have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Their routines have been upended, school stopped for ages and home became the new classroom. Friends were missed, grandparents, cousins, aunts & uncles were only seen on the computer – you couldn't even play in the park. Children & young people already live in a world over which they have little control so when they lose the routine that they have come to rely upon (like friends, school, clubs,) this can cause some long lasting distress.

Hopefully many of these aspects of your children's lives will have returned to normal. However, some may not and those which have may still be different to before.

At school, young people in key exam years are increasingly under pressure to perform consistently well, because they know that another lockdown could mean that the work they do throughout the year could be used to give them a predicted grade for GCSE or A-Level.

While some children may be excited to play and socialise with others again, others may be experiencing low confidence and anxiety around socialising. Everything doesn't have to be a 'big' event' as we transition out of lockdown. - spending time together in playful ways is very important for children & young people.

The pandemic has been a challenging time for parents, children & young people. Children & young people are reported to be at less risk of getting ill from Covid 19 but they are not immune from the mental & emotional impact that the virus and restrictions have brought to many of us.

Trauma specialists have described the experience of the pandemic as a 'collective trauma' – the presence of the virus as an ongoing 'collective threat'. Children & young people, like adults, respond to trauma in different ways. One child or teenager may respond to a traumatic event with anxiety or depression while another will not display any symptoms at all. Difficulties may emerge over time for other children & young people.

Children & young people rely on their families entirely, so it is very important for parents & carers to **Take A Breath**, and make some time for themselves over the festive period.



# Children And Connections

Due to lockdown children & young people spent more time with their immediate families. This has given many young ones a strong sense of connection & has supported their mental health & well-being.

Home schooling was a mixed experience with some really enjoying the gentler start times. For others the absence of a school routine & especially the loss of being part of the school community, with all that brings in friendship & play, has been significant.

Despite having returned to school, the sense of community may have changed as classes and year groups may be kept apart to reduce transmissions. Some of your children's best friends or favourite teachers may have moved on to other schools, and an environment your child may have previously enjoyed may now be something much more challenging.

Physical activity & spending increased time outdoors has been a benefit for some during the pandemic but not all have ready access to parks & gardens and some may simply have gotten too comfortable with being at home.

As parents, we may now be finding it difficult to get our children to move forward and get back into the routines, clubs and activities that we know could be good for their emotional development . It's important to provide opportunities for your children to develop in their relationships without exerting too much pressure by expecting them to move too much too fast.

The fear of getting Covid 19 or the worry that a parent would contract it has been a deep concern. For children and young people whose parents worked on the frontline, this may remain a worry for children even if we as parents feel relatively safe.

Loneliness has been a shared experience for children & young people. Connecting via internet and gaming communities have been a big support and although we may not fully understand it as parents and older people, we shouldn't diminish the importance of these online communities to our children's lives, whilst ensuring they are operating safely online.

While there have been many challenges throughout the pandemic, there is hope as well. Children & young people have been heroically resilient in adapting to a scary world over which they have no control.



There's no magic wand to make everything better overnight, but if you **Take A Breath**, you can discover some way to support children & young people & for them to learn to support themselves moving forward.

# Taking A Breath With Children & Teens

## *Communicating.*

Include children & young people in decisions as much as is possible. Communication isn't always through the spoken word – it's important to pay attention to what children & young people do & how they behave – this can be through their play, their drawings & so on.

Listen to children about their hopes & wishes. If something isn't possible, take the time to explain why. Create a feeling of comfort & security so that children & young people can more easily chat. You can do this by being interested in your children & showing your interest by getting involved in the things that they enjoy. Finances can be tight, so perhaps you could concentrate on playing games and creating fun experiences, rather than providing things. Balance your interest though - don't become an overbearing, competitive parent either!

Respect the privacy of young people – they might not want their news spread through the extended family WhatsApp group.

Listen, listen, listen & listen some more. It's very tempting for parents to want to share advice & guidance but there's never a good time to rush a response. Take your time, slow down & be curious about what your children thinks would help.

## *Be there & Be reliable.*

Children & young people need to know that their parents or carers are there for them. If you schedule time with them, make sure to be reliable and follow through with that. Try to be there when they want to talk. Chances are that the your child will want to talk at the least opportune time for an adult. Set aside what you're doing where possible & give them your full attention. The moment of connection can pass very quickly otherwise.

## *Feelings.*

Be respectful of the children & young peoples' thoughts & feelings. What might seem unimportant to an adult is vital at the time to the young ones. If they know that they can talk to you about the 'small' things then they know they can talk about the 'big' things too.

## *Open mind, open heart.*

A child & a young person is a separate person from you. They have their own thoughts, feelings, hopes & dreams. It is important for their feelings to be affirmed & validated, even if you feel somewhat differently.

## *Boundaries.*

Communication that is open & honest is also about setting boundaries. Whether it's a 5 year-old or a 15-year-old, healthy boundaries give a feeling of safety & security for young people. Encourage the young ones to be active participants in setting agreed boundaries as they will see that their opinions matter & they'll be more inclined to honour the guidelines set.

If you notice that the children or teenagers could maybe benefit from support, Relate NI is available. We offer specialist services for young people including our childrens counselling service for 4-11 year olds and Relate Teen for 11-17 year olds.

It's normal for parents to seek help to support their children. Accessing support shows you're a caring, supportive parent. It may also help you. After all, your mental health & well-being is very important, too.



# What Next

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you **Take A Breath** in order to manage the pressures on you and your children. Relate NI's team of skilled and professional counsellors are also available to help people with their relationship issues, whether big or small. Your relationship doesn't need to be at a time of crisis to benefit from Relate NI services. In fact, 70% of people who use our services last year 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**
- **Relate Kids**
- **Relate Teen**
- **Sex Therapy**

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