

relate ni  
the relationship people



**Relieve the Pressure**

*“Take A Breath”  
With Your Partner*

# 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

Our relationships are under pressure at the moment.

The pandemic has exacerbated relationship tensions in so many ways – including for those in couple relationships.

The festive period adds its own set of additional pressures - money worries, unrealistic expectations and the pressure to socialise may build up on us if they haven't already.

Eventually, the pressure may become too much and begin to affect us as individuals as well as creating unhelpful conflict with our partner.

The result may be that we start to notice new barriers in our relationships, or existing ones become exacerbated.

This is an uncertain time for couples. As we aim to 'navigate' toward normality as effectively and calmly as possible, we may start to question what normality is within our couple relationship and if it is something we want to return to.

As we prepare our homes and our work for the festive period, it is equally important for us to prepare ourselves and our families so as to prevent ourselves from becoming overwhelmed from the additional pressures this time of year may exert on our couple relationship.

This book aims to provide ideas on how you can **Take A Breath** in order to Relieve the Pressure on yourself and your relationship with your partner.



# Couples Under Pressure

If you are reading this, it may be that you & your partner have been stretched as never before – the impact of Covid 19, lockdown conditions, possibly redundancy or the loss of a secure income, dealing with long term sickness – perhaps you have lost a family member or friend as well.

It's probably fair to say that nothing has gone quite as you planned or hoped recently. Feelings of potential & possibility may now have become an exhausted mess of emotion.

You've made it this far & perhaps you're wondering what impact the future might have on your relationship with your partner.

Stress may have caused you & your partner to feel distant from each other. This might seem a strange response if working from home or other circumstances means you're even more in each other's' company than when you were in the first rush of attraction & developing love – when you couldn't get enough of each other & now you feel you could see each other far enough.

Despite being together more, you might never have felt so lonely in your relationship before. This could be compounded by reduced contact with friends, family & work colleagues. Perhaps you fell out of touch with friends during the lockdowns and those support structures are no longer there for you.

The effort to have a conversation with your partner might feel as though it ends in frequent bickering, an ongoing argument about which you've both long forgotten but new irritations rise with each new day to add to the frustration. Each unresolved argument creates less understanding & more space between you and your conflict may be having a negative affect on your children. Each additional hurt piled on top of the last one stops any hope of emotional closeness. Sexual desire is a distant memory.

While it sounds like a challenge it is possible to find a new way together in your relationship. There is hope at coming closer together emotionally, to gain a deeper understanding of each other & to find a renewed desire for one another.

The good news is that you know how to do this. You are the expert in your relationship & you can find ways to reconnect meaningfully.



# Communicating Effectively

The key to change is communication. The important part of communication is listening – really listening. Listening to your partner to understand what they’re telling you– not for a pause in the conversation so that you can tell your side of the story. Part of listening is being curious, being interested in your partner and what they are saying to you.

You might have been together for a few years or many years & think that you know this person sitting on the sofa but do you really know what life is like for them now? Are you the same person you were when you met them? Have you grown, developed, learned new things about yourself, started to like things you never thought would interest you? Well, your partner has grown over the years, too.

All of these things can be compounded by the pressures we may face to return to post-lockdown life the same way we entered into it. The pressure to provide; the pressure to have fun; It’s important to discuss these things so that you and your partner can agree ways to make the most of life going forward in a way that works for you both.

Curious, open conversations with compassion can start to bring you closer together, to develop trust in the relationship again, to enrich understanding of one another.

You could agree to set the social media aside for one night, make a favourite meal (nothing too fussy) and decide to explore each other as though meeting for the first time but with the benefit of the time that you have spent together.

You can explore questions about their life: ‘If you could write a note to your younger self, what would you say in only three words?’ Or ‘What is the one thing that makes you feel alive?’ Or ‘What would your perfect day look like?’

You can remember the early days of your relationship: ‘what’s your favourite memory of us?’ or ‘what’s your favourite way to receive affection?’

It’s a gentle way to have a little lightness about the relationship. To start talking together differently.



Acts of kindness are very supportive for relationships as well. Nothing expensive or extravagant – but the small things that you think that your partner will appreciate, for example, making them a cup of tea, bringing home their favourite bar of chocolate, vacuuming the stairs because you know they hate doing it or changing the cat litter.

# Taking A Breath With Your Partner

If you feel that your relationship is just a little too sensitive to try some of these ideas here are some other suggestions to support you both when disagreements take place. Remember, life will always present difference, discussion, debate. If you were both the same then it would be very dull – your difference was part of the initial attraction for you both. The challenge now is that difference may not be adding to your relationship at the minute – indeed it might be causing some distress.

## ***Time & place***

Try to make sure that there is the time & the space to explore the issues & feelings you have. An argument last thing at night often isn't helpful or when alcohol has been consumed. Your relationship is worth waiting to have an important conversation.

## ***Stay focussed.***

Tempting though it might be to bring up every single disappointment, hurt & frustration it only leads to confusion & the loss of the real problem in the moment. That's not to say that all those past hurts are ignored – they need their airtime too but in their own time, with their own focus. So stay on topic.

## ***Listen.***

The most important part of communication is listening. Really listening. Listening to understand not just stopping talking while you wait your turn to say your bit. Be interested & curious about what your partner is trying to tell you.

## ***Win/win.***

Try moving away from being 'right' because that means the other person has to be 'wrong' - & most people don't want to be 'wrong' so they keep fighting to be 'right'. Explore how you both can have your needs met, what compromise might

look like. Do you take turns? Do you find a completely different way together? Work together to find mutually supportive solutions.

## ***Time Out.***

If the conversation feels like it is becoming heated & unhelpful, and possibly affecting your children, agree to take a pause. This can last for an hour, 24 hours, whatever feels best for you both. Do agree a time to start the conversation again & keep that promise. It is as important that the person who might be feeling overwhelmed has an opportunity for a break as it is important for the person who wants to talk to be heard – so honour that promise to come back to the conversation when agreed.

Talk about these ideas with your partner before the next argument so you can agree if they sound supportive. Perhaps there are more suggestions you would add that are unique to your relationship?

Do try some of these ideas to support you moving forward. Remember to be kind to yourself & your partner to help look after the relationship you have together as well as looking after yourselves as individuals within that relationship.



# 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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