

relate ni
the relationship people



Alternative Valentines

Our Relationship With Our self Is
The Most Important One We Have

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.

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 the importance of healthy relationships, including with ourselves, for our health and wellbeing.

www.relateni.org/



[@relateni](https://twitter.com/relateni)



[@RelateNorthernIreland](https://www.facebook.com/RelateNorthernIreland)



[@RelateNI](https://www.linkedin.com/company/relateni)

85% of respondents said that they wished they had attended Relate NI sooner*

*Relate NI's 2018/2019 Evaluation Survey

tel. 028 9032 3454

www.relateni.org

Individuals Under Pressure

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 global pandemic has placed pressure on all of our relationships and none more so than our relationships with ourselves.

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

People try to follow the guidelines in the hope that they will keep their loved ones safe from infection though those very safety regulations add to the pressure. Focus has been on saving lives in the short-term, which is vital.

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 about the death toll, the suffering of those infected, the impact on their loved ones, we see photos of NHS staff looking like astronauts as they tend to the very unwell. We are in the immediate response stage of this pandemic.

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 & perhaps not getting to see daylight in these winter months, eating takeaways every night because we're too tired & unmotivated to cook.

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



Relieving the Pressure

We need to support ourselves by thinking not only of our responses to the pandemic but also to 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. While we remain physically distanced, we hold in our hearts those we love & care for & it is important to reach out to them in safe ways. Think about sending cards, writing letters as well as the phone & zoom calls & WhatsApp messages.

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 through the festive season and into the new year. 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

Relate NI Services:

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

www.relateni.org

