

Relate NI



**Relieve The Pressure
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 75 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.

Visit our website for more guidance on how to 'Relieve the Pressure' on your relationships throughout Christmas and the Cost of Living Crisis.

www.relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure



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87% of people told us that relationship support helped to improve their well-being

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Introduction

Our relationships are under pressure this festive period.

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

The festive period adds its own set of additional pressures every year, and these are likely to be exacerbated by the rising Costs of Living - money worries, unrealistic expectations and the pressure to socialise may build up on us if they haven't already and we can carry this into the New Year as well.

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 try to navigate the uncertainty which the Cost of Living Crisis is having on both our daily lives and our hopes for the future.

As we prepare our homes and our work for the festive period, and look for ways to shock proof our lives from the effects of the rising cost of living, 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 Relieve the Pressure on yourself and your partner this festive period.



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 might still be looming, perhaps you faced redundancy or the loss of a secure income, and now the rising cost of living is again adding financial pressures and uncertainty around what the future might hold for your and your family.

It's probably fair to say that things haven't gone quite as you planned or hoped for a post-lockdown world. 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 and a busy festive period doesn't necessarily help with this. Perhaps you are pre-occupied with worry, or you've had to take on additional work or caring responsibilities to combat rising bills.

Despite the busyness of modern living and the festive period, you might never have felt so lonely in your relationship before. As we age our responsibilities and leisure time changes, and our budgets and levels of disposable income may change around the festive period too. This can compound feelings of loneliness by reducing our contact with friends, family & work colleagues.

When this has persisted over time, Perhaps you have fallen out of touch with friends and those support structures are no longer there for you.

The effort to have conversations with your partner about how you are feeling might feel as though it ends in frequent bickering, an ongoing argument about something 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 or other family members. 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. Reading this resource shows you are ready and committed to getting back to a good place.



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 in the midst of this cost of living crisis? 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 around having the same magical Christmas that may have been the norm before, now that things are nothing but normal. The pressure to provide the same experience as previous years; the pressure to have fun despite your worries; It's important to discuss these things so that you and your partner can agree ways to make the most of the season 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 Christmas 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 – this can support your relationship much more than extravagant Christmas presents.

Relieve the Pressure With Your Partner

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. Consider some of the following things to help you Relieve the Pressure.

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.



We can Relate

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you **Relieve the Pressure** you and your partner may be facing. 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, 78% of people who used 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.

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 Or Couples**
- **Family Counselling**
- **Relate Kids**
- **Relate Teen**
- **Sex Therapy**
- **Relationship MOT**

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