

Relate NI



**Relieve The Pressure
On Yourself**

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

As we approach the end of another year and the beginning of a New one, and perhaps get ready to enjoy some much needed time off work, many will be looking forward and grabbing every opportunity to get together with friends and family members and invest time and energy into those relationships, which are fundamental to our health and wellbeing.

However, for other the festive period can bring a range of additional stresses to our relationships, including our relationship with ourselves.

Financial issues, which may be there every year, but are now exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, may be adding stresses around expectations to buy gifts or to attend expensive social events. This can be compounded when individuals are single, but perhaps are expected to buy for family members including their spouses and children.

There may be competing demands for our time, as friends and family return home from their lives abroad, and we are expected to make time to see them in their short windows of availability, while also being available for all the regular stuff that you own life at home brings.

Other issues may have exacerbated relationship tensions over the year— including within our friendships or within our families, and the idea of spending long periods of time together over the break is not something that you look forward too.

Perhaps this is the first Christmas in which a loved one won't be at the Christmas table, and their absence is felt strongly whether they have passed away or maybe they have decided to start their own traditions elsewhere. Whatever the reason – this may contribute to a sense of loneliness or loss.

This is an uncertain time for both adults and children. Many of us will be trying to navigate through this particular Christmas as effectively and calmly as possible despite the Cost of Living Crisis upending our plans for the first 'normal' Christmas for a few years, and putting our plans for the future in doubt.

As we prepare our homes and our workplaces for the festive period, it is equally important for us to prepare ourselves for the pressures that this time may bring.

This book aims to provide ideas on how you can **Relieve the Pressure** on yourself and your relationships this festive period.



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.

Financial pressures may mean that we have to make changes to our routines and may lose the usual supports that sustain if for example we have to cancel our gym membership, take less visits to the hairdressers, or reduce our visits to families & friends because of rising transport costs.

Having more time to ourselves can be beneficial when we choose it and we choose to use it effectively, but often when it happens to us we can get stuck in a rut, spend large periods of time on social media in order to stay connected, but also comparing your experience to others.

At Christmas, while your friends may be able to utilise the extra time off work to get to meet up or attend cool events, perhaps you feel disappointment that you are missing out on this time with them, as you are just trying to get through every day. Perhaps you are worried they won't understand why you can't be there and how they might react to your absence.

These experiences may still be affect your self-esteem and even when you do plan to see friends and family again it can be quite daunting. Perhaps they haven't been there for you this year and now you don't

want to see them over the festive period.

Perhaps you have been suffering from illness recently and are frustrated with how this may impact on your plans to spend the festive period, and your ability to enjoy it.

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.

We have responsibilities for others, including a partner, children, older relatives as well as our friends & colleagues and this can also be a source of pressure, especially during the festive period where you might feel forced to have an enjoyable time in order for others to do so. We can Relate!



Relieving the Pressure

We need to support ourselves by thinking about how this short winter period may affect us long term. Our relationship with ourselves is fundamental to our wellbeing and we need to safeguard and nourish it over this period when it will experience many pressures.

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 – helping you manage heightened emotions 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 heightened emotions.

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.

It's okay to use this festive period to **Relieve the Pressure**, and invest in your relationship with yourself instead of focusing on others.

You can do this while still reaching out and showing love to those you care for. Think about sending cards, writing letters as well as the phone & zoom calls & WhatsApp messages. Be honest, and let them know that you are using the festive period to slow down so you won't be able to go to the annual family new years party or whatever it might be.

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. We can Relate

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The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you **Relieve the Pressure** you and your relationships 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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