

Relate NI



**Taking Back Control –
A Cost of Living Christmas**

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.

relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure



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we can Relate

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

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Health & Financial Hardship

It is well documented that financial hardship is a contributory factor to poor mental health including depression & anxiety.

Financial hardship can also impact on our physical health, the stress we experience around money worries can lead to heart problems and high blood pressure for example.

We tend to have a better idea of how to take care of our physical health, but we can be uncertain about how to look after our mental and emotional wellbeing.

The Cost of Living Crisis combined with the stress of Christmas is physically and mentally exhausting. Feeling so depleted can impact on your relationships leaving you upset and anxious.

The impact of this distress can potentially trigger earlier trauma responses. The experience can tap

into feelings of not being 'good enough', fears around not being able to provide for your family, of worrying about having enough to meet your needs for shelter, warmth, food.

Please remember, you are important. You do matter. You are enough. We are so glad that you're here.

What is happening right now, around rising inflation and cost of living, is not your fault. It is not your fault. Read that again, please. It. Is. Not. Your. Fault.

There is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed.

Unfortunately however, the cost of living crisis that we find ourselves in means that many of the normal supports are not available.

Relate NI want to offer ways of supporting you to survive and thrive despite the external burden of anxiety placed on people.

This resource provides a few thoughts on how to support you to Relieve the Pressure on your mental health in the good times but especially now in very challenging times.



Taking Back Control

One of our basic human needs is to have a sense of control in our lives, to know that we have choice and that our actions will make a difference.

Studies show that when we feel that we can make decisions that determine what happens in our lives the greater our capacity for happiness, health, and the resources to cope with challenges.

Research also shows that when we feel that our lives are controlled by external forces, either by chance or by powerful forces, then our mental and physical health suffers. We can feel anxious, depressed, and helpless.

The current cost of living crisis is outside our control. It did not come about by our poor decision making or from greed on our part. It has been imposed on us, yet we are being made to bear the hardship.

There are basic tools that can support us. They are not 'cures' - going for a walk or taking a bath will not change the landscape of fear.

However, these tools can help in soothing anxiety and relieving pressure. Real change however needs to be systemic so that people's needs are met.

Give yourself a rest from worry. It's easy to say that but not always easy to achieve. Ruminating – otherwise known as having repetitive thoughts, can increase our stress levels. Obsessing over all the negative thoughts and feelings, mulling over all our fears makes us feel very vulnerable.

When you find yourself pulled towards worst case scenarios gently remind yourself that worrying about something means that the fearful thing hasn't yet happened, or may never happen, then see what actions you can take to improve things.

Worrying doesn't ever help, it isn't productive, and it isn't healthy. Taking action can help stop, or at least pause, worry.

Action can include starting with your physical wellbeing.

Get enough sleep. Stay hydrated. Eat as well as you can. Move your body. Go for a walk. Put on your favourite music and dance round your living room with your partner or child or on your own. Read a good book from the library.

Breathing exercises can help soothe the mind and body. [7 – 11 breathing is a fantastic resource. We have a range of grounding exercises in our 'Relieve the Pressure' on yourself resource which can be found here.](#)

A Sense Of Purpose

The recent, ongoing collective trauma of Covid, the impact of lockdowns, and now the financial crisis opens up conversations on what do our lives mean? People have reflected on what is important to them, what brings them purpose in life.

A life's purpose is a personal hope. It can be anything from ensuring that your children laugh often and heartily, to being an emotional support for friends, volunteering with a charity that you care about. It can mean becoming a community activist to ensure that no one goes without.

Despite the physical distances between us during lockdown many communities were able to reach out to one another offering support, virtual contact, and virtual connection, doing food drop offs or picking up prescriptions for example for the very vulnerable. Remember to reach out for support yourself and to be a support to others at this time. Utilise your relationships as a protective factor for yourself and others.

Isolation can make a difficult situation much worse. People have three different types of need: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Our physical needs include food, water, shelter, touch, physical intimacy, movement, and play.

Our emotional needs include being seen and heard, to be able to express oneself, connection, a sense of belonging, feeling safe and feeling appreciated.

Spiritual needs include: a connection to your authentic self, a sense of purpose, being aligned with your values and acts of service to others in your community.



What are your emotions trying to tell you?

Many of us have had our needs neglected since childhood or we were forced to ignore our needs to look after others around us.

The impact of the collective traumas we have experienced over the last three years can tap into these earlier childhood traumas. To support our healing, we can practice understanding what our needs are and how we can begin to meet those needs.

You may notice feeling angry about the difficulties you face and that is understandable. We do not always have helpful information about feeling anger and are often told that it is negative, and we shouldn't feel it.

Anger can be very important. It tells us something is wrong. We need to know when something is wrong.

What doesn't help us is turning that anger to bitterness. Bitterness can consume a person and does nothing to bring help.

We need to use anger, 'you write it. You paint it. You dance it. You march it. You vote it. You do everything about it. You talk about it.'

Our emotions are messengers and tell us important information. We need to listen. Part of the challenge we face now is many of our shared values and ethics are not being communicated in our wider society.

We are living in a punishing environment at the moment over which we feel that we have little or no control. What we can control is how we treat ourselves and each other.

Together we can create a life that is worth living. We can create a life that is worth loving.

We can Relate

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

www.relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure

