

# Summer, The Cost of Living & Our Relationships



**Relate NI**



As we enjoy the warmer weather, having BBQs, inflating the paddling pool, and have packed away the chunky jumpers, the weather may have improved, but the prices haven't. The cost of living not only impacts your wallet but also impacts your relationships. During these summer months, we can be forgiven for thinking the bills won't be too bad, after all, we haven't needed to put the heating on for a while now! While our oil/electric heating bills have decreased, we have been digging out the fans and all those electrical devices the kids love, they need charging, and when the kids are off school, we tend to buy more food/snacks while having days out, which all adds up and can cause a headache.

We may not realise it, but all this can and does impact our relationships. Our kids sense when we are stressed, our close family and friends see the strain and our spouses notice it in our daily lives. Those closest to us can, at times, see these changes in us before we do, they may even ask you "Are you OK? You seem very tired." Or "You are very quiet, is there something wrong?" This is when our relationships become those protective sources that we should listen to and confide in, especially when times are challenging.



It could be that all that is required, is a little break, and we need that downtime, to take a breath, recharge and unwind, after all, this is an essential part of keeping our mental health in check! There is a lot to juggle during this time, but you aren't the only one experiencing this. It may be that your friend is struggling with mounting food bills, or your cousin finds it hard with a new baby and is on maternity leave. Why not link in with those people, as supporting one another gives both parties an opportunity to learn from the other, get encouragement and feel empowered. Having a realistic idea or expectation of Summer is essential if we are to avoid experiencing further stress and strain, as we all are aware, stress, if not managed through self-care, can affect us greatly.

# So, what can impact us during the summer months?

1. Having the kids at home more – even if you live in a great community, and the kids have friends that live close by, the kids are still at home more often, this can be tiring and at times, stressful.
2. Food prices – Lack of breakfast club, school lunches/packed lunches, and after-school clubs with snacks included. The grocery bill increases as you try to ensure they are getting enough to eat through the day.
3. More cleaning/tidying – when home a lot of the time, and the kids invite their friends over for a play date, the house can quickly become a jungle of toys, crayons, books, and Legos!
4. Pressure to entertain – we tend to put pressure on ourselves to arrange elaborate days out, have family BBQs and gatherings, agree to mind friends' kids and/or play dates, etc, which can add stress and tension, let alone add to the cost.
5. Childcare costs – when working, we need the kids minded which may mean increasing days with a childminder/daycare centre.
6. Working From Home – A lot of us have carried this on from Pandemic days, which may save money on childcare costs, but can add to stress and lead to self-criticism (“Am I spending enough time with the kids?” “Are they bored?”)



# It Can Cause A Strain On Relationships....

## With our children...

While we are enjoying the lack of stress and rushing around in the morning times to get to school on time, we may now find it stressful to have to ensure the kids are entertained all the time. Even when the puzzles, Legos, and paints are pulled out, it may not please everyone! We can be forgiven for feeling the pressure and strain this can have on us and we, at times, can reflect this in our tone with the children. After all, we are trying to juggle a lot! However, this also impacts the kids. They know when you are stressed, angry, upset, and/or agitated. This then impacts how they see you and interact with you. You are all going through a change in your routine together, so plan your days together too. Getting the kids involved in what activities are taking place helps them feel their voice is being heard too and eases the pressure on you to come up with things all the time!



# It Can Cause A Strain On Relationships....

## With our Partners....

After a long hard day and having to potentially juggle work as well, it may be the relief we feel when our partner walks through the door, more so than anything else! There can be a tendency to forget you have all had a long hard day. This can come out in resentment, arguments, etc. Why not get into a routine whereby you take 20mins to yourself when your partner is home, this also gives them time to have with the kids 1-on-1. But remember, this isn't a competition of who's the more tired at the end of the day. You have all worked hard and are both tired and doing what you can. So, try coming up with a system that you are all happy with. Let's not forget that this is your partner, so schedule a bit of 1-to-1 time with them also. Having 10 mins at the end of the day to talk through current events can mean a world of difference in your relationship.



# How can you then have a good summer holiday, keep your mental health in check, while maintaining your relationships and keep the cost low?

This can sound impossible but is achievable. Most kids enjoy the simple fact there's no school, no homework, and no classrooms! Take advantage of that, keep things simple, and ask the kids what they want to do...you may find the simplest activities are what give them the most joy!

- Go outside! With being in a classroom for most of the school year, your kids will love the freedom of being able to run, jump, go on a swing, etc...
- Picnic – whether in your living room, garden, or even the local park, get the kids to join in in the preparation. It can be a great way to use up food in the fridge, cutting down on costs.
- Cook together – Get the kids involved in the preparation of meals. This shows them what's involved and is a fun, bonding activity to do together. For hotter days try freezing your own ice lollies – a great way to use up the last of the orange juice and doesn't cost a penny!
- When the weather is good, get the paddling pool up, sun lotion on, and have fun!
- Go on an adventure walk – ask the kids to make a list of what they would like to see on a walk, their favourite flower, bug/insect.
- Get the craft kits out – those kits that have taken up space in the spare room would be a great activity, try using them outside!
- Gardening – get your kids involved in planting flowers, weeding, watering the flowers, etc, kids will love to get their hands dirty!
- Look up your local community group's webpage or social media sites, lots of them run clubs/fun days.
- Enjoy not keeping time too much – the odd late night can be fun for the whole family and possibly allow for a lie-in the next day!



# Relationships & you!



- You matter too...while work continues (regardless of if this is paid work or not i.e., stay at home parent) it is important to remember that you matter too. Take time out, get a babysitter, and ask friends/family to mind the kids for some downtime.
- Book time out with your partner or friend, go to someone else's house for dinner, for a walk, or while the kids are at their aunt's house, cook a meal together and unwind.
- Don't forget to communicate. Take 10 minutes at the end of the day to just talk to one another. This could be a general conversation, about childcare, work, etc. This helps to clear your mind and gain perspective.
- Plan the summer months together, this shows that you are in it together. We can tend to believe we are alone in situations, but the reality can be very different. Writing down a plan or timetable collectively helps to map out how to get a good balance of fun time, chores/work, and downtime and there is no confusion over who's doing what!
- Consider what you would like to do over the summer. It's your Summertime as well, so think about day trips you want to go on, evenings with friends having a coffee, etc.
- Expectations are sometimes assumptions. This can cause arguments, disappointment even anger. So, getting clarity on situations is vital to ensuring everyone is on the same page, and don't be afraid to ask questions!
- Have fun! Don't forget through all this to enjoy yourself, let your hair down, and get out into the sun!



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- Adult Relationship Counselling for Couples
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- One At A Time Therapy
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- Teen Counselling
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