

Different Types of Relationships

An interpersonal relationship refers to the association, connection, interaction and bond between two or more people. There are many different types of relationships. This section focuses on four types of relationships: Family relationships, Friendships, Acquaintanceships and Romantic relationships.



Family Relationships



Our family, or relatives are people we are connected to through some form of kinship, whether it is through blood (such as with parents, brothers and sisters), marriage (such as non-blood aunts and uncles or step-parents) romantic relationships (such as a parent's girlfriend or boyfriend) or adoption.

Family includes siblings and parents who you may see every day growing up, and other relatives such as cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents who you may not see quote so frequently.

Families come in many different forms, for example single-parent families, step families, homes with gay and lesbian parents etc.

Ideally, people should have strong relationships with their families, although this does not always happen. They should feel love and

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closeness for their relatives, and be able to confide in them and discuss personal things. A key role of parents and older relatives is to offer guidance, support and, where needed, boundaries and discipline. As families are so close and spend so much time together, arguments and disagreements can arise, but in most families, these are short-lived and even in moments of anger or hurt, families still love and care about each other.

Family relationships are ideally life-long, although as children become teenagers and then adults, it is usual for them to have more independence and for the parental relationship to become less one of guidance and more one of mutual support.

Sometimes as children become teenagers and adults, there can be an increase in arguments and conflicts with parents as the growing child tries to assert their independence and find their adult identity. This is perfectly normal and often calms down once the teenage years have passed.

It is important to have strong communication with family members as, if a healthy relationship is nurtured, a family can be a lifelong source of support.

The bond with a family can play a very important role in personal wellbeing and the ability to form other kinds of relationships outside of the family unit such as friendships and romantic relationships.

In some families, there is little physical contact whereas in others, it is common for family members to express affection by means such as

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hugging, kissing on the cheek or forehead, patting the head or tousling the hair, patting on the back etc. It is common for babies and younger children to be carried or held.

Friends

Friends are people who we are not related to but choose to interact with. Friends are people we trust, respect, care about and feel that we can confide in and want to spend time with. A good friendship should be built on honesty, support and loyalty. A friendship is a reciprocal relationship; for it to exist, both people must see each other as a friend.



There are varying degrees of friendship. You may find that you feel closer to some friends than others. This is perfectly normal. Some friends, especially if they have only been known for a short time or are not seen very often, may not be appropriate to confide in about personal issues or concerns. You may find that you feel more comfortable and able to confide in friends whom you have known for longer or spend more time with.

Friends who are very close and know each other well are sometimes referred to as “best friends”.

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Some people have many friends, while others may only have one or two. There is no right or wrong number of friends to have and everyone is different.

Good friendships are mutually respectful and supportive and share common interests and ideas.

While some friendships can be close and some friends choose to greet each other by hugging or kissing on the cheek, other friendships may have no physical contact, or may simply shake hands. Physically intimate or romantic contact is not appropriate in a friendship.

Acquaintances

Acquaintances are people you may encounter regularly, but who are not friends or relatives. For example, they may be a neighbour who lives in your road that you say “hello” to if you see them in passing, or a work colleague or someone you have seen a few times at a social event but do not yet know well.

It is important to be polite and respectful to acquaintances as having harmonious relationships with people around you, such as work colleagues, people from college, neighbours etc is an important way of avoiding stress or conflict.

In some cases, relationships that start as acquaintanceships can, over time, evolve into friendships as you get to know the person better and see them more frequently.

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The level of contact with an acquaintance is minimal. There is unlikely to be any physical contact (although in a work setting, or when being introduced to someone, you might occasionally be required to shake hands), but the main form of contact is likely to be smiling and saying 'hello'.

Romantic Relationships

A romantic relationship is one in which you feel very strongly attracted to the other person, both to their personality and, often, also physically. This is reciprocated by the other person in the relationship.

A romantic relationship is that which exists between a boyfriend and girlfriend (in a heterosexual relationship) or a boyfriend and boyfriend or girlfriend and girlfriend (in a homosexual relationship) or spouses (in a marriage) or life partners (in a civil partnership or long-term unmarried relationship).

People in a romantic relationship will see each other very often and when apart may frequently stay in contact, for example by phone. Some people in romantic relationships live together.

A romantic relationship is the closest form of relationship and the two people involved will often describe themselves as being attracted to each other and/or "in love". They feel an incredibly strong connection and bond to each other that they do not feel with anyone else, even close friends, and the bond is also exclusive and monogamous.

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Successful Romantic relationships are built on love, trust, respect, support, acceptance, shared interests and a desire for the two people involved to share their lives together. Some people in relationships may choose to have children.

As this is such a close relationship, various kinds of physical contact are accepted which would not be appropriate in any other kind of relationship. These include prolonged cuddling and holding, kissing on the lips and sexual intercourse, however it should still mutually agreed.

Sometimes arguments and disagreements occur in romantic relationships. In strong relationships, these arguments can be overcome through effective communication, understanding and compromise, but in other cases, especially if there are frequent arguments, the two people involved may decide to terminate the relationship.

Relationships can be of varying duration. In some relationships, it quickly becomes apparent that the two people involved are not compatible and do not want to spend their lives together, and so the relationship may end after only a few months. In other cases, the two people may be together for many years or may stay together for the rest of their lives.

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