

What is a Healthy and Supportive Relationship?



The Importance of Relationships for Mental Well-being

Mental well-being is a core determinant of overall health. It shapes how individuals think, feel and behave - influencing both personal outcomes and community resilience.

Building strong, supportive relationships is a central component of well-being.

Positive mental health, often described as “feeling good and functioning well,” enables people to participate meaningfully in life, connect with others and thrive within inclusive environments.

Further information:

[Promoting individual and community wellbeing - Public Health Wales](#)

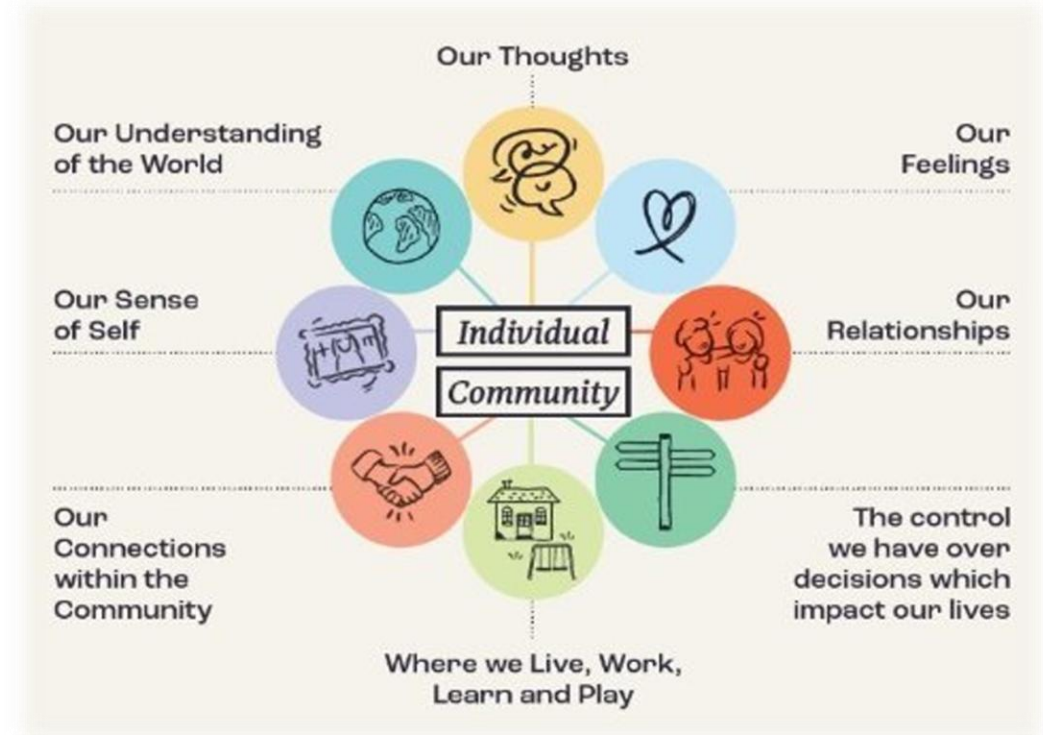
Public Health Wales

A Framework for Mental Well-being

Developed by Public Health Wales, this framework highlights:

- The link between individual and community well-being
- The psychological and social factors influencing mental health

Our relationships are an important component for our individual and community well-being.



What are the Key Elements of a Healthy Relationship?

Healthy relationships are defined by trust, respect and emotional safety. They enable authenticity, growth, resilience and a sense of belonging.

Core Characteristics:

- **Respect:** recognition of each individual's boundaries, perspectives, agency and enabling shared decision making.
- **Trust:** a sense of reliability and emotional security.
- **Authenticity:** transparent, honest communication, open dialogue and active listening.
- **Supportive:** safe, stable, nurturing, enabling connection to self and others.

Such relationships enable individuals to feel valued, connected and psychologically secure - essential for well-being in both personal and professional contexts.



Different types of Relationships

Individuals engage in diverse relationships - familial, social, professional and intimate - each contributing to emotional development, resilience and identity formation.

Key Influences:

- **Family:** Primary context for attachment, trust and value formation.
- **Social Networks:** Friendships and peer connections shaping belonging and self-concept.
- **Educational and Professional Relationships:** Opportunities for collaboration, mentorship and skill development.
- **Digital Communities:** Expanding access to connection while requiring mindful engagement.

Supportive relationships and networks enhance well-being through shared purpose, empathy and mutual reinforcement.



The Role of Family

How we respond to relationships through life is shaped by experiences in very early childhood. Our primary attachment figure teaches us how to respond to and make sense of emotions and how to develop trust in ourselves and others.

Family can be the first place where we experience love and social connection. Supportive family relationships can help build self-compassion, confidence, communication skills and support good mental well-being. However, not all children have the same stable, nurturing and safe relationships at home. Schools can play a key role in mitigating the impact of adverse experiences, providing care, consistency and a sense of belonging for every child.

Supportive relationships can promote:

- **Emotional Stability:** Care, encouragement and affirmation.
- **Communication Skills:** Safe expression and conflict resolution.
- **Values and Boundaries:** Respect, empathy and accountability.
- **Protective Factors:** Security and resilience in adversity.

Trust, love and mutual respect form the foundation of healthy development and well-being.



The Role of Social Networks

As individuals grow, their relationships expand beyond family encompassing:

- **Friends** – Offering trust, companionship and shared experiences.
- **Teachers & Mentors** – Providing guidance, knowledge and emotional support.
- **Community Members** – Contributing to belonging and collective identity.
- **Online & Digital Networks** – Shaping interaction and connectedness when used positively.

Supportive networks can:

- ✓ Provide diverse perspectives.
- ✓ Offer emotional support in times of need.
- ✓ Create opportunities for growth, independence and resilience.



Whether at home, school or in the wider community, strong and supportive relationships contribute to happiness and personal growth.

By surrounding themselves with people who uplift, encourage and respect, children and young people can create positive and secure environments for relationship development.

The Role of Communication

In healthy relationships, communication supports everyone feeling valued and understood.

Key Dimensions:

- **Verbal:** Speaking openly, respectfully, with clarity and empathy.
- **Non-Verbal:** Attuned body language, gestures, eye contact, tone and facial expression.
- **Active Listening:** Demonstrating attention, interest and understanding through presence and reflection.
- **Digital Communication:** Maintaining connection responsibly in virtual contexts.

Good communication builds trust and strengthens bonds.

Poor communication undermines connection and creates tension.



Trust and Respect



Trust and respect are important for healthy relationships. Their presence fosters stability, emotional security and mutual growth, while their absence can lead to conflict and breakdowns in communication.

Trust

- Creates emotional security.
- Minimises conflict and defensiveness.
- Builds cooperation and collaboration.

Respect

- Promotes equality and fairness.
- Enhances communication.
- Encourages personal growth.
- Supports mature conflict resolution.

Strengthening These Qualities:

- Demonstrate reliability and transparency.
- Value differing perspectives.
- Offer and accept apologies when appropriate.

Recognising Unhealthy Relationships

Not all relationships are healthy. It is important to identify the warning signs of unhealthy dynamics, which may include:

- Coercive control, intimidation or manipulation.
- Persistent jealousy or mistrust.
- Emotional invalidation or neglect.
- Pressure, exclusion or lack of autonomy

Unhealthy relationships can negatively impact well-being, leading to stress, low self-esteem and in some cases physical symptoms such as headaches or disrupted sleep. Over time, they can foster isolation and undermine self-confidence.

Such dynamics can occur in friendships, family connections, professional settings or romantic relationships. Recognising the signs early helps individuals protect their mental health and make informed choices.

Indications of an unhealthy relationship:

- ✗ Experiencing intimidation or manipulation
- ✗ Persistent jealousy or lack of trust
- ✗ Feeling insignificant or disregarded
- ✗ Pressure and coercion

Guidance for children and young people:

A healthy relationship is defined by feelings of safety, happiness and mutual respect. If they are ever unsure, they should talk to a trusted adult or friend.



References

The information provided in this slide set has taken references from the following:

- [Promoting individual and community wellbeing - Public Health Wales](#)
- [Maintaining healthy relationships and mental wellbeing - NHS](#)
- [Top tips on building and maintaining healthy relationships | Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [12 elements of healthy relationships – Johns Hopkins University Student Well-Being](#)
- <https://meic.cymru/?s=relationship>
- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-young-people/mental-health/relationships/unhealthy-relationships>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/looking-after-your-mental-health-online/online-relationships/>
- [NHS England » Relationships](#)

Possible learning and activity suggestions

Good vs. Poor Communication Role Play

Objective: Understand the impact of communication styles.

- **Activity:** In pairs or small groups, learners act out two versions of a scenario (e.g., resolving a disagreement with a friend):
- **Version 1:** Poor communication (interrupting, blaming, ignoring)
- **Version 2:** Good communication (active listening, respectful tone, empathy)
- **Debrief:** How did each version feel? What changed the outcome?

Social Network Mapping

- **Objective:** Visualise different types of relationships.
- **Activity:** Learners draw a map with themselves at the centre. Branches extend to *Family*, *Caregivers*, *Friends*, *School*, *Community* and *Online*. They add names or roles and describe how each connection supports them.
- **Discussion:** Which relationships offer emotional support, guidance, or shared interests?

Trust and Respect Scenario Sort

- **Objective:** Identify behaviours that build or break trust and respect.
- **Activity:** Provide learners with scenario cards (e.g., "A friend shares your secret," "You apologise after an argument," "Someone spreads a rumour"). Learners sort them into:
 - Builds Trust
 - Builds Respect
 - Damages Trust
 - Damages Respect
- **Discussion:** What patterns do they notice? Can one action affect both trust and respect?

Relationship Sorting Game

- **Objective:** Identify healthy vs. unhealthy relationship traits.
- **Activity:** Provide learners with cards listing different behaviours (e.g., "listens actively," "ignores texts," "shares secrets," "controls decisions"). In pairs or small groups, they sort them into *Healthy*, *Unhealthy* or *Needs Discussion*.
- **Follow-up:** Discuss why some behaviours are ambiguous and context-dependent.

Community Connection Collage

- **Objective:** Explore the role of community.
- **Activity:** Learners create a collage (digital or paper) showing places and people in their community who make them feel safe, included or inspired.
- **Reflection:** How does community shape who we are?