

# Understanding the Influences on our Relationships



# Environment and Relationships

Surroundings play a crucial role in shaping how individuals form relationships. The contexts in which children and young people live, learn, grow and play - whether at home, in school, in the community or online - influence the ways they communicate, collaborate and develop trust.

From classroom expectations to wider community culture, the physical and social environment actively contributes to the patterns of friendships and group dynamics that emerge. Recognising these influences allows us to better understand the conditions that support positive social development and identify factors that may undermine it.



## **The following slides will explore:**

1. How physical environments can influence relationships
2. The psychological and emotional influences on relationships
3. The potential role of schools and communities on supporting relationships
4. Cultural influences on relationships

# Physical Environment & Relationships

The physical environment shapes people's relationships by influencing how they meet, interact and rely on others. Below are a few examples of how the physical environment can affect relationships.

## Where People Live Affect How they Connect:

- **Urban Areas (Cities)** → Large populations, busy lifestyles, many acquaintances but fewer deep relationships. People rely on public transport and technology to stay connected.
- **Rural Areas (Villages, Countryside)** → Fewer people, strong community ties and face-to-face interactions. Relationships tend to be long-term and deeply rooted.



## Public Spaces and Social Interaction

- Parks, schools, community centres and markets provide places for people to meet, talk and build friendships.
- Lack of public spaces (in crowded cities or remote areas) can make it harder for people to connect in person.

## Climate and Geography Influence Social Bonds

- **Cold Climates (Arctic, Northern Europe)** → People work together for survival, leading to strong community bonds and teamwork. Indoor socialising is common.
- **Hot Climates (Mediterranean, Tropical regions)** → More outdoor gatherings, festivals and strong social networks based on frequent interaction.

# Psychological & Emotional Influence

Our surroundings and relationships shape how we think, feel and connect with others. Environments that feel safe, supportive and calm help people to manage emotions, build empathy and form stronger relationships.



## Emotional Impact of Environments

- **Calm and natural settings** can lower stress and support focus, patience and positive emotions.
- **Chaotic, noisy or unsafe environments** can heighten anxiety or defensiveness, making trust and cooperation more difficult.

## Family and Community Support

- Supportive families, peers and communities promote belonging, self-worth and emotional security.
- Isolation, conflict or lack of support can lead to loneliness, low mood and strained relationships.

## Home and School Environments

- Positive, caring environments help young people feel valued and confident.
- Stressful or critical settings can undermine emotional well-being and make social relationships harder to maintain.

## Promoting Positive Influence

- Encourage open communication and emotional expression.
- Provide spaces that feel safe, inclusive and nurturing.
- Model empathy, understanding and positive coping strategies.

# How Schools and Communities Support Relationship Growth

In schools and communities, the development of healthy relationships is supported through various programmes, activities and a supportive environment. Examples include:

## **Creating Safe Communication Spaces**

- Encouraging open dialogue where young people feel able to express feelings and opinions.

## **Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving**

- Developing skills in listening, empathy and negotiation to address disputes constructively.

## **Promoting Respect and Inclusivity**

- Celebrating diversity to foster mutual understanding and reduce prejudice.

## **Peer Mentoring**

- Older learners support and guide younger ones, fostering positive connections.

## **Building Positive Peer Relationships**

- Extracurricular activities (sports, music, drama, community projects) help build friendships.

## **Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) Education**

- Lessons on healthy relationships, boundaries and consent teach respectful connections.

## **Encouraging Self-compassion**

- Activities promote self-reflection and confidence for healthier relationships.

## **Community Engagement & Support**

- Schools partner with organisations to offer counseling and relationship resources.



# Cultural Influences on Relationships and Social Norms

**Relationships:** The connections people have with other people, including friendships, family and romantic relationships.

**Social Norms:** Unwritten rules or expectations about how people should behave in society. These norms are influenced by culture, family and society.

## How Culture Affects Relationships

- **Different Types of Relationships:** In some cultures, family relationships are very close, with extended families living together, while in other cultures, independence is valued.
- **Respect for Elders:** In some cultures, showing respect for older people is very important and shapes how children interact with adults.
- **Marriage and Friendship Norms:** The expectations of when and who to marry or how friendships are formed, can vary widely between cultures.

## Examples of Social Norms Worldwide

- **Greetings:** Bowing, handshakes or cheek kisses.
- **Gender Roles:** Different expectations for men and women.
- **Personal Space:** Varies by culture - some prefer close contact, others need more space.



# The Impact of Technology and Social Media on Modern Relationships

The impact of technology and social media on modern relationships is significant, bringing both positive and negative effects. Here's a brief breakdown:

## ✓ **Positive Impacts:**

### **Enhanced Communication**

Technology can allow people to stay connected instantly, even across long distances. Some age appropriate social platforms, messaging apps and video calls can support people to maintain relationships.

### **Stronger Connections**

Technology can help people find and connect with others who share similar interests, fostering new friendships and support networks.

### **Increased Support Systems**

Age-appropriate online communities sometimes provide helpful spaces to share experiences, seek guidance and find emotional support, when used with a mindful approach to managing online risks.

## ✗ **Negative Impacts:**

### **Social comparisons**

Social media can encourage comparison to others which may undermine self-esteem, increase feelings of anxiety and reinforce incorrect perceptions about relationships.

### **Superficial Connections**

While technology facilitates connections, it can sometimes lead to shallow or less meaningful relationships.

### **Cyberbullying and Harassment**

Social media platforms can be sources of cyberbullying, which negatively affects mental health and relationships.

### **Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction**

Over-reliance on digital communication can reduce the quality of in-person relationships.

### **Distraction and disconnection**

Frequent use of technology and social media can lead to more fragmented attention, distracting from authentic real world relationships. Brief and curated interactions can lead to feelings of emotional disconnection.

# References

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

- [Full article: The impact of physical components of the environment on the sociability of cultural-recreational spaces case study: Rasht cultural complex](#)
- [The Effect Your Relationship Has on Your Well-being — Trust Mental Health](#)
- [Friendship Importance Around the World: Links to Cultural Factors, Health, and Well-Being - PMC](#)
- [The Influence of Cultural Differences On Friendships – We Thrive Together](#)
- [Relationships and belonging : Mentally Healthy Schools](#)
- [2810 the-impact-of-social-media-on-modern-relationships.pdf](#)
- [The impact of political, economic, socio-cultural, environmental and other external influences | Health Knowledge](#)
- [State of the environment: health, people and the environment - GOV.UK](#)
- [Urban green spaces and health World Health Organization \(2017\).](#)



## Possible learning and activity suggestions

### Community Spaces Mapping

- **Objective:** Identify local spaces that support social interaction.
- **Activity:** Learners draw or digitally map their community, marking places where people connect (e.g., parks, schools, cafés, sports clubs).
- **Prompt:** “How do these spaces help build relationships?”

### Public Space Design Challenge

- **Objective:** Encourage creative thinking about social spaces.
- **Activity:** Learners design a public space (e.g., park, youth centre) that encourages positive relationships. They must include features that promote safety, inclusion and interaction.
- **Presentation:** Share designs and explain how they support social well-being.

### Mood & Environment Reflection

- **Objective:** Explore how surroundings affect emotions and behavior.
- **Activity:** Learners complete a task with prompts like:
  - “A place that makes me feel calm is...”
  - “A noisy or stressful place I’ve experienced is...”
  - “When I feel stressed, I tend to...”
- **Discussion:** How do these feelings affect how we treat others?

### Peer Mentoring Simulation

- **Objective:** Explore the benefits of peer support.
- **Activity:** Learners take turns role-playing as mentors and mentees. Scenarios might include helping a younger learner with homework, offering advice on friendships or supporting someone new to the school.
- **Reflection:** How can older learners positively influence younger ones?

### Tech Talk Debate

- **Objective:** Explore both sides of technology’s impact.
- **Activity:** Divide the class into two teams:
- **Team A:** Argues that technology strengthens relationships.
- **Team B:** Argues that technology weakens relationships.
- **Debrief:** What points did you agree or disagree with? Can both be true?