

CHAPTER 3

Healthy relationships

A young person's relationships with their parents, siblings, extended family, friends and others are the basis of a happy, healthy life. Having good relationships relieves stress, builds self-esteem, improves mental health and allows a person to lead a better, longer life. Developing healthy relationships relies on good communication and trust. People in positive relationships respect the rights of others and show affection, support and encouragement to each other.

Syllabus outcomes

A student:

- examines and evaluates strategies to manage current and future challenges (PD4-1)
- examines and demonstrates the role help-seeking strategies and behaviours play in supporting themselves and others (PD4-2)
- investigates effective strategies to promote inclusivity, equality and respectful relationships (PD4-3)
- recognises how contextual factors influence attitudes and behaviours and proposes strategies to enhance health, safety, wellbeing and participation in physical activity (PD4-6)
- demonstrates self-management skills to effectively manage complex situations (PD4-9)
- applies and refines interpersonal skills to assist themselves and others to interact respectfully and promote inclusion in a variety of groups or contexts (PD4-10)..

Focus areas

- Types of relationships
- Healthy relationships
- Negative relationships (including bullying)
- Valuing diversity
- Discrimination

Figure 3.1:

Technology is increasingly important in the lives of adolescents.



Types of relationships

In childhood and adolescence, relationships with family, friends, teachers and peers are important as they each play a different, but significant role. However, relationships can be complex and difficult to maintain, especially as young people are changing and developing. During adolescence, new relationships with people will often form and some teenagers may even experience a more intimate relationship.

Some relationships are long lasting, such as the relationships individuals share with their parents, siblings, and life-long friends, whereas others may be short-lived due to conflict, changes in friendship groups or changes in circumstances, such as a change in school or sporting team.

Families

Family structures are diverse and continue to change over time. The most common family types include:

- A nuclear family is the most common type of family structure in Australia. It involves both parents living with and raising children together.
- A single-parent family is one parent living with and raising children alone.
- An extended-family unit is where members of the family, other than the parents, live in the same house and have a caring relationship with children.
- A blended family includes partners and any children from previous relationships, as well as any additional children they have together.
- A foster family has custody and provides care for children whose parents are unable to care for them.
- A childless family is a couple without children.

Families form the foundation of society and provide the protection, love and support that children need to grow into healthy, happy adults. In many ways, the family dynamic and the values they promote contribute to the type of attitudes and behaviours young people have in their lives.



Figure 3.2:
Relationships within families are important.

Friends

One of the most important relationships a young person will have is with their friends. As children grow older, the importance of friendship becomes even more important as independence grows and parental influence lessens. A young person might feel comfortable discussing some things and doing things with friends that they wouldn't with family. Good friends don't judge or put their friends down. They should be there in the good times and be supportive through the bad times. A person's peer group becomes a strong influence on attitudes, behaviours and values that develop during the formative adolescent years.

Intimate relationships

Adolescence is the time of life that many young people experience their first close relationship that involves physical intimacy or sexual feelings. This many come at a time when an individual is unprepared and inexperienced in negotiating the rights and responsibilities that are necessary in a healthy, intimate relationship. It is important that young people come to understand if they are ready to enter into a close, romantic relationship and not be influenced by peer pressure or an idealised version of romance as is portrayed on television and the wider media.

Online relationships

Technology is becoming increasingly important in the lives of adolescents, who are typically using technology to communicate with friends, family members, and strangers and pursue romantic interests. While much of this communication is with individuals with whom they know personally, often the engagement is with strangers via social media, gaming, blogs and forums. At best, these online relationships can foster social engagement and be a way to share common interests and information. At worst, it can be a dangerous environment where predatory behaviour is common.

Although young people may find online relationships convenient and often less confronting than 'real life' interactions, it is important to maintain a balance and develop skills that foster safe, healthy relationships in both environments.



Figure 3.3:

Good friends should be there in the good times and be supportive in the bad times.



Figure 3.4:

Young people should not enter into a close, romantic relationship before they are ready.

Internet activity

Log on to TitanOnline to complete Activity 3.1 to assess the challenges you can face when making new friends.

Did you know?

Social activities account for 91 per cent of all mobile internet use.



Figure 3.5:

Starting secondary school is a time where new friendships are made and developed.

Healthy relationships

Healthy relationships make a person feel safe and happy. While healthy relationships are not necessarily always ‘perfect’, and from time to time might experience conflict, they generally make a person feel good about themselves and the time spent together.

Forming healthy friendships

Starting secondary school is a time where new friendships are made and developed. It may be scary or intimidating for young people without the support or company of old friends who understand them, but making new friends can be an exciting experience. Old friends are important for young people to have and it can be difficult to start at secondary school with different people, particularly if most of their old friends are at other schools. Young people may feel self-conscious and lose confidence when making new friends, as they may feel nervous about whether or not they will fit in.

There are many ways to help ease the stress and find people who share the same interests. One way is to join extra-curricular activities through the school such as drama groups, dance groups, music clubs, gaming clubs and sports teams. It’s possible to ease oneself into a friendship by participating in enjoyable activities.

Things that can help young people make friends more easily are:

- thinking about what they are going to say
- starting conversations
- being interested in others and what they have to say
- being themselves
- being friendly, smiling and acknowledging people
- being confident
- having positive self-talk.

Belonging to a peer group is an important part of adolescence for social and mental health. Groups to belong to can include a group of friends, a sports team, a hobby group or people that live in the same area. Groups can be formed through enjoyment of similar things or values, such as music, hobbies and sports. Having a positive group of friends can provide a great support network and offer encouragement, advice, comfort and companionship. A peer group can also be a big influence in how a person behaves, and contributes to a positive sense of self. A peer group can be helpful through the growth of a young person's identity and feelings of acceptance and inclusion. By expressing feelings to friends that they trust, it can help young people build self-esteem and mental and emotional health. When someone has no one they can talk to, they risk feelings of loneliness and depression.

Growing up is all about learning about oneself, in comparison to the world around us. A person's friends and peers can be both positive and negative influences. In the desire to fit in and belong to various friendship groups, young people can be pressured into doing things they may not feel comfortable as being right, safe or healthy in order to feel accepted by those they feel are important. This is known as peer pressure.

Positive peer pressure can involve increasing an individual's confidence and exposure to new experiences, such as going to your first job interview. In opposition, negative peer pressure can potentially lead to young people engaging in detrimental experiences and risk-taking behaviours. Developing a strong understanding of an individual's values, beliefs and sense of identity can assist them to proactively engage in peer relationships.

Did you know?

An inability to form close friendships is as harmful as smoking or obesity.



Figure 3.6:
Belonging to a peer group is an important part of adolescence.

Rights and responsibilities

To achieve and maintain a positive relationship, it is important that both people know their rights and responsibilities.

In any relationship, everyone has rights. Everyone has the right to:

- feel safe
- be respected
- say 'no'
- change their mind at any time
- express thoughts, feelings and opinions freely
- spend time with other people
- be treated fairly and equally.

Just as someone has rights in relationships, they also assume responsibilities. Everyone has the responsibility to:

- be considerate
- be honest
- take care of themselves
- not threaten or harass
- listen
- avoid causing harm
- provide support.

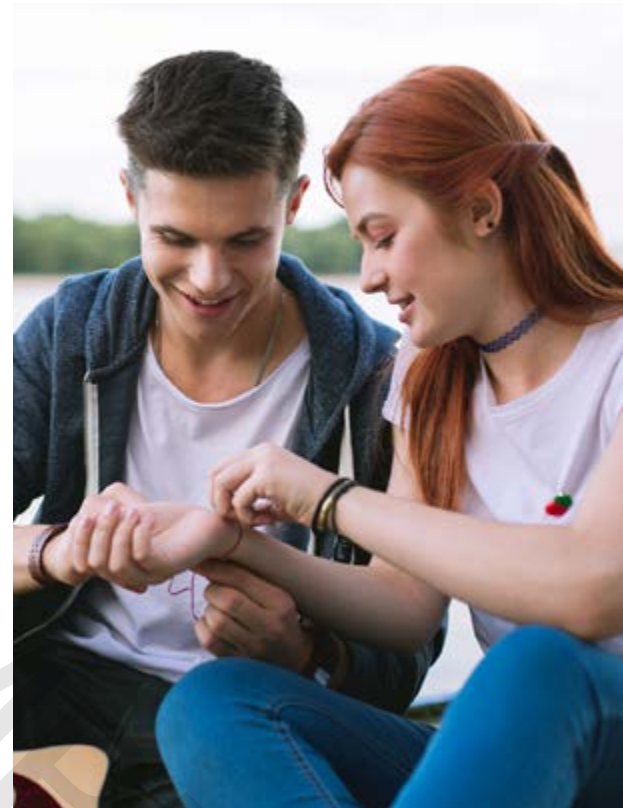


Figure 3.7: Everyone has the right to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions openly.

Developing independence

Gaining independence and the ability to be independent is an important aspect of growing up. It is common for teenagers to want increased freedom. However, gaining increased freedom brings new responsibilities for individuals that can initially be challenging to manage and adapt to. It can be beneficial for teenagers and parents to develop some limits when increased independence is being given to teenagers. Setting rules and abiding by them, helps to develop trust and eventually leads to greater responsibility. Some ways that teenagers can develop independence while still living at home can include:

- completing regular chores at home, such as hanging out washing or drying up
- scheduling appointments by themselves
- beginning a local part-time job
- getting to and from school by themselves.

When gaining independence, learning how to effectively make healthy and safe decisions is another important consideration. Gaining independence is all about having to make decisions by oneself. The environments in which these decisions will need to be made will begin to change and influence young people. Learning to be able to think through the potential outcomes of situations in determining actions and choices is a positive element to increasing independence.

Managing changing relationships

Throughout life, individuals make many relationships and connections with other people. Relationships with friends, family and parents can go through changes and tensions, especially during the teenage years. It's important to know how to manage and deal with changes and possible breakdowns in relationships.

Relationships with family may change as young people go through adolescence. They may distance themselves from their parents and seek more independence. They may also feel like their family doesn't understand them, start to have differing opinions on things and prefer to spend more time with their friends. This can cause tension and conflict to arise as it is a difficult time for both parents and adolescents. It is important to remember that parents are acting in the best interests of their child, even though it may not always seem like it. If disagreements arise, young people should:

- discuss the issue in a calm matter
- try and negotiate an agreement where both adolescent and parents are happy
- listen and try to understand what parents are saying
- follow through with the agreements so that no further issues arise.

Relationships with friends can change over time as they grow older. They may grow into deeper friendships where there is affection, trust and respect or may grow apart entirely. Reasons for changes in relationships can include: lost communication, disagreements, spending time with other people and having less in common than previously.

These changes in relationships are a normal part of growing up. A healthy friendship should allow an individual to become a stronger person, to express themselves freely and be accepted for who they are. Friends should also respect and listen to their friends' opinions, and be supportive and encouraging. It is not uncommon for friendships to experience difficulties from time to time and sometimes relationships will not be repairable. Learning to manage changing relationships and coping with failed relationships is an important life skill.



Figure 3.8:

Relationships with friends can change over time as they grow older.

Learning activity

1. Think about three relationships that you share with others. For example, your relationship with your mother, father, sibling, friend, coach, teacher. Write down four qualities that these relationships possess.
2. Explain the importance of rights and responsibilities in relationships.
3. Make a list of all the groups and clubs that are available for students to join at your school and think of an idea for a new group or club.

Communication and relationships

Effective communication is important in establishing and maintaining positive relationships. It is also important to understand how the type of communication style can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings. An individual should aim to communicate assertively and avoid an aggressive, passive-aggressive or passive style of communication. To build healthy relationships, communication needs to be clear, direct and respectful. There should be an atmosphere where problems and conflict can be discussed without harm or abuse.

Styles of communication

There are many different ways to communicate and each person has their preferred way of communicating. The type of communication a person chooses might vary depending on the situation or the audience. They may choose to communicate verbally, non-verbally (e.g. using body language) and/or in writing. Whichever communication method is used, there are four main styles of communication: passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive and assertive.



Figure 3.9: Assertive communicators tend to have high self-esteem.

- **Passive communication:** a style in which individuals avoid expressing their opinions or feelings. They fail to protect their rights or identify and meet their needs. Passive communication is usually caused by low self-esteem. Passive individuals allow grievances and annoyances to mount and are prone to outbursts and blowing events out of proportion. After the outburst they feel shame, guilt and confusion, and return to being passive.
- **Passive-aggressive communication:** a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but act out anger in a subtle, indirect way. Passive-aggressive communicators feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. They often manipulate others to get their own way and often appear honest but make underlying snide comments or sulk when things don't go their way.
- **Aggressive communication:** a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Aggressive communicators are verbally and/or physically abusive. This form of communication is usually caused by low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness.
- **Assertive communication:** a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others. Assertive communicators tend to have high self-esteem. They value themselves, their time and their needs. They advocate for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others.

Communication using technology

Young people are increasingly using modern modes of technology to communicate and interact with each other. Interpersonal communication is important in establishing and maintaining relationships. For communication to be effective, it must be clear. Modern society has seen a communication evolution and the developments have shown, more than ever, that the world is a global village. While technology has seen landline phones, letters and faxes replaced by mobile phones, text messages, emails and social networking, it is still important to use words that communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings.



Figure 3.10: Effective communication is important in maintaining positive relationships.

Internet activity

Log on to TitanOnline to complete Activity 3.2 and test your emotional intelligence by completing the online quiz.

Did you know?

Emotions are in fact contagious. It is proven that a person will unconsciously copy the emotions of those around them.

Other effective strategies to enhance communication

Promote empathy

Learning to be empathetic towards others is another key strategy that improves communication. Empathy involves looking at situations through the perspective of another. An empathetic person tries to consider and understand what another individual is feeling and thinking in regard to a certain situation. Individuals can demonstrate empathy in various ways, including cognitively, emotionally and compassionately. A compassionate, empathetic individual is said to demonstrate their understanding in the most practical manner. For example, they sit on the sideline of a sporting game to ensure that another player gets equal time on the field.

Be conscious of non-verbal communication

Communication of an idea, thought or instruction does not solely occur from verbal communication methods. Non-verbal behaviour and position can also significantly influence how the message is communicated and received by the other individual. By crossing arms or placing hands on hips when communicating, suggests either aggression or a direct instruction, whereas if the hands remain behind the back or gently to the side, it suggests that the communication is more open to interpretation by all involved.

Be a good listener

It is a great idea to put as much effort into listening as it is into thinking about what is to be a reply. If a person listens as well as talk, they avoid misunderstandings and show respect for what others are saying. It makes people feel valued and understood.

Learning activity

1. Discuss some reasons why relationships can begin to change during the teenage years.
2. List some of your own ways to keep a friendship healthy and stay in touch with friends that you don't see very often.
3. Create two scenarios where a parent and teenager are having a disagreement. Provide ways to resolve the conflict and make both parties happy.
4. Create a script with dialogue between friends to show passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive and assertive communication.
5. For the passive, passive-aggressive and aggressive dialogue in the previous question, choose an assertive alternative.
6. Compare and contrast popular modes of communication today and in your parents' generation when they were your age.
7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of acknowledging there is a problem in a relationship.