

# Relationships

TITLE  
**05**





# Relationships

This unit aims to enhance the learners’ understanding of interpersonal relationships including relationships with familiar people, friendships and loving/romantic relationships.

The activities are suggestions only as there remains the need to carefully plan and personalise learning experiences. When you know a learner well you will be aware of how they communicate whether that be with behaviour, body language, speech or vocalisation or using aids such as photographs, symbols or signs or other technology available to them. You can adapt or extend what is suggested to suit your learner’s age, cognitive ability and specific needs.



Links to Curriculum for Excellence	Learning intentions	Success criteria
<div><div>▶ I understand that a wide range of different kinds of friendships and relationships exists. HWB 2-44a</div><div>▶ I am aware of how friendships are formed and that likes, dislikes, special qualities and needs can influence relationships. HWB 0-44a/1-44a</div><div>▶ I understand and can explain the importance of, and need for, commitment, trust and respect in loving and sexual relationships. I understand the different contexts of such relationships including marriage. HWB 3-44c</div></div>	<div>With the appropriate level of support and resources children and young people learn:</div> <div><div>▶ That they engage in different kinds of relationships with family and peers.</div><div>▶ What a friend is and how to be a friend.</div><div>▶ To recognise feelings (likes, affection, love, attraction).</div><div>▶ That when people are in love they can live together or marry. This can be with someone of the opposite or same sex.</div></div>	<div><div>▶ I recognise self and show signs of recognising familiar others (family, peers).</div><div>▶ I show preference for some people.</div><div>▶ I can interact with peers/ express a desire to be with peers.</div><div>▶ I can identify things I do to make or maintain friendships.</div><div>▶ I show awareness of different feelings: likes, affection, love, attraction.</div><div>▶ I understand that when people are in love they can live together or marry.</div></div>

## Links to other themes

Learning within these other thematic units will support learning on this theme:

- ▶ Personal Space and Boundaries
- ▶ Puberty



## Why this learning matters

Children develop relationships with those around them. First bonds are built with parents and carers, then children start to engage with others who will play a role in their lives, including peers. These relationships matter to children and young people with complex additional support needs as much as they do to any child, but they will need support over their lifetime so that we can help them to connect with us, to communicate and to collaborate with others.

When it comes to learning about *relationships* in this thematic unit, it is important that we have a good understanding of the ways in which the child's disability affects how they process information or communicate. As adults, in *our relationship with learners*, we must be interested, engaged and respectful toward each and every child: this is how we model the way interpersonal relationships should be.

### Activities, ideas and supports for learning

There are 3 sections in this unit. We begin with exploring the most familiar of relationships, those in the child's family. Then we look at peer relationships and friendships. Finally this unit explores feelings related to close, intimate relationships; love and attraction. These may be challenging concepts for some of our learners, but they matter when we consider the human desire for love and meaningful connections with others.

### 1. My family

### 2. Friends and friendship

### 3. Relationships: love and attraction.

## 1. My family

The first consideration when it comes to relationships are relationships within the child or young person's family.

### My family portrait

With the support of the learner's family and/or carers collect photographs of key people, this could be those the child lives with, but should also include family members close to them. People in the portrait could include adults the child or young person knows well from regular respite care. Ensure everyone has given permission for their photo to be used, and have parents/carers tell you a bit about who people are. With the learner, create a poster/portrait of each child and their family. Place the child/young person's photograph in the centre and around them place the people who are important to them.

- ▶ Encourage the child/young person to identify people and label everyone. Talk about who is in each photograph.
- ▶ Remember to find out what names people use at home so that you can use them too; for example gran or nana or perhaps a name from a language spoken at home?
- ▶ Find out and explore what the child/young person likes to do with these people. When you discuss the plan you have to create these portraits, you could ask parents and carers for some indications of what each child/young person likes or likes to do with close family members... Swimming? Stories? Playing games? Chill watching TV?
- ▶ You can explore what different people in the family do for a child/young person to care for and look after them. *Who makes your breakfast? Who helps you get ready for bed?*



- ▶ You can explore the emotional bonds between children and family members. *Who makes you smile? Who makes you feel happy? Who do you hug/cuddle? You can acknowledge when the child or young person is expressing/communicating likes, affection or love for a person.*
- ▶ Decorate the personal family portraits with words, images or photographs that capture any of the above insights.

### All our families are different

Compare and contrast each of the portraits as they develop: *Who lives with their mums? Who lives with their gran? Who has brothers and who doesn't? Who has sisters and who doesn't? Who lives with their birth family and who doesn't?* In doing so acknowledge that all our families are different. You can use the slide set from Early Level *Our Families* to create/extend conversations around different kinds of families: **Early Level - RSHP** Perhaps you could insert photographs of your own class members families in some of the slides.

### Family events and celebrations

Family events can be acknowledged in class. Parents/carers can be encouraged to share photographs and stories of family gatherings like weddings, religious or community events so that you can talk about them in class. Parents and carers could come into the class to help share and talk about family celebrations, maybe bringing food or music or smells of things that accompany a celebration.

### When things change/sad times

Through discussion and play it is possible to explore change or loss. Children and young people can be confused or sad when someone is very ill, when someone leaves, when someone dies. In your regular communication with home do encourage parents and carers to understand that they can tell you about home circumstances, both happy and sad, because these can impact on behaviours or be times when you can support a child with understanding change or loss.



## 2. Friends and friendship

Typically functioning children will go through stages of development, normally linked to chronological age, that define their understanding and experience of friendships. According to psychologist Robert Selman there are five stages to friendship, the stages are not concrete, but they are worth us considering so that we can consider how to best support the child with complex additional support needs to build capacity and experience friendship.

- ▶ In their early years children start with what Selman calls *momentary playmates*, children are keen to play, friendship is about having fun with someone who likes what they like. In this stage children have limited ability to see other perspectives.
- ▶ Then, typically around 4 to 9 years old, children think about friendship as *one way assistance*. So a friend is someone who does nice things for them but they do not generally consider what they bring to the friendship, but children do consider having friends is important.
- ▶ As they grow, in their primary school years, children then build *two way, fair weather cooperation*, meaning if they do something nice for a friend they expect that back. Children can be concerned with fitting in with peers and there are risks of some children dominating or excluding others.
- ▶ In their upper primary school years and early teens friendship might be seen as an *intimate, mutually shared relationships*, so friends really care about each other, bonds are created.
- ▶ Then, in their teens, young people might then build *mature friendships*, with emotional closeness being prioritised.



There are obvious challenges to supporting children and young people with complex additional support needs to form and sustain friendships. Developmentally they will not follow the same trajectory as a typically functioning child. Opportunities to make friends can also be undermined by social isolation and the level of care and support adults might provide which can impinge on independent social experiences. However, with all this in mind, it is important to reflect on the aspirations we have for children and young people. Friendships are a part of a good childhood and it is within our power to provide the best possible supports or scaffolding to build peer relationships that can become friendships.

### Acts of kindness

Kindness is at the heart of friendship; it could be explained as *kindness means doing helpful or good things for another person*. It is in the 'doing' of kind acts that understanding and helping behaviours will be developed. Kindness can be expressed in words but also actions that can be acknowledged – picking something up someone has dropped, opening a door, smiling at someone as encouragement, sharing a book or toy.

As part of learning about kindness you could allocate kindness buddies – the challenge is that whoever is a kindness buddy does what they can to be kind to others. This can be done so that everyone knows who is a kindness buddy that day – or it can be done anonymously with the kindness buddy trying to do their job but keep it quiet and then they are declared at the end of the day; *Did anyone spot who was being extra kind today?*





**Playing together**

Whilst acknowledging the child’s right to play with other children *of their choice* - it is important to look for preferences when it comes to who the child/young person wants to be with/play with - you can take opportunities through play to foster new connections between children and young people. An older child can help a younger child learn something. A shared interest or skill can be highlighted, and a play connection encouraged. A child who is reticent to play with something/at something can be paired with an enthusiastic child. At the end of every day/session when sitting together new or caring play partnerships can be acknowledged and celebrated.

**Sharing**

Friends share things with each other. It is important to acknowledge when a child shares. You can of course set up activities where it is necessary for children to share – be explicit about this being a sharing job and check out with the child, how it felt to share.

**Buddies**

Children can reflect on what helps people get along, and what helps when they are not getting along. Buddies can have a role to help other children, to keep an eye out for children who have no-one to play with. The role can be developed with older children in the school.

**What is a friend?**  
**(Supporting PowerPoint available)**

The PowerPoint prompt poses the question, the slides that follow look to establish awareness of what a friend is. For each, questions and discussion can follow about the child’s connections to peers. *Who do you play with? Who do you have fun with?*

**What is a friend?**  
A friend can be a boy or a girl  
Friends play together  
Friends are nice to each other  
Friends have fun together  
Friends share things  
Friends listen to each other  
Friends make us happy

**My friend(s) and Me**  
**(Set of cards as download available)**

This activity will support children and young people to name what they do with friends and what they bring to friendships; it can be extended to think about what attributes their friends bring to the friendship. The activity can be facilitated with one, two or more in the group if they are friends. *Same* and *different* will be taught through the maths curriculum for pre-Early Level learners and so can be used here.

Do you do this with your friend?	Are you good at these things/Is your friend good at these things?
Spend time together	Good at listening
Have fun	Being kind
Go swimming	Taking turns
Play games on the computer	Being helpful
Tell jokes	Playing with a friend
Listen to music	Doing things my friend likes to do
Play outside	
Go shopping	
Watch movies	

A photograph of several children in a swimming pool. They are wearing swim caps and goggles, and some are reaching their arms up. The water is blue and the background is slightly blurred.

A photograph of two children in a kitchen. A girl in a yellow sweater is using a whisk in a glass bowl, and a boy in a striped shirt is standing next to her, looking on. There are various kitchen items on the counter.



3. Relationships: love and attraction

With puberty comes new feelings about self and others. Young people can be attracted to others, but not necessarily understand those feelings or how to navigate them. They will also observe loving relationships around them, or via media they access. These activities build awareness of personal feelings and understanding that when adults love each other they might live together or get married.

When we like/fancy/are attracted to someone  
(Supporting PowerPoint available)

This activity/tool can be used as part of a programme of learning around relationships but can also be used in specific circumstances where you are supporting a young person to understand their feelings or behaviours. As can be seen above the terms like/ fancy/are attracted to.... are used. Would simply using the term/euphemism ‘like’ might be misunderstood by a young person? As someone who knows what terms young people you work with will use, make changes to this language as necessary. Make any changes to the PowerPoint provided.

To begin, use the PowerPoint slides with images of couples expressing love or intimacy to ask and discuss: *What might these people be thinking about each other?* Young people are likely to respond with, or can be introduced to terms such as: *they are happy, they are kissing, they are hugging, they are in love.* Then progress on to the next slides, one by one, to discuss feelings of attraction and consideration of when this is reciprocated or not. The slides say:

When we like someone

- ▶ When you like someone that’s okay.
- ▶ When you like someone you might want them to be your girlfriend or boyfriend.
- ▶ When you like someone they might like you back. They might want to be your girlfriend or boyfriend.
- ▶ You can hold hands.
- ▶ You can talk.

- ▶ You can message each other.
- ▶ You can kiss.
- ▶ You can hug.
- ▶ When you like someone they might **not** feel the same way. That’s okay too.
- ▶ You **must not** make someone be your girlfriend or boyfriend. That would make them sad and unhappy.

What is love?  
(Supporting PowerPoint available)

With this activity young people consider what love means and that people who love each other can live together or get married. Whilst images are provided in the supporting PowerPoint these could be supplemented by photos of family members or familiar people, including school staff with their partners/husbands/wives. Mixed and same sex couples are represented in the images and messages, if there are opportunities to ask for photographs from home then familiar lesbian and gay relationships could be represented. Learners can be introduced to the terms *gay* and *lesbian*.

- ▶ We love a person who is special to us.
- ▶ Love makes us feel happy inside.
- ▶ When adults are in love they can live together or get married.
- ▶ These adults are in love. /series of images

This is Jane and Eddie. They are in love. They live together.

This is Michael and Mary. They are in love. They are married.

This is Tom and Andrew. They are in love. They live together.

This is Fiona and Maria. They are in love. They are married.

- ▶ We love a person who is special to us. Love makes us feel happy inside.



Jane and Eddie



Michael and Mary



Tom and Andrew



Fiona and Maria



### When young people in school have a relationship

In the Success Criteria listed earlier we stated that by engaging in learning supported by this unit of work, then a young person would be able to *show awareness of different feelings: likes, affection, love, attraction*. For those young people who want to form relationships with someone they like or are attracted to, these relationships may blossom or be evident in school or college. For many young people with complex additional support needs school/college may be the only space where they interact with peers. Young people might want to spend time with someone, hold hands, kiss or express their feelings.

Having a boyfriend or a girlfriend is an appropriate thing for adolescents, and so acknowledging the particular circumstances of our learners with ASN it is beholden upon us to acknowledge their rights to relationships and to work with them to build understanding of what might be appropriate behaviour and what isn't, depending on the setting. For example this might mean understanding that it is okay to hold hands in the social areas or in the playground, but not necessarily in class. It would surely be an infringement of the rights of young people to stop them expressing affection or attraction?

Respecting the rights of young people in this way may raise questions or concerns for adults about consent. To be clear we are not talking about sexual activity but about the normal expression of adolescent feelings and attractions. By observing how young people are together, by knowing young people, professionals and parents/carers can understand whether a young person is happy and no coercion is taking place. Where personal relationships bring happiness and joy, we can do what we can to give them space to develop.

### And finally....

#### I can indicate to an adult if I am upset

Children/young people may be upset about aspects of learning about relationships. As they learn we want them to understand and remember who they can find support from. The learning activities undertaken as part of this unit can support children and young people to identify who they can tell if they are upset. Of course it is also the responsibility of adults who provide education and care to know the learner well and to be aware of changes in behaviours that might communicate worry or distress.

#### Learner evaluation

Learners should be asked to show a preference as to whether they like or dislike the activities that are part of their RSHP learning. It may be possible to tell if the child/young person is enjoying their participation as it happens, this is facilitated when the adult knows the learner well and is able to interpret reactions. Whether at school or at home, you may have already worked on developing an object of reference or signifier for when you want to know a child/young person's opinion. Learner evaluation will help you to make learning more enjoyable, relevant and useful for the learner.



