



# Relationships

Do you have someone you can rely on for support? Feeling disconnected from important people in your life? How are your relationships?

Relationships are an important aspect of social and emotional wellbeing. How we relate to others at home, work and in the community can have a big impact on our lives. When relationships become challenging it can affect our mental health. It is important to recognise when relationship problems are negatively impacting us and others, and to take appropriate action to get help.

**Relationship challenges and interpersonal conflict represent one of the most common issues for which people seek the support of a counsellor, mental health professional or helpline.**

## The importance of relationships

Relationships are defined as our connection to other significant people in our lives. Every day, all of us are involved to some degree in the give and take of relationships.

These daily interactions can bring us joy, fun, information and support when we need it. Good relationships are a key protective factor against mental ill health and other wellbeing issues. Strong relationships enhance our: safety and security; happiness; life fulfilment; sense of identity; social participation; access to support; and even our ability to function to our full potential in areas such as work and education.

## Some relationships you might have include:

- Family relationships e.g. spouse, parents, siblings, children, extended family;
- Romantic relationships e.g. girlfriend, boyfriend, partner;
- Friendships e.g. your mates, peers, social acquaintances;
- Formal relationships e.g. with coaches, teachers, carers; and
- Workplace relationships e.g. colleagues, employers, clients.

## The impact of relationship stress in the workplace

**Personal:** Bringing family, social and other relationship issues into the workplace can be a big drain personally and professionally. Meaningful and fulfilling relationships are essential to our ability to do well at work.

**Professional:** Experiencing conflict and relationship issues in the workplace is a major source of workplace stress, safety concerns, absenteeism, staff turnover, poor work performance, reduced productivity, and loss of fulfilment and potential at work.

### Types of relationship challenges you may experience:

- **Conflict:** Arguments, disagreements of opinion, fighting, or failure to resolve differences. This conflict can be passive or active in nature.
- **Bullying:** Ongoing misuse of power or position to verbally, physically or psychologically target someone to harass, abuse or act systematically unfair to them.
- **Power imbalance:** Misuse of a position of power to negatively control, coerce, threaten, isolate or victimise someone.
- **Communication breakdowns:** Inability to communicate respectfully and productively with another person producing negative consequences.
- **Destructive behaviours:** Negative impacts from other people's behaviours, actions or words that put safety, wellbeing or livelihood at risk.
- **Difficult personalities:** Attitudinal or behavioural traits that make a person difficult to communicate with, 'get along with', or be around.
- **Violence and abuse:** Actions that hurt or harm. This includes family violence and violence outside the home: threats, physical violence, sexual abuse, financial abuse, behaviours that impede on self-autonomy and legal rights.

## When do relationship challenges become a problem?

It is a fact of life that we will not always get along positively with everyone we meet, work with, or live with.

### So when do relationship challenges become a problem?

- When you are worried, stressed or anxious about your relationships.
- Whenever you feel unsafe or under threat or have experienced violence.
- If you are feeling depressed, sad, unhappy over a prolonged period.
- If they are impacting your physical needs/health: sleep, diet, exercise, wellness.
- If they are negatively impacting other areas of life: social participation, work, education.
- When you have tried to resolve issues/problems and they keep arising.
- If you have negative thoughts about self-harm or suicide.
- If you feel you may act in a way that is out of control or hurt someone.

## Practical steps that can help:

- **Talk to someone:** a trusted friend, family member colleague, mentor, supervisor, your GP.
- **Support for personal relationships:** contact a relationships counsellor or service.
- **Avenues for workplace concerns:** HR, Mediation, Formal Complaints, Unions, EAPs.
- **Protective mental health factors:**
  - > Make time for things you enjoy.
  - > Connect with positive people in your life.
  - > Look after yourself physically – get rest, eat well, hydrate, exercise.
  - > Connect with help: GP, EAP, Counsellor, Psychologist or Help Line.
- **Stay safe:** If violence occurs seek police or legal assistance and keep yourself safe.

### Need Help?

If any of the topics covered raise concerns for you, please reach out. No-one needs to face problems alone. The OzHelp wellbeing and support team are available during business hours. Lifeline 13 11 14 is available 24/7 for crisis support.

T 1300 694 357 | E [info@ozhelp.org.au](mailto:info@ozhelp.org.au) | W [ozhelp.org.au](http://ozhelp.org.au)

*Please note: The information in this booklet is not intended to be a substitute for specific independent health advice, nor is it intended as a self-treatment program. Such decisions should be made in consultation with a health professional.*