

Lesson 3: Social Dimension



Everyday you interact with a variety of people. Every time you make a connection with another person, you form a relationship. You have been given some relationships—for example, those with family members. You choose other relationships, such as those with friends.

Relationships and Roles

role: the expected social behaviour of an individual in a given situation

Do you talk and behave the same way when you interact with a younger sibling, teacher, or school acquaintance? Of course you don't. Your **role** in each of these relationships is different, so the expectations for how you will speak and behave will also be different. Your younger sibling may expect you to be informal and protective. Your teacher may expect you to be polite and more formal. A school acquaintance may expect you to be casual but not too personal.

How did you learn about your various roles? Your family probably taught you some of these behaviours. You discovered more by observing others in your community and in the media.

In this lesson you will explore relationships and roles. You will think about unhealthy relationships, and you will discuss how to develop and maintain healthy relationships.



Family relationships may be very important to you. They probably always will be; few bonds are stronger than those between family members. Your family has a unique personality—just as you do. Many factors combine to make a family unique. For example, family composition is one component of the family personality. Following are some of the most common types of families:

- ***Nuclear family.*** This family group is composed of a couple and one or more biological or adopted children. This family group is also called a *traditional family*.
- ***Extended family.*** This family group is made up of three or more generations—usually grandparents, their son or daughter, and their grandchildren—who live in the same household or very close to one another.
- ***Foster family.*** In this family group, an individual or a couple provides a substitute family for children referred by the courts or government agencies.
- ***Single-parent family.*** This family group consists of one parent and one or more biological or adopted children. This family group is also called a *lone-parent family*.
- ***Blended family.*** This family group consists of a couple—at least one of whom has children from a previous relationship—and their children together. This family group is also called a *stepfamily*.
- ***Grandparent-led family.*** In this family group, grandparents are raising children whose biological parents have died or can no longer take care of the children.



1. Families differ in more ways than size and composition. With a partner or small group brainstorm some other ways that families differ.

Compare your answers with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.

Did You Know?

Until the late 1960s most families portrayed on television were upper-middle class, white, nuclear families. Examples include the Andersons in *Father Knows Best* (1950s) and the Cleavers in *Leave it to Beaver* (1950s). *All in the Family* (1970s) and *Roseanne* (1990s) were two of the first shows to portray working-class families with real challenges. *Julia* (premiered in 1968) and *The Cosby Show* (1980s) were revolutionary because they depicted African-American families. In addition, *Julia* was a single mother. *The Brady Bunch* (1970s) showed a blended family. The TV show *Married ... with Children* (premiered in 1987) was unusual because it portrayed a family that didn't seem to like each other; viewers sensed that each member of the Bundy family would be better off not being a part of this family.



2. a. With a partner or friend, discuss the portrayal of families on TV today. What types of families do they represent? How do the family members in each of these families relate to one another? Are the portrayals of these families and their problems realistic? What types of problems do these TV families face? How do they deal with these problems?
- b. How does your family deal with problems?

Compare your answers with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.

Changing Relationships and Roles



You are preparing for an important transition in your life—the transition from teenager to adult. Part of growing up is becoming more independent, making more decisions on your own, taking responsibility for your decisions, and being accountable.

As you gain more independence, your relationship and role with your family are bound to change. You are spending less time with your family and more time with your friends, teachers, employers, and co-workers. Your family probably has less influence on you now than when you were younger. You may have different ideas about your life choices than your family has. This transition from teenager to adult can lead to conflict.

Some amount of conflict is normal and healthy as families work out new roles and relationships. When major changes occur in families, extra pressure is placed on the relationships. For example, if you are having to adjust to a new stepparent or new stepsiblings, you are facing a major change. It is a change that will certainly create pressure on relationships.

3. What are some other life changes that can cause conflicts in families?

Compare your answers with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.



How do you handle conflict in your family? Do you withdraw from the argument, pretend that there is no problem, or simply change the subject? Do you always give in to others to keep peace? Do you blame and accuse others? Do you refuse to listen to the concerns of others? None of these actions really solve a conflict. Instead, these actions may harm the relationship.

Dealing with conflict is not easy, but it is necessary to resolve your differences. The strategies you use to resolve the conflict can help to strengthen your relationship.

Addressing the issues, as they occur, helps to keep the conflict in perspective. Ignoring the conflict or hoping it will go away will not work. Sometimes a small issue becomes a major sore point by the time you are ready to deal with the conflict. Expressing your feelings and getting complaints out in the open where they can be dealt with is better than bottling them up inside. However, avoid hurting others when you express your feelings. When a conflict occurs, remain cool and calm. Try taking a deep breath or going for a walk to cool down. Choose a time when you are calm to discuss the conflict.

Step-by-Step Guide to Resolving Conflict Successfully	
Step 1	Define the conflict. Describe the conflict in clear, concrete terms. Focus on behaviours or problems, not people. Don't blame or lay guilt trips.
Step 2	Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Try not to prejudge the individual or the circumstance before you have all of the information. Listen to the other person's point of view. Ask questions that will clarify the situation. Explain how you see the problem. Communicate your understanding positively and respectfully.
Step 3	Take turns offering alternative solutions to resolve the conflict. If possible, offer a way for the other person to save face.
Step 4	Examine consequences of each solution. Then agree to a solution that you both can accept. Sometimes you will have to compromise, but a compromise can be a win-win situation because each person gets something. The important thing is that you work toward achieving an acceptable resolution.



For more strategies for managing conflict, view Segment 3: Conflict Resolution on your Student Support CD.

role-play:
an activity in which a person plays a part to practise a skill and receive feedback

Role-play is an effective technique for learning social skills. It provides opportunities for practising skills and receiving feedback. With a partner, role-play the following scenario:

You borrowed your sister's car and drove it on a rough logging road and you blew out a tire. You know you were not supposed to take the car "off road." Your sister is angry and you don't have the money to buy a new tire. How will you resolve this conflict?

4. Discuss with your partner the way you each acted and the way you each felt in the role-play. Did you follow the conflict-resolution steps given in this lesson?



Compare your answer with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.

Unhealthy Relationships

Families provide many important needs for their members—including enhancing well-being through all the dimensions of health. Families that manage to achieve this enormous task are called functional. Unfortunately not all families function in a healthy manner.

In a dysfunctional family, one or more family members may be victims of abuse. Children are particularly vulnerable, but spouses, siblings, parents, and grandparents can all be subject to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Some families also experience spiritual abuse.

Physical abuse is the most visible form of abuse. Victims often suffer physical injuries from deliberate violent acts such as punching, kicking, shaking, slapping, pushing, beating, biting, or burning. Physical abuse also includes failing to meet a child's basic needs for clothing, nutrition, medical attention, education, and adequate supervision.



Emotional abuse includes verbal attacks and criticizing, belittling, insulting, or threatening. Emotional abuse also includes ignoring, rejecting, or isolating. Because emotional abuse damages the self-esteem of victims, they may come to see themselves as unworthy of love and affection.

Sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child or non-consenting adult. It includes a range of sexual behaviour from unwanted kissing to forced intercourse. Sexual abuse also includes non-contact abuse, such as exposure to child pornography.

Spiritual abuse is the name given to abusive practices in religious organizations and groups. It usually involves control and manipulation by spiritual leaders, but may be supported by members. Spiritual abuse is not necessarily deliberate, but may be the outcome of a particular doctrine. Spiritual abuse often involves secrecy and fear.

Note: The types of abuse described here may be interlinked; they often go together.

Abuse in families can be very complex. A lot of shame and anxiety is attached to the situation. Victims may not want to report the abuse for the following reasons:

- They fear that revealing the abuse may cause the family to break up.
- They may believe that the abuse is their fault.
- They are afraid of retribution, or punishment, from the abuser if they tell.

Moreover, after an episode of abuse, abusers are often remorseful. They may apologize and ask for forgiveness. The victims may hope the abuse will end. Without intervention, however, the abuse will most likely begin again. The violence may even escalate in subsequent episodes. Therefore, it is very important that victims of abuse seek help to end the abuse.

5. If you are a victim of abuse, you've probably thought of a thousand things that you could try to do to end it. Perhaps you've already tried some. What are some things you can do to end the abuse?

Compare your answer with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.



Did you know that when adults create their own families, many of them repeat the same dysfunctional patterns that they experienced as children? People who grow up around abusive or disrespectful behaviour may become abusers themselves because they have not learned to treat others with kindness and respect. Alternatively, people who grow up around abusive or disrespectful behaviour may become victims of abuse again because they don't expect to be treated with kindness and respect. This cycle can be broken with counselling and education. Many communities offer family counselling and parenting courses.

Go to page 6 of Assignment Booklet 1A and respond to question 5 of Section 1.

Developing and Maintaining Healthy Relationships



Chances are you spend a lot of time with your friends. You're probably aware that when you can share your experiences, feelings, and ideas with friends and when friends support and help you, your life is enriched.

You also know that friendships change over time—some friendships grow stronger and others end. Losing a friend can be painful and disappointing.

It's a good idea to have several friends; relying on only one or two people puts too much pressure on everyone. The best way to make new friends is to become involved with activities in the community. Talk to people, get to know them, and find out if you have something in common with them.



For information on making and maintaining friends, view Segment 4: Relationships on your Student Support CD.

6. The following statement was expressed in the video segment: “A relationship works best when we know what we want from a relationship and what we can contribute to it.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Compare your answer with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.



Ms. Chan: In order to have friends, you need to be a friend. What are some of the qualities that make friendships richer and stronger?

Ashley: Being positive, upbeat, and warm.

Jamal: Being honest and dependable. Being respectful of others.

While spending time with your friends is important, you need your own space too. Make time for yourself and other people who are important to you. Continue to be an independent person with your own opinions and interests.

To maintain healthy relationships, set limits and boundaries on your friendships so you feel comfortable and safe. Expect and insist that others respect your boundaries and, in turn, always honour the boundaries of others. Of course, not all friendships are healthy. Reconsider your friendship with anyone who

- violates your boundaries
- is very clingy or needy
- lies or is dishonest
- engages in illegal or unethical behaviour
- is physically, emotionally, or sexually abusive

Rate Your Relationship

There's a big difference between a healthy relationship and one that's harmful to either one or both of the people involved. Whether the relationship is with a relative, a friend, or a date, you can give it a quick check-up for health. Use this list to check up an important relationship in your life. Just put in the name of the person—a friend, a date, a member of your family—in the blank space provided and then answer “agree” or “disagree” for each statement. (You can try this list each time you want to think about a relationship in your life.)

How Does Your Relationship Rate?

- We like spending time together.
- I can express warm feelings and affection with _____.
- I can trust _____.
- I trust _____ with my feelings.
- _____ trusts me.
- Most of the time, I understand _____ and _____ understands me.
- When we don't understand each other, we make a bigger effort by really talking and really listening.
- I am honest with _____ and _____ is honest with me.
- I never feel scared or threatened in this relationship.
- We are interested in what happens in each other's lives.
- I like the person that _____ is.
- I am proud to be seen with _____ and _____ is proud to be seen with me.
- I don't feel pressured by _____ to do things I really don't want to do.
- When we don't agree, we can talk about it.
- When we don't agree, we can usually work out a compromise.
- When we have a problem or a disagreement, _____ is willing to spend time working it out.
- We enjoy spending time together doing a variety of things, not just one or two activities.
- There is no violence or abuse, ever in our relationship. (This is really important. If you disagree with this one, you need to leave the relationship. If you need help to do this, it's time to get some help for yourself.)

If you have some “disagrees” on your list, now is the time to work them out so that the relationship can be better. Use your list as a starting point for talking about things that concern you. Have your relationship partner do this checklist and then discuss your results with each other.

If your partner won't discuss these issues with you, it may be time to think about the real value and health of this relationship in your life.

¹ “Rate Your Relationship” taken from *Relationships* (Lifechoices Series). Campbell, Judith (Pearson Education Canada, 1996), 25. Reproduced with permission by Pearson Canada.



Communication plays a big part in building social relationships. For ways to improve your communication skills, view Segment 5: Communication Strategies on your Student Support CD.

Ending a Relationship

Unfortunately, relationships break down. Most people experience a relationship break-up at some time in their lives. Even if both people in the relationship agree that ending the relationship is the best course of action, there will still be feelings of sadness and loss. If the relationship is ended by one person, the other person will likely feel hurt and rejected. They may feel confused or angry.



Ending a relationship isn't easy but there are things you can do to make it less painful.

- Choose a time and place that will let both of you keep your dignity. Ending a relationship in public will only add to the pain. If, however, you fear an angry or violent reaction, choose a place where there are others within hearing distance.
- Be clear that it's over. Don't leave any doubts or false hopes for the other person.
- Be as honest as possible. This doesn't mean that you should blurt out that you found the other person dull and boring, but tell him or her that you have spent some time thinking and that you no longer want to continue the relationship. You might say something like "It hasn't worked for me." Or "I want other things out of life."
- Don't drag out the ending. It is time to leave when you have clearly told the other person you're ending the relationship; you know your message has gotten through—even if it's not accepted; and you've indicated what you would like to happen in the future.
- Express your feelings with sensitivity. You may feel relieved or glad that the relationship is ending but breaking up can really hurt feelings. Ending a relationship is not easy for either person. Feelings of grief and loss are a part of the healing process for both.



Ashley: Are there things that you shouldn't do when you're ending a relationship?

Mr. Romanchuk: Yes, there are. Most of them relate to being sensitive to the other person's feelings. Here's a list of things not to do.

How Not to End a Relationship

- Don't tell other people that you intend to break up before you tell the person.
- Don't text message or leave a voice mail message that you're ending the relationship.
- Don't break up in a public place, unless you fear a violent reaction.
- Don't cut off all contact without giving the person an explanation.
- Don't expect that you can end a relationship without anybody feeling hurt.

After the Ending

It may take time to accept that a relationship has ended and it's time to move on. Following are some tips that may help in getting through a relationship break-up.

- **Keep busy.** Spend time with friends, do things you enjoy doing—go for a run, read a book, listen to music.
- **Try something new.** For example, take that course you've always wanted to do, take up rock climbing, or try out for a drama group.
- **Remind yourself that you're okay.** Don't spend too much time blaming yourself (or the other person) for the failure of the relationship. Think about your achievements, friends, and people who have said good things about you.
- **Talk with someone you trust.** This may be a friend, family member, a teacher, or a counsellor. There are lots of people to help you through this difficult time.



7. With a partner or in a small group, discuss the following questions.
 - a. Why is it important to end some relationships in your life?
 - b. What feelings might be involved in ending a relationship? How can a person deal with these feelings?

Compare your answers with the Suggested Responses at the end of the lesson.

Go to page 8 of Assignment Booklet 1A and respond to question 6 of Section 1.

Looking Back; Looking Ahead

In this lesson you explored relationships and roles. You thought about unhealthy relationships, and you discussed how to develop and maintain healthy relationships. You were given tips to make ending a relationship less painful. In the next lesson you will examine the intellectual dimension of your life.

Glossary

role: the expected social behaviour of an individual in a given situation

role-play: an activity in which a person plays a part to practise a skill and receive feedback

Suggested Responses

1. Responses will vary. Following is one student's response.

Families relate to each other in different ways and make different life choices. Some families are openly warm and affectionate. Other families are quiet and reserved; although family members care about each other, they don't openly show affection. Still other families are loud and boisterous; family members like to debate ideas and tell jokes and funny stories.

In some traditional families both parents work outside the home; in others, one of the parents stays at home. In some families the children go to school; in others, the children learn at home. In some families the parents are very strict and authoritarian; in others, the parents are lenient and permissive.

2. a. Answers will vary. Some portrayals are fairly realistic; however, solutions to problems in TV families are often simplistic.

b. Answers will vary. Here's what some students had to say:

We have a saying when it comes to dealing with trouble in our family—"Really talk; really listen." It works when my parents and brothers and I make an effort but it can be really hard to do. I think I do a good job of it mostly.

Randy

My mom and I were fighting all the time. I was going to move out but at the last minute, a friend of mine said I should talk to someone before I did something crazy. It really helped me to talk to the counsellor at my school. I learned how to get my message across to my mom without getting really mad and stomping out before I had said everything.

Suki

In my family we always argued about the time I had to be in on a weekend night. My dad hates staying up late but he always insists on knowing that I am home on time. So he would wait up for me and then be really tired and crabby the next day.

Now we use the alarm clock system. He sets the alarm for the time I am supposed to be home and then goes to bed. I shut off the alarm when I get home. If I'm home on time, the alarm doesn't go off and my dad gets a full night of sleep and he's not so crabby the next day. If I'm going to be late, I phone. My dad says he would rather wake up to hear the phone ring and my voice than the alarm ring and not know where I am.

Jolani

We're getting along a lot better since we started doing some stuff together. My favourite is Saturday mornings. It started when I was training

for the track team at school. My dad decided he'd go jogging with me. At first, he couldn't keep up but now the two of us run together a couple of times a week. My mom jokes about being on the team. On Saturdays, she and my brother walk part of our route and end up at home about the same time we do. Then we have breakfast together.

Bridget

We have to leave each other alone for a while when things get too hot at home. If we are fighting about something and everybody is real tense, then we agree on taking a break. We all agree on a time to meet again to discuss the issue. Usually we take several hours or even a big part of the day. Then everybody goes off for a while. Usually things have calmed down some when we get back together.

Josh

We have family meetings once every couple of weeks, even if there isn't anything big to talk about. If there's an issue that comes up before our usual meeting day, any of us can call a special family meeting.

Ian

When we were little kids, my parents used to make a really big deal out of every little thing we did right. Like, we would get to be the guest of honour at dinner for a good report card or some other accomplishment. I guess over the years it has sort of turned around because now we celebrate successes of my mom's and dad's. Us kids do the dinner or whatever and one of them is the special guest.

Blair

¹ Excerpt from *Relationships* (Lifechoices Series). Campbell, Judith (Pearson Education Canada, 1996), 44. Reproduced with permission by Pearson Canada.

3. Other life changes that can cause conflicts in families may include the following:

- a change in finances such as when a parent loses a job
- a change when a family relocates to a new community
- changes brought about by a death, divorce, or remarriage

You may have thought of others.

4. Answers will vary. Hopefully the role-play and discussion afterward gave you some good insight into conflict resolution.

Sometimes two people in conflict need a mediator to help them discuss the problems and work out solutions. A mediator is a third person who is not involved in the disagreement. The mediator's function is not to make judgments or offer solutions; instead, the mediator's role is to help the people in conflict come to an agreement.

5. If you are a victim of abuse you may feel very alone in your struggle, but there are people who can help. Avoid the tendency to hide the situation or try to deal with the situation on your own. You may be embarrassed about what's been happening to you, but this is the time when you need support. You can speak to a teacher, a school counsellor, or another responsible adult. You can also contact one of the following agencies:

- Family Violence Info Line — 24 hour (toll-free 310-1818)
- Child Abuse Hotline (24 hour) — 1-800-387-KIDS (5437)
- Kids Help Line (24 hour) — 1-800-668-6868
- Protection for Persons in Care — 1-888-357-9339
- Bullying Helpline — 1-888-456-2323

Your local phone book may also list the phone numbers of other crisis centres, teen help lines, and abuse hotlines.

If you experience a family violence emergency, you can call 911, or you can contact your local police, RCMP, or Tribal Police.

If you know someone who is being abused, you may find it helpful to remember the CLUES acronym

- **C**onnect with the person.
- **L**isten to him or her.
- **U**nderstand what the person is going through.
- **E**xpress concern.
- **S**eek help from a responsible adult, agency, crisis centre, or abuse hotline.

6. Answers will vary. Following is one student's response:

Yes, I agree with the statement, "A relationship works best when we know what we want from a relationship and what we can contribute to it." All relationships are based on give and take so if both partners are aware of what they need and what they can offer, then there is less chance for misunderstanding each other. Expectations can be clearly determined.

7. a. Reasons for ending relationships might include the following:

- The relationship may be unhealthy. One or both partners feels abused, threatened, or troubled by continual conflict.
- People change and develop new interests.
- Situations change, which may impact the relationship so that it is no longer workable.
- The partners are not respecting each other.
- One or both partners decide their needs are no longer being met by the relationship.

You may have come up with other reasons in your discussion.

b. Feelings that might be involved in ending a relationship are anger, sadness, confusion, hurt, rejection, and grief. One way of dealing with these feelings is to discuss them with a trusted person. You might also use the suggestions given under the heading "After the Ending."

Image Credits

All images in this lesson were created by or for Alberta Education with the following noted exceptions:

Page

- 32 Brand X Pictures/Getty Images
- 33 Digital Vision/Getty Images
- 34 Kevin Peterson/Photodisc/Getty Images
- 35 © 2006 Jupiterimages Corporation
- 37 © 2006 Jupiterimages Corporation
- 38 Rubberball Productions/Getty Images
- 39 Photodisc/Getty Images
- 40 **left:** Kevin Peterson/Photodisc/Getty Images
centre and right: Photodisc/Getty Images
- 42 Photodisc/Getty Images
- 43 **both:** Photodisc/Getty Images