



The COVID-19 pandemic has meant big changes for our social and personal relationships and how we connect with others. We've all had to be a bit more imaginative about how we communicate and maintain important relationships as we navigate our way through this "new normal".

You've probably found that most of your relationships have been in some way affected by the impact of the pandemic; perhaps you're seeing some people a lot more, like your immediate family or the people you live with; perhaps you're seeing others, such as friends and extended family a lot less, or in a very different way. It could be that you're seeing professionals like teachers only online now, and there may even be some people that you've had no contact with at all since the pandemic began.

Relationships at home

For many, spending more time with your family or the people you live with can begin to feel claustrophobic, and we're all more likely to get irritated or stressed when we're under each other's feet all the time, which can lead to conflict in those relationships. It's a challenging time for everybody right now, but there are some things that can help:

- ◆ Talk to each other about how you can share space at home, how your routines interact with each others, and how you can share chores fairly
- ◆ Try to be patient and kind to each other and considerate of each other's feelings
- ◆ Try and plan in some activities; either to do on your own, or even with each other, so that you are joining together as a household to do something fun and to try and forget about the stress of current times for a while

Relationships with friends and others

In terms of relationships outside our households, it's likely that we're conducting those almost entirely online at the minute; whether it's with friends via phone calls, messages or videos, using WhatsApp, Snapchat or others, or perhaps we're using new platforms such as Zoom or Google Classroom for learning online.

You might not be used to interacting with, for example your teachers, in this way, or you might find that having to conduct friendships or more formal relationships in this way makes you behave differently. You may find that you see a relationship in a new light, or you realise a friendship is not as close as you thought it was; or perhaps you've found there are people you're becoming closer to, as a result of having more regular contact online.



Looking after our mental health

All these feelings are a natural part of life at the minute as we try to manage being distanced from people in our lives with the stress that many of us are feeling right now. Whilst reaching out to friends can help us offload and talk about our feelings, we may also sometimes feel like we want to hide away or detach from others, and that's a normal feeling too. Many people are feeling lonely and isolated right now too, and this can have an impact on mental health over time. If you're feeling low, reach out now by talking to a trusted adult, a friend, or check out some online resources such as [The Children's Society](#) or [Mind](#). Try if you can to maintain and nurture your relationships with friends and others by keeping in touch in whatever way works best for you. Even if it seems hard or you don't feel like it, try and connect with others as it will boost your spirits and mental health, and who knows, maybe give a friend some much-needed support too.



Considerate online behaviour

While we're living so much of our lives online at the minute, it can be easy to forget that there's a real person at the other end of the screen; be a considerate contributor on the group chat or social media, by thinking about what you're posting and the impact it may have. Conducting our relationships online might also mean that we blur the usual boundaries too; finding ourselves perhaps behaving too informally in video calls with teachers, or losing our inhibitions in online friendships! Think about your digital footprint, and if you find your emotions ruling your online behaviour, or you're about to say something unkind or inappropriate, maybe it's time to log out. You can play an important role in standing up to negative or hateful content too, by blocking or reporting harmful posts. If you feel that you are being targeted or bullied online, know that it's not your fault: don't retaliate, save the evidence on your device, and talk to a trusted adult. There's lots of further advice on [Childnet](#), [Connect Safely](#), or [Brook](#).

Over to you....Think about:

- ◆ Have your relationships with others changed as a result of the lockdown and social distancing? In what ways?
- ◆ Has your response to the people in your life changed at all? Do you feel there have been any positives to take away from this experience in terms of your social and personal relationships?

Further support and Information:

[BBC Own It—Cyberbullying](#)

[Young Minds—mental health support](#)

[UK Safer Internet Centre—Online Friendships](#)