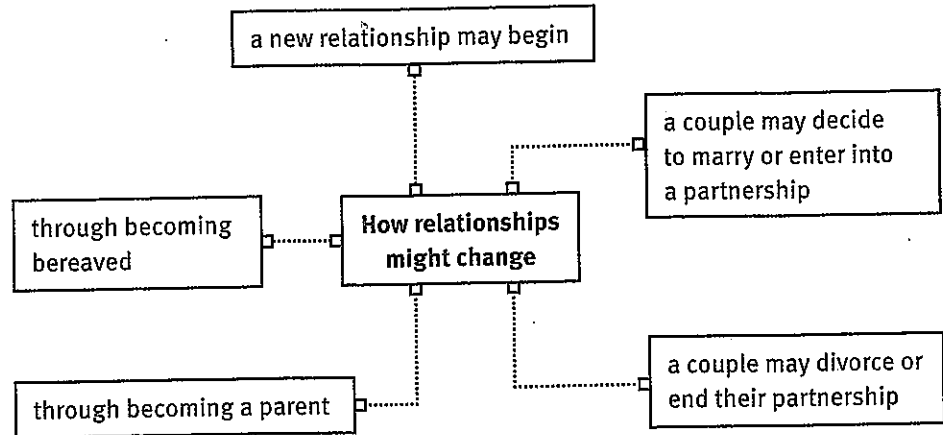


Relationship changes

GETTING STARTED

Make a list of the changes in relationships that might happen during a person's life course.

Relationships can be viewed as important for many individuals. But if relationships with others change or break down, they may have an impact on emotional and social development.



■ Figure 1.25: Relationships are rarely static

New relationships



■ New relationships are part of our emotional and social development

Relationships are really important for our emotional and social development. People form new relationships at every life stage. In early childhood, children tend to make friends with those they see regularly and who have the same interests. From adolescence, people begin to widen their social circles. They tend to form close friendships and intimate relationships with others who have similar values and interests.

Building a new relationship that is based on a mutual understanding, trust and loyalty can result in positive self-image and high self-esteem. Friends are important. They allow us to share social interests such as hobbies, sports and travel. A close or intimate friendship means that individuals have someone to:

- share worries with
- help provide practical and emotional support.

Long-term relationships

Marriage, civil partnership or entering into a long-term relationship is a major change in anyone's life. It means:

- adapting to life as a couple
- changing lifestyle (to an extent).

Commitment to a long-term partnership can:

- be positive and improve a person's self-esteem
- provide a feeling of safety and security
- provide sexual intimacy.

These things are all essential for emotional development.

Divorce or separation

Research shows that after the death of a spouse or long-term partner, divorce or separation from a long-term relationship comes second in the level of impact on a person's emotional development. Strong family ties provide the stability and security needed for positive growth and development. A breakdown in a relationship can lead to insecurity for the people involved, the couple and their children. Lack of security and poor self-image can lead to ill health, affecting emotional and intellectual development. It can affect social development, as there is a loss of friendships and wider family networks.

Parenthood

Parenthood generally brings positive emotions of great joy and fulfilment. However, for some it may also have a negative impact.

- Parents change their whole lifestyle and routines.
- New responsibilities for another person can create anxiety, especially if the parent is single and has no one to share their worries.
- It also means they have less time for themselves to pursue their interests and meet with friends.
- There are added pressures if parents work (perhaps around childcare).
- Lack of sleep can put pressure on a partnership or marriage, affecting emotional development.

Bereavement

One of the most difficult events a person has to cope with in life is the death of someone close. People deal with their grief in their own way but it will have a considerable impact on their emotional development for some time. Some deaths may be expected – for example, when a person has been ill for some time. In these circumstances, others close to them may find it easier to come to terms with the death because they are prepared. If the death happens unexpectedly through illness or accident, then coming to terms with it could take longer.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are many different emotions that bereaved people experience, including; shock, sadness, anger, guilt, exhaustion.

ACTIVITY

In groups, discuss the possible impact of relationship changes on the emotional and social development of these individuals.

- 1 Meena, aged 27, dated Tariq for three years and Tariq has proposed marriage. How might marriage affect Meena's development?
- 2 Sean, aged 45, and Graham, aged 48, have been in a partnership for four years. Graham has decided to leave as they are not getting on. How might the breakdown of the partnership affect Sean's development?
- 3 Sarah is aged 69. She and her husband Alan were married for 37 years but recently Alan died. How might bereavement affect Sarah's development?

CHECK MY LEARNING

Share your responses to each of the scenarios with others in your class. Identify possible positive and negative effects.