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Social Well-being – Inter-personal Relationship

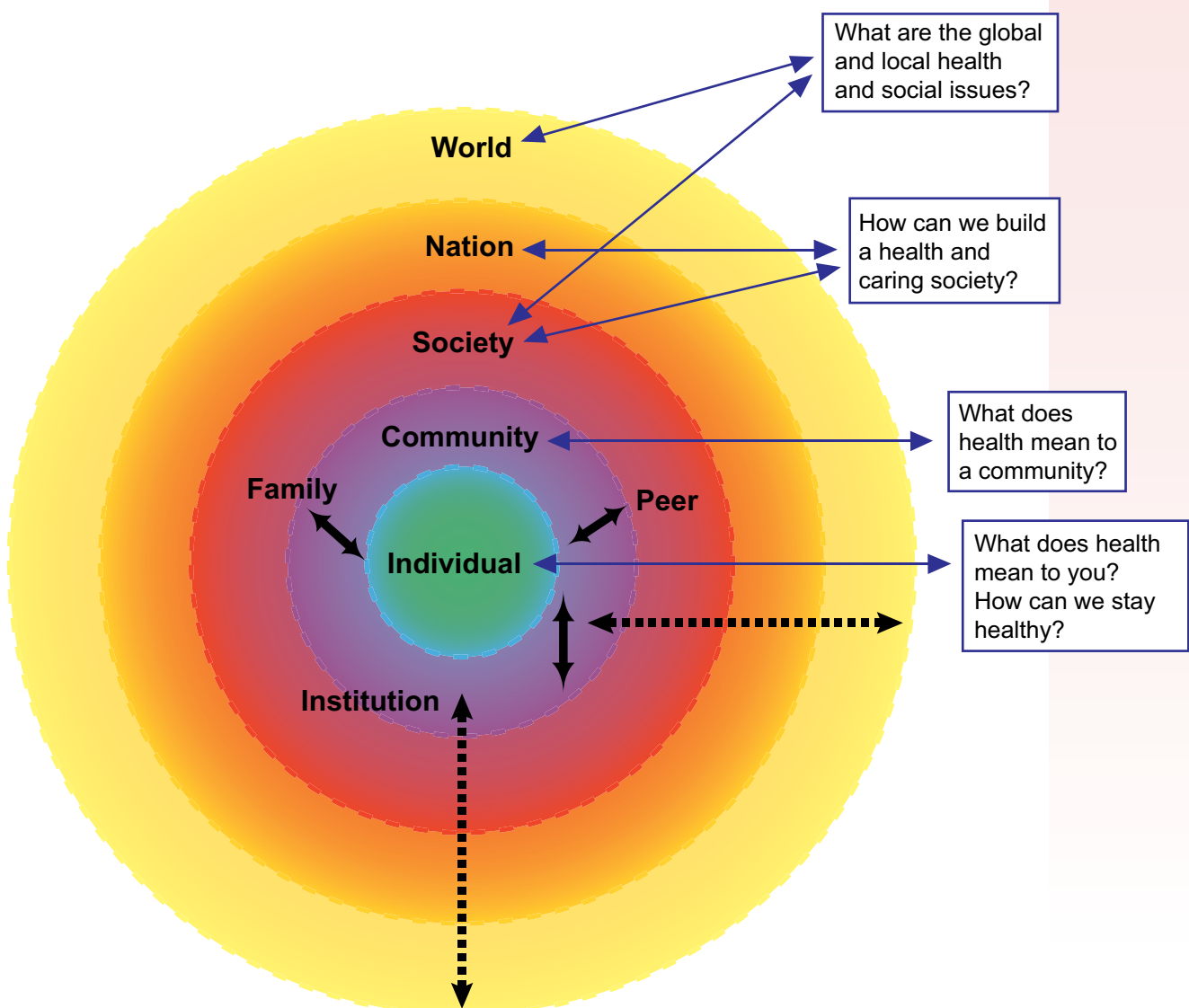
**Health Management
and Social Care
(Secondary 4-6)**



Health Management and Social Care Booklets

The design of the HMSC curriculum rests on the notion of the interconnectedness of the various levels at which phenomena related to health and sickness, well-being and ill-being, and personal and community care are to be understood. The curriculum aims to enable students to explore all of these levels as well as the relationships between them. The different levels can be interpreted as the individual, the family, the peer group, the community, the institutional setting, society, the nation and the world (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The Various Levels and Essential Questions of HMSC



This part includes 19 booklets of learning and teaching reference materials for teachers. The topics and information in these booklets are selected and organized based on the five essential questions from various levels mentioned in the curriculum design in Chapter 2 of the Health Management and Social Care Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6)(2007). The booklets facilitate teachers to develop an overall framework of HMSC and identify the key concepts of the curriculum so that their students will be more able to critically assess the relevant issues. Details of these booklets are as follows:

Levels	Essential Questions	Booklets	
Individual, Family and Peer	What does health mean to you?	1	Personal Needs and Development across Lifespan
		2	Health and Well-being
	How can we stay healthy?	3	Physical Well-being - Healthy Body
		4	Mental Well-being - Healthy Mind
		5	Social Well-being - Inter-personal Relationship
Community	What does health mean to a community?	6	Healthy Community
		7	Caring Community
		8	Ecology and Health
		9	Building a Healthy City
Society	How can we build a healthy and caring society?	10	Health Care System
		11	Social Welfare System
		12	Medical and Social Care Professions
		13	Health and Social Care policies
		14	Social Care in Action
Local and Global Societies	What are the local and global health and social issues?	15A	Health and Social Care Issue - Ageing Population
		15B	Health and Social Care Issue - Discrimination
		15C	Health and Social Care Issue - Domestic Violence
		15D	Health and Social Care Issue - Addiction
		15E	Health and Social Care Issue - Poverty

Each booklet will start with the essential questions. The expected learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, value and attitude as well as the content outline will be listed as an overview. Teachers are advised to adapt and flexibly use the materials based on school or community situation, background of students, interest, learning skills and the prior knowledge of students. Social issues as well as the graphic organizers that illustrated in Booklet 3.1.5 can be used to help student organize and analyze complex and abstract concepts, construct their knowledge effectively and achieve deep understanding.

How can we stay healthy ?

Health begins with individuals. To learn how to promote community, social and global health, one should begin with themselves by establishing a healthy life style. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the definition of health introduced in 1947, is that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being more than being free from diseases or physically fit. That is, one should maintain a healthy physical, mental and social well-being in order to achieve a good condition of health. How can an individual maintain health in these three dimensions?

We have divided this section into three booklets: Booklet (3): Physical Well-being - Healthy Body: begins with a healthy body by understanding different body systems and methods to stay healthy. For example, management of weight promotes personal physical fitness, balanced diet and physical exercises etc. Booklet (4): Mental Well-being - Healthy Mind: we explore the factors that influence the mental health of individuals and methods to stay healthy. Booklet (5): Social Well-being - Interpersonal relationships: we explore how interpersonal relationships influence personal growth and how to develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships.

The topics of Health Management and Social Care to be included in the booklet 3, 4 and 5 are listed in the following table:

Booklet		Health Management and Social Care Curriculum and assessment topics
3	Physical Well-being - Healthy Body	<u>Compulsory part</u> 3A The notion and practice of health promotion, health maintenance, ill-health prevention, social care, welfare and community services 4C Aspects of risk assessment and health management
4	Mental Well-being - Healthy Mind	<u>Compulsory part</u> 5C Mental health as a personal predicament and as linked to the social context
5	Social Well-being - interpersonal Relationship	<u>Compulsory part</u> 1C Transitions and changes in the course of lifespan 4D Social care, healthy relationships, social responsibility and commitment in the family, community and groups

5 Social Well-being – Interpersonal Relationship

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Learning Targets

Through the study of the topic on social well-being - interpersonal relationship, students are expected to:

Values and attitudes

- ❖ Respect each and every relationship

Knowledge

- ❖ Identify various types of relationship and how they affect personal growth

Skills

- ❖ Acquire interpersonal skills for relationship building

Key Questions

To achieve the above learning targets, teachers may use the following questions to enhance understanding:

- ❖ How do relationship affect personal health?
- ❖ How can we develop and maintain healthy relationship?

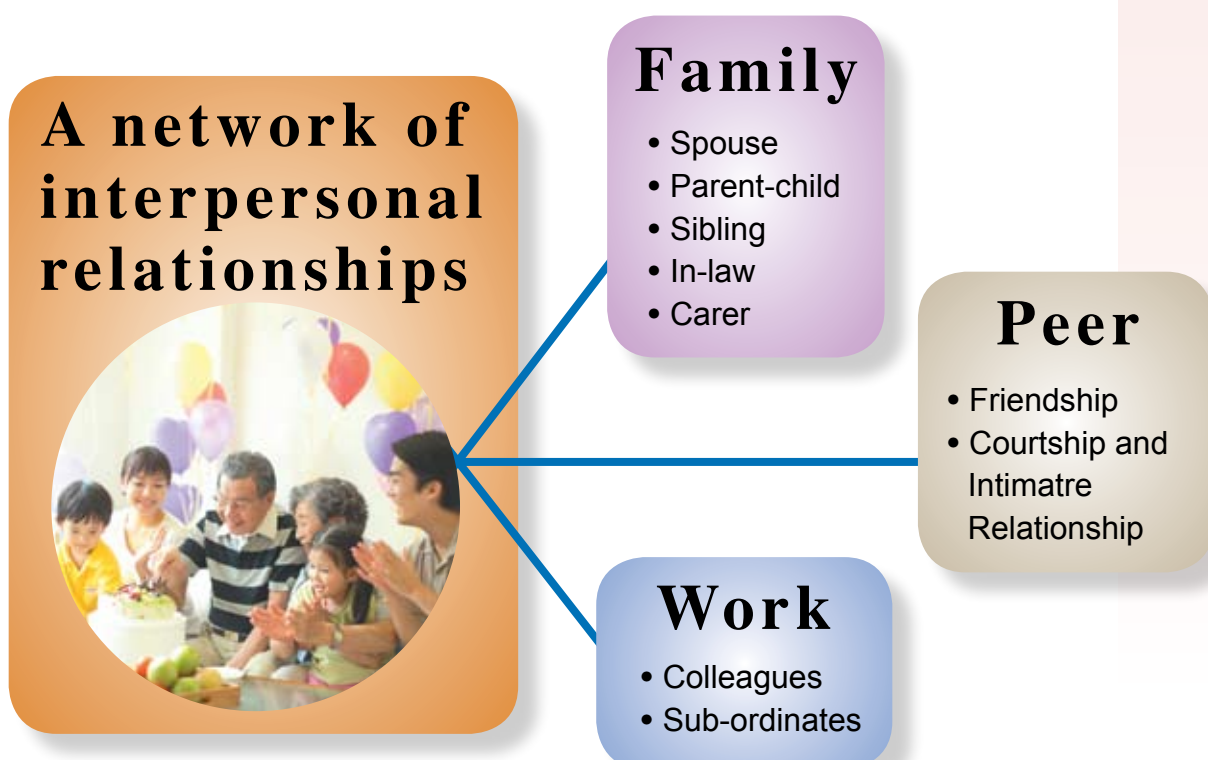
5.1 Healthy Relationship

No man is an island. It seems that every person is an independent entity. We live independently, satisfy our personal needs and maintain our health on our own. In Booklets (3) and (4), it was mentioned that our physical health and mental health are influenced by the community we belong to, which also affects our social health. We are all living in an interconnected environment in which our physical health, mental health and social health are influenced by our own community and other communities as well.

A community is composed of different kinds of groups. Each group is formed by two or more individuals. Members are interdependent and interrelated. A group is usually formed to achieve a specific goal. Each group has its own structure, organisation, relationship, roles and ways of communication. Different members play different roles and have different relationships to function in a group. Each group is maintained by different relationships. A healthy group is built on the healthy relationship within the group.

In this booklet we will explore the groups which include the family, peer groups and organizations, so as to analyse the different interpersonal relationships within the groups as well as their positive and negative impacts on personal growth and development. It is expected to enhance our understanding on how to maintain a healthy relationship.

Figure 5.1 A network of interpersonal relationships



5.2 Family Relationship

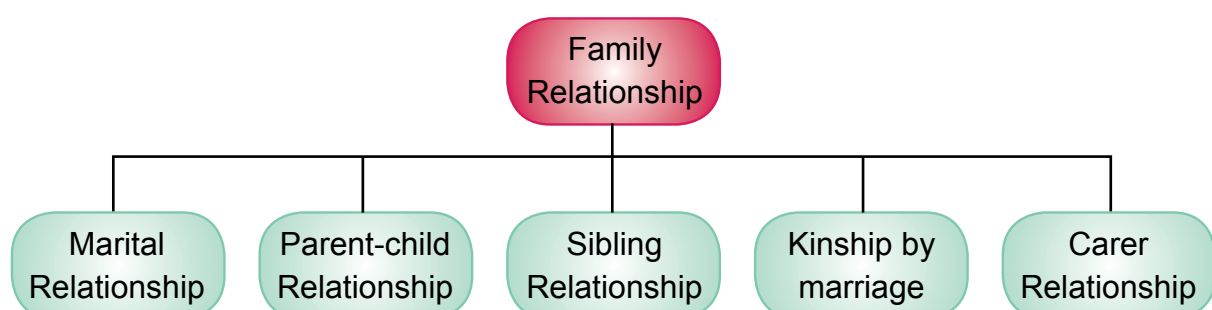
Family can be defined as a social group linked by the ties of blood or marriage. Most families consist of people of two generations. They live together and it is the longest lasting relationship in one's life. The family relationship is the first relationship in our life, and it should be the longest one. Infants establish their first relationship by attaching to their parents, forming the parent-child relationship. Then they develop sibling and other relationships.

What is a healthy family relationship? A healthy family relationship is developed on the cohesion and adaptability of the family. Cohesion refers to the degree of intimacy and recognition of each family member to the family. With great cohesion, the family members will spend time with each other regardless of how different they are. The family will work as a team and solve problems whenever difficulties are encountered. Adaptability refers to the ability to adapt to new roles and restructure their communication to deal with changes across their lifespan, and at different stages across their lifespan, including different life events and unexpected changes as mentioned in Booklet (1).

The analysis starts with different family relationship and is followed by the changes that occur in the family throughout the life cycle.

(A) Different types of relationships

Figure 5.2 Family relationship



1. Marital Relationship

In most families, the marital relationship is the core family relationship. A family begins with a marital relationship. This is assumed to be the longest lasting and the most intimate relationship across one's lifespan. It can be understood from the physical, psychological and social perspectives. These perspectives are interrelated and help to explain how the harmony of a couple can be developed.

In view of the physical perspective, a marital relationship may imply a sexual relationship. Though sex in marriage is the only part of a marital relationship, it plays an important role. An intimate sexual relationship serves as a foundation for establishing a harmonious marital relationship. Conversely, sexual satisfaction is related to overall satisfaction with a marriage.

In view of the psychological perspective, an intimate relationship satisfies human needs of security and love. It helps achieve self-actualization. Ideally, a marriage is able to compensate for any deficiencies in other relationships. Apart from the intimate contact, the couple is able to develop an intimate and committed long-term relationship. When the husband and wife establish a shared feeling of becoming one entity, and regard their spouses as their "other halves", they will be able to cooperate and cope with problems, which eventually reduce the stress levels in both partners.

In view of the social perspective, a marital relationship has a social function. In a traditional agricultural society, marriage provides the next generation of a family, as well as the labor force. The marital relationship has been overlooked in the past. With urbanisation and social changes, the marital relationship reveals the division of work and functions of a family that is unavoidably influenced by culture and the changing economic situation. Who is expected to be the breadwinner? Who is responsible for child care? Who makes the decisions? The social expectations on the gender roles affect the communication between husband and wife. For example, in the patriarchal society, the wives have the obligation to obey and serve their husbands. The husbands have the right to discipline and order their wives. The relationship between husbands and wives is hierarchical in nature. However, in other societies in which gender equality is upraised, the husbands and wives make decisions about family affairs together.

There are different levels of marital relationship for different couples. Some establish an intimate relationship both physically and mentally. Some prefer to maintain a mutual respectful relationship, which places much emphasis on the calm, objective and polite attributes in the relationship. The level of passion and ways of communication in a marriage depend on the characteristics of individuals and their habits.

However, a marital relationship is not static across time. The relationship varies in different situations and at different stages of life. For example, some couples may be more intimate in a private space. In public, they will maintain a socially and culturally acceptable distance.




Similarly, in the first few years of marriage, some wives may try hard to meet the expectations of an ideal wife. They will be more obedient and willing to raise children at home. When they reach their middle adulthood, they begin developing their own interests or careers as their children are leaving home, resulting in a different marital relationship status from before. Besides, husbands and wives may take up different roles and act like parents, friends or siblings in different situations in their daily living.

To establish a harmonious marital relationship, couples should understand these different roles and make adjustments and changes across different situations and at various stages of life.

2. Parent-child Relationship

A parent-child relationship refers to the relationship between parents and their children. Parent-child relationship also change across their lifespan, like marital relationship. They are a hierarchical and vertical relationship, where parents take care of their children, and children obey them. In this sense, the marital relationship is more horizontal in nature. Nevertheless the parent-child relationship can become a horizontal one like friendship when the children grow up. However, when the parents are getting older, the relationship may be reversed again from horizontal to vertical, with the parents being cared for by their children this time.

A parent-child relationship can also be further analyzed from physical, psychological and social perspectives.

-  From the physical perspective, child-rearing is of utmost importance in the parent-child relationship. Parents have to ensure the physical growth of the child by satisfying their physical and psychological needs.
-  From the psychological perspective, parenting is the core component in the parent-child relationship. Parents have to provide a role model to the child and assist them in acquiring skills that they should learn to develop their self-esteem and positive self-concept.
-  From the social perspective, the parent-child relationship represents the nurturing of a child to adapt to society by providing opportunities and involving them in social activities at different stages of life.



Cultural reproduction

A French sociologist – Pierre Bourdieu suggests that cultural reproduction is the transmission of existing cultural values and norms from generation to generation. It refers to the mechanisms by which continuity of cultural experience is sustained across time. For example, people in the middle class generally are wealthier or more literate. They are able to visit different museums or art galleries, performances in theatres or travel abroad. During this process, there is a transformation of capital, from economic to cultural. Hence, the process of nurturing and the available opportunities varies with their family backgrounds. The existing cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation and shape the cultural values of the next generation. Deficiency in cultural capital will eventually influence one's academic performance and reduce their competitiveness at school.

The parent-child relationship is crucial in one's personal growth and has a long-term impact. Different research has proved that a parent-child relationship not only influences one's life skills in childhood, its effects also persist to adulthood. This also shapes one's conduct and personality. Children who have insecure attachments with their parents eventually have lower self-esteem, relatively poor social ability and negative self-concepts, whereas children who have secure attachments with their parents tend to be more secure, easy going, pleasant and happy, which are vital to child development.

The different types of attachment between parents and their child introduced in Booklet (1) form the foundation of child development in later stages of life. Children who have secure and healthy attachments with parents are able to establish healthy relationship with others later in life. Conversely, children who have insecure attachments with parents may eventually become prone to emotional and behavioral disturbances later in life. (For details, please refer to 1.1 of Booklet (1)).

The parent-child relationship is affected by social culture, especially the expectations with regard to child-rearing. In some societies, they place much emphasis on the nurturing of the child as the duty of parents. Parents are only responsible for taking care of their children until they are independent and leave home. The parents will plan for their retirement or funerals on their own. However, in the traditional Chinese society and other agricultural societies, it is believed that children are the labour force and the capital of the family. Much emphasis is placed on the obligation of children to repay their parents. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, this concept has undergone great changes.

However, in some patriarchal societies, parents are still the authority figures that children must obey. This vertical relationship persists through different stages of life. Comparatively speaking, the children enjoy more freedom in decision making in the societies which advocate human rights and democracy.

Conflicts in parent-child relationship are often the result of misunderstandings based on mistaken expectations. Sometimes parents are too demanding, and their children are not able to live up to their expectations. Sometimes it may be the result of generation gap, where parents and children have different perceptions of the issues involved. It may also be because of the fact that parents are not yet able to adapt to the changes of life stages of their children or the changes of the culture in the society, which influence the parent-child relationship. Hence, effective parent-child communication is vital.

It is essential for the parents and the child to spend time together to enjoy and share pleasure moments, appreciate the strengths of each other, readjust their values and attitudes through conflicts and build a harmonious relationship.

To develop a good parent-child relationship, both the parents and the child have to learn to control their tempers and not to control the others through power struggles. Parents should learn to communicate with their children in a positive atmosphere. If they are able to share joy with their children, they will be also able to share their tears.

For this reason, the parents should allow their children to express their feelings freely without judging them. If the children are able to share their anger, distress, fear and doubts appropriately, they are less likely to misbehave, or to express their anger or negative feelings, or hide their emotions.

Parents should allow their children to express their views, even though they may be different from the parents'. Children need to develop their own critical thinking, which is important to their personal development. Parents could also share their views and suggestions without imposing them on their children. Children will be more willing to share if their parents do not criticize and judge their thinking and feelings.

3. Sibling Relationship

Sibling relationship serves as companionship and emotional support at different stages of an individual's lifespan. They affect one's physical and mental health and social well-being.

Sibling relationship is different from other relationships. It exists within the parent-child relationship in which the roles and responsibilities of the children are shared. A sibling relationship is dynamic in nature. Sometimes the siblings compete with each other and jealousy arises when they are competing for the family resources and parents' love. Sometimes they love each other and cooperate to deal with problems and cope with demands and pressure from parents.

Siblings cooperate and help each other throughout the lifecycle. Infants often imitate their siblings. When receiving positive feedback, this imitation helps infants to learn to share and cooperate. Both toddlers and children like imitating the behaviour of their siblings. They are able to get guidance and support from them. In adolescence, siblings are like their peers. At this stage, the relationship between siblings is the closest in the physical and psychological dimensions. When they reach adulthood, siblings are able to give advice and provide support to each other on their careers or families. Sibling relationship also serves as an emotional and financial support at different stages of life. When parents enter their late adulthood, siblings are able to share the role of carers for their parents. For example, they are able to discuss the arrangements for accommodation for their parents, to deal with their deteriorating health. When siblings are getting older, they form the major support networks for each other. Research on the elderly suggests that elderly people with sibling support are likely to have better physical and mental health.

Conflicts in sibling relationship is common. From the child's point of view, it is a challenge for them to share the love and attention from his/her parents with another person. Some children are obedient in front of their parents but display negative sarcasm, assault and yelling in front of their siblings. In addition, conflicts in sibling relationship may persist until adulthood. Research on influence of sibling relationship on children and adolescents suggests that delinquent behaviour may arise due to poor social skills, which were caused by the poor relationship between siblings, their hostility towards each other and frequent conflicts. In extreme cases, conflicts between siblings can develop into bullying and abuse. Hence, parents should help children to establish harmonious sibling relationship.

There are three major causes affecting the sibling relationship, namely, the number, the gender combination and the age gap of siblings.

Number

Children with and without siblings are different in their personal development. Without brothers or sisters, children may not have any experience in growing up together with other family members. Meanwhile, the number of siblings determines the allocation of family resources and parents' attention. The larger the number of siblings, the greater will be the competition for family resources and parents' attention in a family. The sibling relationship tends to be more complicated in large families.

Gender combination

The combination of males and females also affects the relationship. Generally speaking, siblings of the same sex are more able to share common topics and hobbies, but find it easier to be jealous and competitive with each other. There are different social expectations on different genders in a family. For example, elder brothers are expected to take care of their younger sisters. Hence, the elder brothers should be the ones who are mature and able to protect the younger ones. Conversely, it is widely accepted that the younger sisters can be spoiled and should be protected by their elder brothers. However, some younger brothers worry they will not be masculine enough if they are under the care of their elder sisters. Thus, they try to keep a distance from their sisters. These social expectations on gender eventually influence sibling relationship.

Age gap

Age difference also influences relationships. Sibling relationship is different from the parent-child relationship, but the elder children may still take care of the younger ones as if they are different ages. Since they belong to the same generation, they can cooperate as well as compete with each other. They tend to act like peers if the age gap is small. The wider the age gap between siblings, the more likely they act like parent and child.

4. Kinship by Marriage

In-laws or kinships by marriage are the relationships developed between one and their spouse's family members through marriage. This includes the spouse's parents, siblings, and all other relatives related by blood, as well as the related family members.

In a patriarchal society, a married woman is regarded as a member of her husband's family. Her in-law relationship may be even closer than her relationship with her original family. The woman may live with and care for her husband's parents, brothers and their wives, as well as her husband's unmarried sisters. Even with couples who form nuclear families and live apart from their parents,

the wives are expected to pay frequent visits and look after their father-in-laws and mother-in-laws. On the other hand, the relationship between a husband and his in-laws is more distant. Although the husband is expected to treat his in-law family well, the husband only has to presume the responsibility of visiting his in-law family once in a while and is often treated as a guest during his visit.

In the matriarchal society, a husband will assume the role of a son in his wife's family. A husband is expected to have a tight bond with his in-laws. Both the husband and the wife will continue to maintain a close relationship with their own original families.

Many studies on marriage point out that the in-law relationship is often one of the main factors affecting the stability and quality of a marriage. In the Chinese patriarchal society, where the family ethical tradition and filial piety are upheld, the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-laws may be the most problematic ones in the family relationship.

Why do the mothers and daughters in law have frequent conflict with each other?

Traditional Chinese Culture

Some scholars believe that the norms and teaching in Confucian tradition shape the roles and the relationship of the married woman and her mother-in-law in a traditional Chinese family. As mentioned above, to a traditional Chinese agricultural society, marriage means a man marrying a woman to increase the labour force of the family. The man will still live with his original family after marriage. However, for the woman, marrying a man means that she has to leave her own family, move into her husband's home and become a part of her husband's family. Unlike her brothers who are married, after her marriage, all the people the woman gets along with and serves belong to her husband's family. Leaving the familiar environment in which she has been brought up, the married woman has to make extra effort to adapt physically and emotionally to the new environment. Conflicts often arise between this married woman and her mother-in-law during the transitional period or even a longer period of time.

Relationship with Son

In traditional patriarchal societies, it is important for women to have a son for the continuity of their husband's family. Giving birth to a son raises a mother's status in the family and ensures that she has someone to rely on when she grows old. In such a cultural context, it makes sense for the mother to place most of her attention and affection on her son. After marriage, a mother's son inevitably builds a stronger affectionate bond with his wife, who is another woman to the family. Jealousy accumulates easily. The mother-in-laws who have been previously treated badly by their mother-in-laws often develop a very close relationship with their sons. Some of them even regard their sons

as closer than their husbands. When a son leaves home for his intimate partner and establishes a family of his own, his mother may think that she is losing the most important person in her life. For this reason, some of them will unintentionally try to block their son from developing an intimate relation with his wife. A son who knows that he is important to his mother seldom “betrays” his mother, but nonetheless will develop a more intimate relationship with his wife. Such jealousy and resentment between the wife and the mother-in-law is the origin of various kinds of conflicts.

The attitude and the involvement of the son/husband are crucial to solving the conflict between the wife and the mother-in-law, preventing the deterioration of this troublesome in-law relationship and making any breakthrough. When a son/husband actively participates in conflict resolution between his wife and mother with a fair and impartial manner, the tension is more likely to be relieved. On the other hand, if the son/husband takes sides with the mother or the wife, an unbalanced relationship will be formed and the un-favored side will suffer.

Child-rearing

The nuclear family is the prevalent family structure in modern society. A couple usually lives separately from their own original families. Child-rearing becomes a source of conflict between the wife and the mother-in-law. Nowadays many women have their own careers and become financially independent. Both the spouses are the income earners of their families. The women may not be willing to give up their career to stay at home for child-rearing. For this reason, the mother-in-laws become a choice for them to share the burden of child-rearing. However, young couples usually have different views on child-rearing and may not agree with their parents and in-laws. The discrepancies in views create conflicts. If both the mother and the grandmother of the child have a strong Emotional Quotient (EQ), they will be able to treat each other with respect, tolerance and understanding.

If the mother and the grandmother fail to compromise, the grand child may take advantage of the disagreement to gain what they want, causing further conflict and hostile feelings between the in-laws. If they discuss and listen to each other’s advice, the consensus can help to facilitate the personal development of the child.

5. Carer Relationship

Traditionally, family relationship referred to all the above mentioned relationships. Nowadays, a new type of relationship is also common in modern families. As it is now common to have families in which both the mother and the father have their own careers, women no longer stay at home to care for the children, parents and the chronically ill. Hence, more and more families employ a foreign domestic worker to take up the care work. Therefore, the foreign domestic workers become a part of the families.

In Hong Kong, since the Government introduced legislation in 1973 to allow domestic helpers from foreign countries to work in Hong Kong, many middle-class families have hired foreign domestic helpers. Although most people do not think that foreign domestic helpers are members of the family,, they have to admit that these domestic helpers become 'necessities'. In particular, when both parents of the families need to work, the foreign domestic helpers become the main care givers of their children. When the children come home from school, they usually find the domestic helpers there, when their parents are still at work. Gradually, they develop a more intimate relationship with the domestic helpers than with their parents. Once the domestic helpers leave the families, it sometimes triggers disputes between children and their parents, when their relationship has not been maintained and developed.

(B) Changes of family relationship across lifespan

Like the development of an individual, a family also has its life stages. A family begins with the marital relationship. A family consists of different stages of development, and changes occur at different stages:

Life stages	Changes of relationships
1. Entering into early adulthood	Independence between young adults and parents
2. Getting married	Establishment of a new family
3. Becoming parents	Accepting new members into a family
4. Raising an adolescent	Revising family rules and expectations to foster independence
5. Adapting to the independence of children	Accepting children leaving home
6. Entering into late adulthood	Accepting the changing roles and responsibilities and preparing for death

1. Entering into Early Adulthood

Before getting married, a person relies on their original family at different stages of life, which includes infancy, childhood and adolescence. The emotional bond established with the family is relatively strong during infancy and early childhood. Care and recognition from parents are essential for children in the early stages of life. Then, in adolescence, the children begin to seek independence from their parents. Therefore, the emotional bond between parents and adolescents may not be as strong as it was before. When the adolescents strive to be independent, they want to achieve more autonomy. On the one hand, they are distancing themselves from their parents. On the other hand, they are becoming mature and starting to develop peer relationship outside the family. Hence, more time will be spent with their peers.

Seeking their own identities is a vital psychological need of adolescents. When they begin separating from their family and becoming independent, they start to explore and learn different values which help them develop their self-concept.

They explore and question different values and compare these values with those of their families. For this reason, young people usually encounter doubt, frustration and depressive moods.

Many adolescents may experience psychological struggles when they are striving for independence but still relying on care, support and guidance from their parents. Moreover, they also encounter emotional tension induced by the growth of their physical body and the change of hormones. Social pressure also impacts on their emotions.

Peer relationship is important during this period. Parents may not be able to be a substitute for peers, who can share experiences, concerns and doubts. Peers can also help each other in goal setting. Many young people will choose their peers based on their shared interests, hobbies and social class to meet their needs. Young people want their parents to reassure them of their importance and accept them. Yet they usually place a higher priority on their peer relationship than their parent-child and sibling relationships. Their social networks are unavoidably extended during this period.

2. Getting Married

After achieving independence, young adults start to establish their own families and form intimate relationship. The stage from marriage to parenting usually lasts for 1-5 years. The key developments at this stage are as follows:

To establish an intimate relationship

In new families, young couples need to learn how to pay more attention to their partners, to trust and rely on each other and to share each other's vision so that they are able to establish and develop an intimate marital relationship. An intimate marital relationship builds on the couple's sensitivity, affection and ability to negotiate with each other. The young couples should know how to express their feelings, to communicate and to cooperate with each other.

To achieve independence

Independence is also vital to a marriage. This includes social and economic independence. The family income will be increased if both of the spouses have their own jobs. In the marriage, the couple has to learn how to master the household income and expenditure, which is important to them. Good financial management prepares them for the future life stages of the family. In addition, they also need to learn to pull away from their original families in order to establish new boundaries and new roles in their new family.

To establish family roles and responsibilities

Striking the balance between work and family is also an important issue for the married couples from when they reach adulthood to when they are elderly. Women usually have to spend time and energy on their family and work at the same time. Role conflicts and the problems of overload often occur. The emotional support of the husband is very critical because family harmony, in this case, is built on the husband's recognition of the wife's roles in family and work.

3. Becoming Parents

With the birth of the first child, the family enters into a new stage. Being parents does not only imply a change in roles, but also the new responsibility of caring and nurturing the next generation. It will bring an increase in the financial and household burdens. Who is responsible for caring for the baby? It becomes a major family issue. If it is the mother's responsibility, the woman has to quit her job. Is she able to adapt to this change? It will affect the physical and mental health of the husband and the wife, as well as their relationship. If the mother is unwilling to accept this arrangement, she will struggle in making such a decision. It will increase the crisis of post-natal depression. The women who quit their jobs due to the demands of the family may have greater stress than other women. Some couples, therefore, will ask their own parents to take care of their children. However, if they overlook the importance of developing and maintaining the relationship with their own children, parent-child conflicts will unavoidably occur in future.

During infancy and early childhood, the child develops a strong emotional bond with his/her parents. They need parents' love and recognition. A parent-child relationship is hierarchical and vertical, in which parents are the care givers and children are the recipients. Infants depend much on their parents for feeding, care, protection and psychological assurance. Young children also need parental guidance and discipline. They need their parents to give support and care to meet the needs of their physical and psychological development. For this reason, the parents have to develop effective parenting skills and cultivate a harmonious parent-child relationship. Besides, the child needs to learn to get along with his/her brothers and/or sisters if there are any. Then they learn how to get along with children outside the family. However, the sibling relationship is much more intimate than other peer relationship at this stage.

Child-rearing may affect the marital relationship. The arrival of children changes the original family lifestyle and impacts on the relationship of the couple. For some families, children are the sole centre of interest of the parents. They may overlook the importance of caring for, and paying attention to their spouse as well. This weakens the marital relationship. When the children grow up and the family enters the empty nest stage, family disputes break out.

4. Raising an Adolescent

Family relationship changes a lot at this stage. With rapid physical changes, adolescents may have a strong desire to achieve independence and search for self-identity. On the one hand, parents are delighted to see the independence of their children. On the other hand, they worry that their children no longer obey their orders. The major issues are usually centred around responsibility, self-discipline and sense of control. When parents feel a loss of control over their children, children also feel a loss of privilege as a child, as their responsibilities increase.

The parent-child relationship is subject to challenges when young people pursue autonomy on the one hand and ask for more recognition on the other hand. They will examine and evaluate the parents' status and image based on their standards. They may no longer be simple and straight forward in character. They may not disclose their feelings easily to their family members, even if they have been very close to each other previously. They prefer to talk to their peers and appear to be impatient with the wishes of their parents. They expect to be treated like adults and develop a more 'horizontal' relationship with their parents.

If the parents treat the grown-up children like infants and young children, they may over-protect or over-interfere with the children. The children may feel that trust and respect are not enough. The discrepancies between the needs of the parents and the children will drive the children to act against the parents' authority in pursuit of democracy and a more equal parent-child relationship.

To better adjust to the changes, the parents of adolescents need to respect and understand adolescent development: their need to be dependent, but still being immature, and needing to be guided and treated reasonably with respect to rules. Therefore, the parents have to show their respect and care but at the same time give timely help and guidance.

5. Adapting to the Independence of Children

When the children become totally independent, the family is at the 'empty nest' stage. At this stage, the children leave the family one by one as they grow older, leaving their parents to live alone. The families are called 'empty-nest families'.

In traditional large families, the empty-nest families are the families in which the parents may already be elderly when all the children leave. The period of being on their own will not be long. Nowadays, people in middle adulthood may experience 'empty nest' unexpectedly when their only son or daughter leaves. The 'child-centred' lifestyle changes and they are not accustomed to the fact that they are no longer needed by their children. The couple needs to adjust to the new life and restore the psychological balance. They also need to re-establish their ways of communication.

In the past, when large families included a number of children, the birth, growth and leaving of children was taken as a gradual and natural process. Nowadays, when families tend to have fewer children and each child has received intensive care and attention, the leaving of children will bring a strong sense of loss and emptiness for the parents. Therefore, they need to be well-prepared and plan for the adjustment in their family relationship and their daily routines.

In mainland China, the 'one-child policy' has had a huge impact on the empty nest stage, which affects the parents when they are middle aged nowadays. This is called 'empty nest at middle adulthood'. As their only child leaves home for overseas study, work or joining the army, the parents are prone to feelings of loss, anxiety and other emotional problems.

In fact, the empty nest can be the start of a new stage. Some people may take this as an opportunity to do something they could not do in the past when they needed to take care of their children. Others may have marital conflicts which lead to divorce when their children leave. Not all the adults are able to cope with the challenges of the empty-nest stage.

For this reason, couples should be prepared for the new life in the empty-nest stage, including fostering their marital relationship, and learning how to adjust to their new life when the children leave. Couples at this stage can be alone with each other like a newly married couple, except that they have developed mutual trust and understanding. They can enjoy spending more time with each other. Thus, it is sometimes called the 'second honeymoon'. Some couples may have failed to maintain a harmonious marital relationship when the children were still young. They divorce when their children leave home. Some couples may have more conflicts when they have more time to be with each other. They need some effort to maintain the marital relationship.

6. Entering into Late Adulthood

Entering into late adulthood, couples need to learn together to adjust to the physical, psychological and social changes in being elderly. They also need to rearrange their pace of life. The changes in family relationship include:

Taking care of new families

When the children leave home to establish their own families, they may keep in touch with their original families. This attachment will be even closer with the birth of the first child of their children. The parents become grandparents and may help to care for the child. In economic downturns or the cost of living rises, when their children are unemployed or divorced, the original families will become the shelter to help their children cope with financial difficulties or other problems.

Being cared for by their children

With their deteriorating physical condition, the parent-child relationship can be reversed. The parents now need to be cared for by their children. The following is a letter from an old father which is very popular on the web internet (author unknown):

Dear son...

The day that you see me old and I am already now, have patience and try to understand me ...

If I get dirty when eating... if I can not dress... have patience. Remember the hours I spent teaching it to you.

If, when I speak to you, I repeat the same things a thousand and one times... do not interrupt me... listen to me.

When you were small, I had to read to you a thousand and one times the same story until you went to sleep...

When I do not want to have a shower, neither shame me nor scold me... Remember when I had to chase you with a thousand excuses I invented, in order that you wanted to bath...

When you see my ignorance of new technologies... give me the necessary time and not look at me with your mocking smile...

I taught you how to do so many things... to eat good, to dress well... to confront life...

When at some moment I lose the memory or the thread of our conversation... let me have the necessary time to remember... and if I cannot do it, do not become nervous... as the most important thing is not my conversation but surely to be with you and to have you listening to me...

If ever I do not want to eat, do not force me. I know well when I need to and when not.

When my tired legs do not allow me to walk... give me your hand... the same way I did when you learned your first steps.

And when someday I say to you that I do not want to live any more... that I want to die... do not get angry... some day you will understand... Try to understand that my age is not lived but survived.

Some day you will discover that, despite my mistakes, I always wanted the best thing for you and that I tried to prepare the way for you.

You must not feel sad, angry or impotent for seeing me near you. You must be next to me, try to understand me and to help me as I did it when you started living.

Help me to walk... see me to the end of my life with love and patience. I will pay you by a smile and by the immense love I have had always for you.

I love you son...

Your father

Death of the spouse

Death of the spouse has a great impact on the elderly. Some elderly people may not be able to accept that they live longer than their spouse. Therefore, the risk of death will be higher when the widow experiences trauma and loneliness. For this reason, the elderly have to be psychologically prepared for the death of their spouse, siblings, peers and themselves.

5.3 Peer Relationship

All of us are born with social and emotional needs to develop relationship with people who have similar backgrounds, interests and attitudes with us. Thus, apart from our families, we need friends to give us comfort and pleasure.

(A) Importance of Interpersonal Relationship

1. Holistic Health

Friends play an important role in one's physical, mental and social aspects of health.

In view of the physical aspect of health, the companionship of friends provides protection and personal safety in dangerous situations. Human beings are social animals. Friendship provides protection for the survival of mankind, especially in dangerous and threatening situations. People have always stayed in groups to protect themselves against their enemies and protect their personal safety. Therefore, in ancient times, our ancestors hunted in groups. In addition to providing tangible support and protection, friends also provide emotional support in times of crises, and during the aftermath of disasters, which helps us reduce our stress. If a person fails to build healthy relationship with others, they will be isolated. Social isolation causes anxiety and other physical problems. The persistence of these physical problems will cause illness and death. Conversely, social contact and attachments help one to adjust his/her physical condition and relieve some of the symptoms of stress.

In view of the mental aspect of health, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love and belonging are essential for establishing self-esteem and self-actualization when a sense of security is achieved. Friends give us care and friendship which help us develop a sense of belonging to a group. Everyone has a desire to belong to a group to lessen their sense of alienation and loneliness. Thus, we look for peer acceptance. If someone is willing to make friends with us, our self-esteem will be enhanced. We all want to be approved of and accepted by others. The psychologist Carl Rogers remarks that acceptance is the most powerful human need. Friends are able to satisfy this need.

In view of the social aspect of health, friends provide social support in expected and unexpected life events that helps us solve the crisis and increases our capacity to cope with crises. Friends are one of the important elements in a social support network. Friends with similar backgrounds create the unique culture and values which also constitute part of the social culture. However, sometimes these sub-cultures are anti-social in nature. For example, gangs are young people who grow up together but fail to play the expected social roles. They have their own culture and behaviour. They indulge in anti-social behaviour (such as theft, fighting, drugs) under group influence.

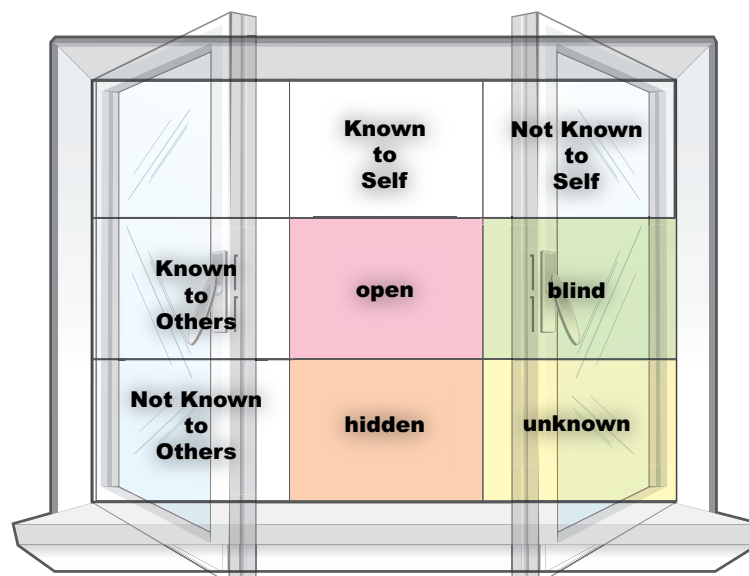
2. Self-understanding

Friends also help us understand ourselves. In Booklet (1), the Looking-glass Self proposed by Charles Horton Cooley was introduced. It is believed that a person is able to understand their self-image through getting along and communicating with their friends. There are three main components of the looking-glass self. They are:

- ✏ We imagine how we must appear to others.
- ✏ We imagine the judgment of that appearance.
- ✏ We develop our 'self' through the judgments of others.

Therefore, friends can shape our self-concept.

When we develop deeper interpersonal relationship, our understanding of ourselves and others will be deepened. The Johari Window can be used to illustrate this. The Johari Window is named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. A four paned "window," as illustrated below, divides personal awareness into four different types: open, hidden, blind, and unknown.



Open

The "open" quadrant represents things that both I know about myself, and that you know about me. The knowledge that the window represents, can include not only factual information, but my feelings, motives, behavior, wants, needs and desires... indeed, any information describing who I am.

Blind

The "blind" quadrant represents things that you know about me, but that I am unaware of. This information is in my blind quadrant because you can see it, but I cannot. Now, I may also have blindspots with respect to many other much more complex things.

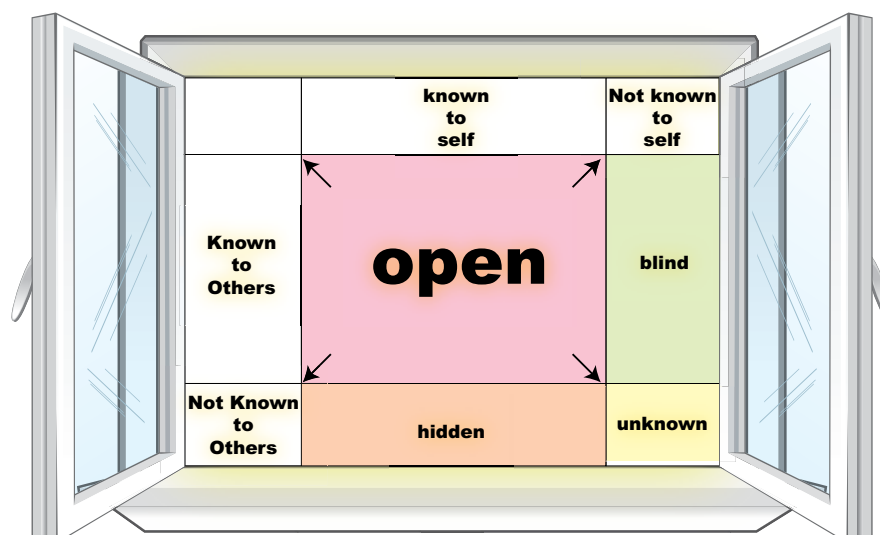
Hidden

The "hidden" quadrant represents things that I know about myself, that you do not know. This information is in my "hidden" quadrant. There are amounts of information that has yet to be revealed to you. As we get to know and trust each other, I will then feel more comfortable disclosing more intimate details about myself.

Unknown

The "unknown" quadrant represents things that neither I know about myself, nor you know about me. Being placed in new situations often reveals new information not previously known to self or others.

The process of enlarging the open quadrant is called self-disclosure, a give and take process between me and the people I interact with. Typically, as I share something about myself (moving information from my hidden quadrant into the open) and if the other party is interested in getting to know me, they will reciprocate, by similarly disclosing information in their hidden quadrant. Thus, an interaction between two parties can be modeled dynamically as two active Johari windows.



3. Loneliness

Friends are important to all of us. Without friends, people may feel lonely. In his book 'Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation' the sociologist Robert Weiss attempts to capture the phenomena of loneliness by distinguishing two types of loneliness: social and emotional.

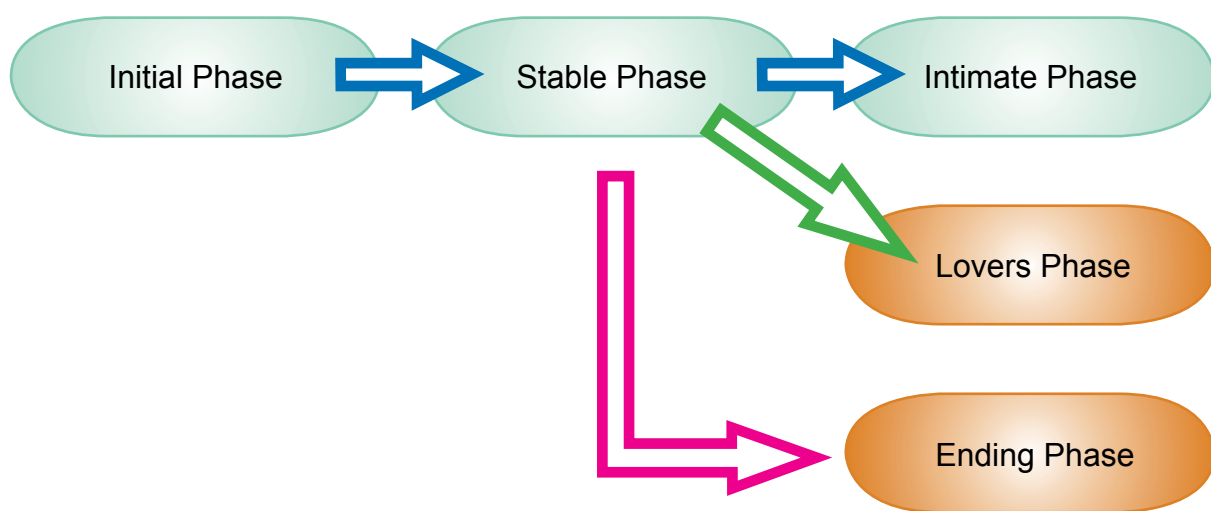
- ✍ Social loneliness is resulted from social isolation. People with social loneliness have a lack of friends. They want to join some social groups but do not know what to do. Under this circumstance, they may feel bored and aimless.
- ✍ Emotional loneliness is a result of emotional isolation. People need an intimate and mutually committed relationship in which they know and care for each other. Without this deep attachment, people may feel anxious, lost and even abandoned.

Social loneliness can be overcome by social relationship and support while emotional loneliness can only be eliminated by intimacy. Social relationship cannot take away emotional loneliness.

(B) Development of Interpersonal Relationship

Similar to family relationship, friendship has its stages of development. Each type of relationship keeps developing and has its own lifecycle.

Figure 5.3 Development of Interpersonal Relationship



1. Initial Phase

In the initial phase, people will know each other and collect information so that they are able to decide whether they become friends. Why do we choose some people to be our friends and keep our distance from others? The following may be four of the possible factors:

Spatial proximity

people who live and work near each other may find it easier to develop friendships. It is not only due to easier accessibility, but also the identity they share, such as being residents of the same neighbourhood, schoolmates/classmates or employees of the same company.

Appearance

we recognize people by their physical characteristics first. People may choose to make friends with those who have similar fashion sense or clothing. They may also be attracted by people who look handsome or beautiful in the beginning, especially those who are also gentle and kind. As time goes by, however, personal traits become more important than appearance.

Birds of a feather flock together

people will make friends with others with similar traits, such as interests, hobbies, background, personality, attitudes and values. The more similar to each other the greater the attractiveness.

Complementary to each other

in some cases, people are attracted by the ones who have opposite traits so that they are able to complement each other. The friendship provides them with mutual satisfaction. For example, an introverted person has an extroverted friend. A careless person has a friend who is attentive and careful. They can find the strengths and qualities they do not have in their friends.

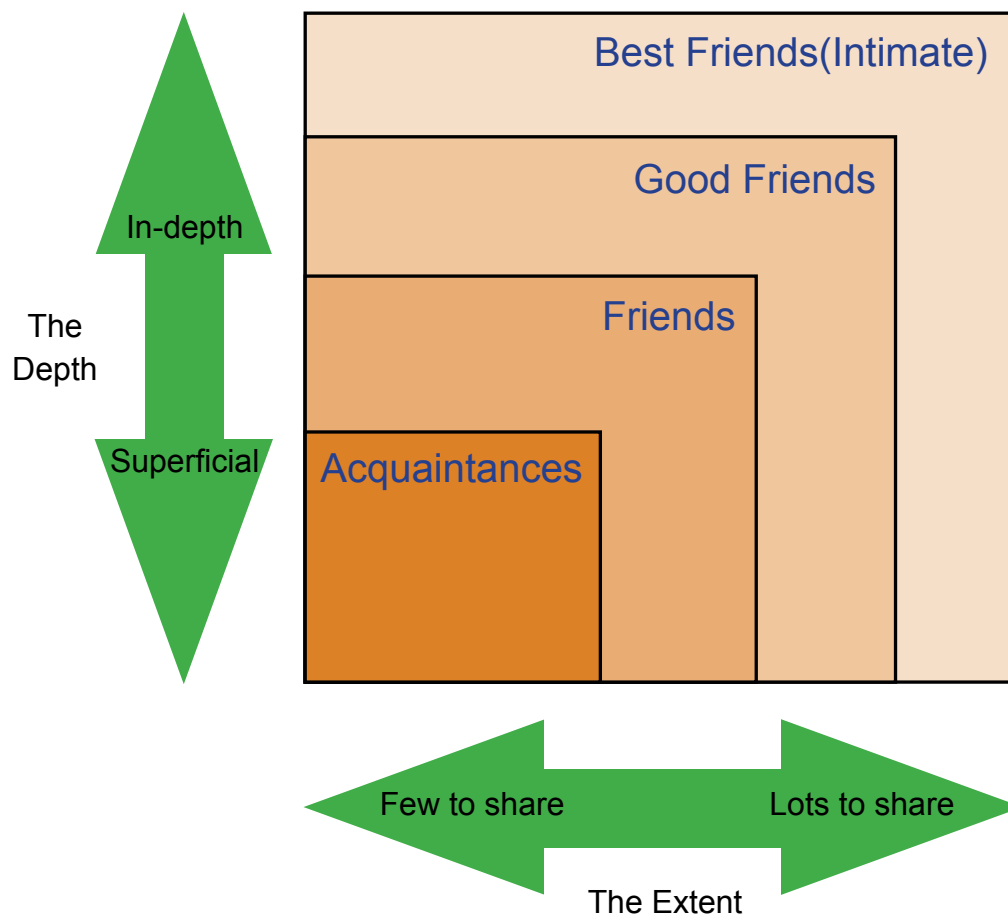
People will start their friendships with casual talks and then develop into sharing of personal thoughts and feelings. With the development of the relationship, they begin to share more personal and in-depth information.

2. Stable Phase

When both sides are satisfied with each other, the relationship will be stable. In this phase, they will be willing to do things to maintain the friendship. The extent of self-disclosure is an indicator of how deep their relationships are. Reluctance of self-disclosure will be an obstacle to the establishment of an intimate relationship. It makes all friendships stay at the initial phase and leads to social alienation in the long term. When people are used to hiding their authentic selves from their friends and not willing to disclose themselves, they may not be able to achieve better self-knowledge in their social interactions. Eventually, both they and their friends will ignore their real needs and feelings.

There are different types of friends and friendships. Each of them represents a different width and depth of self-disclosure.

Figure 5.4 Types of Friends



Therefore, we need to learn how to disclose ourselves to our friends. When we have more information and perception of our friends, the trust in the friendship will be stronger. Frank and honest sharing will enhance the friendship as the more we disclose the deeper the relationship we will be able to develop. Sufficient information will facilitate us to accommodate ourselves and others for mutual benefit. Once the intimate relationship has been developed, we will be more willing to reveal to each other our most authentic selves.

Crises of friendship may come from the wrong estimation of the relationship between each other, resulting in too little or too much self-disclosure. Ultimately, it leads to a failure in establishing an intimate relationship. For example, if one treats a person as their friend, but this person is not willing to disclose their personal feelings and information, the friendship will be affected and even terminated in the long run. Conversely, if one discloses too much information to their friends in the initial stage, their friends may be overwhelmed, or take time to accept the different orientations, attitudes and values, such as sexuality and family problems.

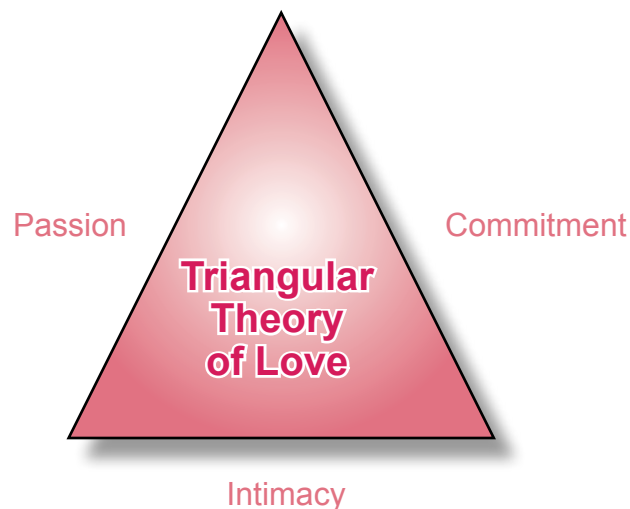
3. Intimate Phase

A person may have many acquaintances but no good friends. A broad social network does not guarantee the presence of any intimate relationship. Our intimate friends share our in-depth feelings. As mentioned above, Robert Weiss proposes that people need intimacy to eliminate emotional loneliness. Our intimate friends will offer support when we are in need. We can also understand ourselves better when we disclose ourselves to our friends.

Intimate relationship may include family members, lovers, friends and colleagues. A high degree of intimacy will make people eager to cultivate the relationship. However, some people may not be able to develop harmonious relationship during courtship since they do not know how to foster and nurture intimate relationship. It ultimately leads to breaking up. Thus, before being a lover, a person should know how to be a good friend first.

What is love? Psychologist Robert Jeffrey Sternberg proposes the triangular theory of love in which there are three elements in love:

Figure 5.5 Triangular Theory of Love



1. Intimacy - Which encompasses feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness
2. Passion - Which encompasses drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation.

3. Commitment - Which encompasses, in the short term, the decision to remain with another, and in the long term, the shared achievements and plans made with that other person.

The 'amount' of love one experiences depends on the absolute strength of these three components; the 'type' of love one experiences depends on their strengths relative to each other. Different stages and types of love can be explained as different combinations of these three elements; for example, the relative emphasis on each component changes over time as an adult romantic relationship develops. A relationship based on a single element is less likely to survive than one based on two or three elements.

Combinations of commitment, intimacy and passion				
Relationship between lovers	Example	Commitment	Intimacy	Passion
No love	Stay in the relationship without reasons	-	-	-
Empty love	Get married or come together for responsibility only	+	-	-
Liking and friendship	Understand each other without passion or desire to stay together	-	+	-
Infatuated love	Stay together only for romantic feeling	-	-	+
Companionate love	Like intimate friends more than lovers	+	+	-
Romantic love	Deeply in love with each other but have no commitment for a long-term relationship	-	+	+
Fatuous love	Deeply in love and desire for a long-term relationship but have limited understanding on each other	+	-	+
Consummate love	Deeply in love, act like intimate friends and have commitment for a life-long relationship	+	+	+

4. Ending Phase

Relationship can be reversed and terminated regardless of how one or both sides hope to maintain the relationship. The ins and outs of a friendship are part of the experiences we have in our personal development across our lifespan. Changes in friendships are due to different reasons such as changes of accommodation, the inappropriate disclosure of the secrets of a friend which leads to deterioration in relations. Sometimes we will spend more time with new friends who share similar interest with us and less time with our old friends. Nevertheless, we need to identify who our real friends are. For example, we may need to terminate the relationship if our friends encourage us to do something wrong or contradictory to our principles and values.

When a relationship is terminated, some people may feel sad whereas others may feel relieved. The termination of relationship can be in three phases:

Initial Phase

A feeling of discontent and disgust appears when they find that their expectations are different and conflicts will be intensified during this period of time. The negative feelings accumulate and cause dislike or even hatred which makes the relationship deteriorate.

Middle Phase




The intimacy in the relationship deteriorates. In order to avoid conflicts, they talk less and the talk becomes superficial. The depth and width of self-disclosure diminishes. They act like acquaintances.

Ending Phase

To end a relationship, different people use different strategies:

- Some people will deliberately let their friends or partners find their mistakes or flaws so the relationship can be ended.
- Some people will avoid the other party and pretend that nothing has happened.
- Some people prefer to talk to their friends or partners clearly and frankly to end the relationship.

Therefore, to maintain a long-term intimate relationship, the following principles can be applied:

-  To listen with patience and always keep secrets
-  Not to use gossip to build and maintain friendships
-  To tell the truth in love and avoid hurting others

- ✎ To share sorrow and joy together
- ✎ To apologize frankly when mistakes are made
- ✎ To share and open ourselves frankly
- ✎ To accept others even if they do something wrong
- ✎ To praise whenever appropriate
- ✎ To help friends in need

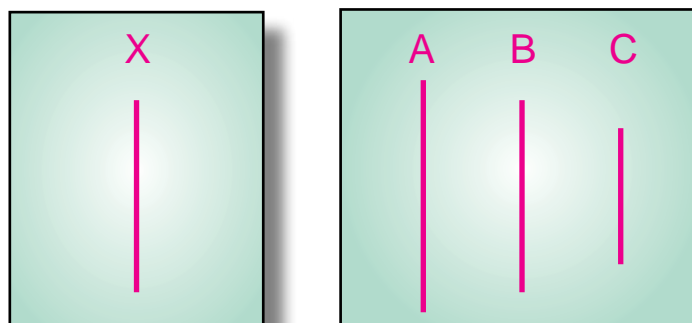
(C) Influence of Interpersonal Relationship

1. Social pressure

The Asch conformity experiments were a series of studies published in the 1950s that demonstrated the power of conformity in groups. These are also known as the "Asch Paradigm".

Experiments led by Solomon Asch asked groups of students to participate in a "vision test."

Figure 5.6 The Asch conformity experiments



Asch showed bars like the above figure to college students in groups of 8 to 10. He told them that their task was to decide: which of the bars on the right was the same length as the one on the left. Only one student in each group was a real subject. All the others were confederates who had been instructed to give incorrect answers. Asch arranged for the real subject to be the next-to-the-last person in each group to announce his answer so that he would hear most of the confederates incorrect responses before giving his own. Would he go along with the crowd? To Asch's surprise, 37 of the 50 subjects conformed to the majority. Asch was disturbed by these results.

Why do the subjects conform to the wrong answer?

First of all, when an individual's opinion differs from others, it will lead to a kind of psychological tension. The person tends to doubt himself or herself. They may then lose their confidence and seek reassurance from others. The more one trusts in a group the more receptive they will be to an unreasonable or even wrong decision.

Secondly, the acceptance of group decisions is often due to the reluctance to be isolated. People seldom dare to be different, so most of them will follow the group decision. When there are different views, in order to maintain the conformity to the group and to achieve group goals, members will exert their influence and pressure on the members who disagree. This is especially true when young people believe that their peers are important. When they need recognition and support from their peers, they will be more easily compliant to the group's decision.

Not only teenagers, but adults can also be influenced by 'groupthink'. When the group cohesion is high and there is a strong leader, the group may reject outside information and just rely on their leader for decision-making in order to enhance the morale of the community. On the one hand, it can increase group cohesion and make it easier to mobilize the collective strength to achieve group objectives, such as collaboration in disaster relief and aftermath reconstruction. However, if the group makes an irrational decision, it may cause catastrophic events. One of the examples was the death of more than 900 people in 18 November 1978 in the United States because the leader of the People Temple, Jim Jones, led his followers to commit mass suicide.

Group pressure can bring positive impacts. For young people, positive group pressure can encourage healthy lifestyles and appropriate social behavior. For example, they can exercise together, cheer each other on in the race, become a positive role model and share their success with their peers. They can also compete positively with their peers. Meanwhile, peers often listen to their frustrations, challenges and concerns and are willing to accept and understand them. With peer support, it is easier for young people to practise and try out new behaviors, training and social skills. It also will be easier for them to get along with others in the future.

However, group pressure also has its negative impacts, especially for young people when they feel isolated or rejected by their peers. Sometimes they will engage in dangerous or antisocial behaviour in order to get the acceptance of their peers. Some young people even adopt different style of dress, friends and values, following their peers' likes and dislikes. According to a study in 1995, 84% young people abused drugs because of peer pressure. Peer pressure is believed to be one of the major reasons for drug and alcohol abuse. Peer pressure may affect the judgment and encourage risk-taking behavior. For example, they may commit some criminal acts to achieve peer acceptance and recognition, and risk

losing parental confidence and being sent to prison. Negative peer influences can drive young people to do something contrary to their own values, choices and behavior.

Since peer pressure will affect one's behaviour, every person must learn how to make decisions for themselves.

2. Group and self

Social life is important to us. Our social life provides us with a sense of security, a sense of belonging and social support. However, if the social groups exert too much influence on us, we will lose ourselves, especially when the group decisions are contradictory to our own values and interests. Different people may have different strategies to deal with these conflicts. The following are three possible responses:

Submissive response

Some people are reluctant to share their views and do anything against the group, even if they are suffering or will suffer. They do not want to break up the relationship. These people are always regarded as 'nice guys' or 'good ladies' but they lose themselves in groups. For example, a submissive teenage student may abuse drugs because of peer pressure even though they know that drugs are detrimental to health.

Aggressive response

At the other extreme, some people will use sarcastic words and aggressive behaviour to express their discontent and act for their personal interests regardless of others' feelings and the situation. They choose to protect their own personal interests at the cost of the interpersonal relationship. They do not mind if it will also cause them trouble. An aggressive teenage student may insult or criticise their friends or classmates when they do something contradictory to their values and principles. This will eventually cause hatred and hostility.

Assertive response

How can we make informed decisions about our health and well-being without alienating ourselves from our peers or losing ourselves in the group influence? Self-assertiveness refers to a communication style in which we express our views and protect our own interests without hurting those of others. A self-assertive person is able to respect others and protect their own interests. He or she will make their feelings and position clear and firm. Once the peers are aware of his/her firm attitude, they may give up any attempt to influence him/her.

To achieve self-assertiveness, we can:

- Express personal feelings and thoughts openly, using 'I' statements
- Make the details clearly presented if there is any feeling of discomfort.
- Use specific descriptions of here-and-now behaviours and issues and avoid any unnecessary elaboration or provoking speech and acts
- Avoid using threats, criticism and arbitrary judgements in confrontations
- Use firm eye contact and natural tones of speech

Self-assertiveness is influenced by the different cultures we live in. For instance, the importance of individual rights and interests is upraised in western society. It is easier to be self-assertive. However, the importance of kinship and community, and its collective interests are emphasized by most Chinese. Harmony is the most treasured attribute. For this reason, some Chinese tend to be passive and submissive even when their interests are being sacrificed. Meanwhile, in some patriarchal cultures, such as those in Latin American countries, Spain, China, Japan or South Korea, men are also more prone to aggressive behavior for conflict resolution. Self-assertiveness is related to self-confidence. Someone who believes that they have control over their environment will be more able to be assertive in interpersonal relationship. On the contrary, if they feel powerless to change the environment and believe that they are manipulated by fate, they will learn helplessness. They can only be assertive when they overcome these feelings of inferiority.

5.4 Workplace Relationships

Every adult needs to work. Like family and peer relationships, the workplace relationship is another important interpersonal relationship in adulthood. Broadly speaking, a workplace relationship is an interpersonal relationship within an organization, such as the relationship amongst employers and employees, students and teachers. It can also be the relationship between colleagues, supervisors and subordinates, service providers and customers. Not only do these relationships have a significant impact on the development of an organization, but also the health of an individual when people nowadays tend to spend more time in the workplace and interact with their colleagues. Good workplace relationship offers opportunities for an individual to relieve work stress. However, if the workplace relationship is unhealthy, it may create emotional tension, which lowers self-esteem and leads to role ambiguity, loneliness, anger and even mental disorders.

(A) Interpersonal Relationships in a Workplace

Interpersonal relationship in a workplace can be classified into four types:

1. An independent relationship: everyone has their own task, and they seldom cooperate with others
2. A dependent relationship: everyone needs to cooperate to finish a plan or project
3. A competing relationship: everyone has to compare their performance and compete with their colleagues in order to be promoted and achieve a higher salary
4. A conflicting relationship: the colleagues have opposing views which are communicated with an aggressive attitude and behavior

In the real work setting, these relationships are dynamic, creating complex interpersonal relationship. For example, in a large insurance company, employees are divided into different groups to achieve a goal. They are competing with the other groups. Hence, members in a group work as a team and cooperate with each other to carry out promotional activities, creating a dependent relationship. Yet, members also compete with each other to achieve better individual performance. In addition, once the colleague gets promoted, they may no longer complain about the department head with their former colleagues. Meanwhile, business co-operation can turn a competing relationship between the two companies into a mutually dependent relationship for co-operation.

(B) Interpersonal Skills in the Workplace

Positive and productive communication is essential in establishing an effective workplace relationship.

1. Developing a trusting relationship







A positive and productive workplace relationship is based on trust. It is well known that trust is a reciprocal process. Generally speaking, the more an individual trusts in others, the more the others trust in them. Mutual trust allows for the sharing of information between people (trust in communication), the ability to keep agreements (trust in contracts), and the willingness to respect people's ability (trust in competence).

2. Listening and Advice Giving

Listening includes empathy, which means standing in other person's shoes; understanding their thoughts and emotions and giving advice to them. If we are willing to listen, more practical advice can be given which can improve work efficiency. (Further information will be discussed in Booklet (14) – Social Care in Action)

3. Skills in Expressing Views

People will be more willing to listen to you if you:






-  Place emphasis on others' needs and interest
-  Use positive words
-  Praise first and let recommendations come next
-  Make the opinions straightforward
-  Keep the requests practical
-  Explore the difficulties in implementation and suggest ways of handling

4. Persuasion skills

Persuasion is a reasonable way to convince others, allowing others to choose freely. The three main elements of persuasion are reasons, reputation and affection. Reasons can be in the form of evidence, which supports an argument or some conditional offer. Reputation is the confidence others have in you, which is obtained from profession, integrity and personal traits. Affection means making here-and-now statements of personal feelings with the understanding of how to make use of information for emotional resonance.

5. Consensus

The following skills can be used to reach a consensus:

-  Concluding problems and debating the issue
-  Emphasizing common goals and needs
-  Searching for a solution which benefits both parties
-  Using objective criteria as a basis for discussion
-  Being serious but not aggressive

(C) Conflict Management




Conflicts arise when two parties are unwilling to make a concession and a common consensus cannot be met.

1. Conflicts

Conflict refers to the result of tension due to different perceptions or disagreements between individuals or groups. Although tension creates an uncomfortable feeling among individuals, the disagreement allows the two parties to clarify their expectations and thoughts, learning to deal with disagreement and making adjustments. When the conflict is handled properly, problems will be solved. Both parties will be able to learn how to negotiate with others to achieve personal growth.

However, some people perceive conflicts as threats and try to avoid them. Avoiding and suppressing conflicts lower one's creativity and efficiency. As mentioned before, social pressure and suppression of conflicts will lead to 'group think' which eventually disrupts one's creativity. Yet, positive conflicts allow people to enhance personal and organizational achievements. Hence, rather than avoiding conflicts, the way of dealing with conflicts is most important.

Why do conflicts arise? There are different factors across situations. In this section, we will focus on the workplace relationship. Stephen Robbins, the management and organizational behaviour expert, classifies conflicts as follows:





-  **Communication**
conflicts are the result of misunderstandings based on incorrect, distorted and unclear information
-  **Structure**
competition of resources due to the structural needs of the organization
-  **Individuals**
conflicts due to individual characteristics such as different values and emotions; conflicts in interpersonal relationship are often the result of misunderstandings based on mistaken assumptions or expectations and stereotyping





Stereotyping

Applying a set of presumed attitudes about groups of individuals in society. This relates to the formation of positive and negative attitudes, which can affect behavior towards a particular group or individual. Stereotyping can be learned by children from their parents. In addition to this, the mass media (i.e., television, newspapers, books, films, games and comics) can reinforce stereotypical attitudes.

Conflicts can happen:

-  **In individuals (internal conflict)**
For example, whether an individual should give up their own interest in order to help others
-  **Between individuals (interpersonal conflict)**
For example, quarrels between a husband and wife
-  **Within groups (intra-group conflict)**
For example, disputes due to corporate decision-making
-  **Between groups (inter-group conflict)**
For example, disputes between employers and employees

Stephen Robins describes five stages in the conflict process:

-  **Stage 1: Potential Opposition or Incompatibility**
There is a presence of conditions that create opportunities for conflicts to arise. However, the conflicts are not yet at the surface so the parties involved may not be aware of them. The contradictory or opposite directions in goals and resource allocation may cause conflicts in the future.
-  **Stage 2: Cognition and Personalization**
There is awareness by one or more parties of the existence of conditions that create opportunities for conflicts to arise. Meanwhile, the emotional involvement in the conflict creates anxiety, tenseness, frustration and hostility.

Stage 3: Intentions

This concerns how an individual is going to handle the conflict. The possible intentions include competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding.

Stage 4: Behaviour

This includes statements, actions and reactions made by the conflicting parties. These conflict behaviours are usually overt attempts to implement each party's intention.

Stage 5: Outcomes

These are the consequences of the action-reaction interplay between the conflicting parties. The outcomes can be functional in that conflict results in an improvement in group performance or dysfunctional in that it hinders the group's performance.

2. Managing Conflicts

How to handle conflicts depends on the degree and nature of the conflicts. Thomas Kilman suggested a Conflict Mode Instrument, stating that there are five methods in handling conflicts:

Competing (assertive and uncooperative)

an individual pursues his own interests at the expense of others

Avoiding (unassertive and uncooperative)

an individual does not deal with the conflict and ignores it; but avoidance may worsen the situation.

Accommodating (unassertive and cooperative)

an individual neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of others: there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode; yet, it may also worsen the situation over time as it eventually causes conflict within an individual.

Collaborating (both assertive and cooperative)

this respects others' goals and involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfy their concerns, establishing a sense of belonging.

 **Compromising (moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness)**

the objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties.

There are various strategies to resolve conflicts. A person who has healthy workplace relationship is able to deal with and solve the conflicts that arise between colleagues as well as encourage discussion between individuals to achieve common goals. While an individual is establishing a workplace relationship, he/she is also learning to improve his/her problem solving skills and achieve a stable and long-term relationship.

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Learning and Teaching References

- 1** Personal Needs and Development across Lifespan
- 2** Health and Well-being
- 3** Physical Well-being – Healthy Body
- 4** Mental Well-being – Healthy Mind
- 5** **Social Well-being – Inter-personal Relationship**
- 6** Healthy Community
- 7** Caring Community
- 8** Ecology and Health
- 9** Building a Healthy City
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- 15C** Health and Social Care Issue – Domestic Violence
- 15D** Health and Social Care Issue – Addiction
- 15E** Health and Social Care Issue – Poverty