

ROTHERHAM RELATIONSHIPS CHARTER 2023/27

Every child – resilient, successful, and safe.



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
WHY RELATIONSHIPS MATTER	3
ROTHERHAM'S CORE RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLES	4
A. Pregnancy and the Early Years	5
B. Children and Teenagers	6
C. Families and Adulthood	7
D. Later Years	8
LEADERSHIP AND MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS	9
What works to improve relationships?	10

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about and supporting positive relationships, whether within the Local Authority, with other organisations and most importantly, with our residents, underpins our approach in Rotherham. We want Rotherham to be a place where no one is lonely, every child sees parents and caregivers getting on well, whether they live together or apart, where better mental health is something that everyone can have, and where neighbourhoods and communities are full of people who are kind and who care. A place where employers know the value of relationships and a place where organisations overcome their differences and work together well.



Cllr Victoria Cusworth

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Nicola Curley
Strategic Director
Children & Young People's Services

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Cllr David Roche

WHY RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Rotherham has worked hard to build delivery of high quality services, whilst effectively responding to the challenges faced by residents, partners, and businesses across the borough. This has been achieved against a backdrop of growing demand, immense challenges as we continue to work in the context of a global pandemic, an unprecedented period of budget reductions for local government and the growing cost of living crisis.

Many services and organisations have been structured to focus on asset-based working, prevention, and early intervention to give communities and citizens more control over the issues that are most important to them. Four guiding principles have been introduced which underpin the Council Plan (2022/2025):

- Expanding opportunities for all
- Recognising and building on strengths to make positive change
- Working with communities
- Focusing on prevention

Rotherham Childrens Services was rated Good by Ofsted in August 2022, and this highlights the sustained good practice evident in the council and with partners. We work together to ensure that **every child is resilient, successful, and safe.**

This Rotherham Relationships Charter underpins each of these principles. Our family, work and community relationships are one of the most important aspects of our lives, yet we often forget just how crucial our connections with other people are for our happiness. Relationships make us content and fulfilled; yet poor relationships can also make us feel sad, afraid, anxious or lonely.

www.jrf.org.uk/blog/stronger-together-indispensable-role-human-relationships-economic-security

Couple, family, and social relationships hold the key to good parenting, educational attainment, mental and physical wellbeing and quality of life in our later years. Essentially, it's the people around us that will get us through life's ups and downs. Indeed, research evidence has grown in recent years establishing a scientific basis for what we believe to be true. We now know, for example, that the quality of relationships affects how much alcohol we drink, fundamental aspects of our physical health such as blood pressure, and our mental health. And we also know that isolation and loneliness – that is, the absence of loving relationships of any sort – are detrimental to our health, being associated with increased risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and mortality (see, for example, Whisman, 2010). Relationship conflict is a key factor in poor mental health and increased risk of suicide.

Happiness and health aren't the result of wealth, fame, or hard work, but come instead from the quality of our relationships (*Triumphs of Experience, Harvard University, 2012*). People who are positively connected to family, friends, colleagues, and their community are happier, physically healthier and live longer, with fewer mental and physical health problems than people who are less well connected. Living in any kind of conflict, being socially isolated or being in a toxic relationship is damaging and we know, through extensive research and evidence, that outcomes are not good when children and adults are exposed to this.

It's crucial that support for people who need help with their relationships, whatever their age, becomes embedded in how we deliver services locally, so that relationship support becomes a normal part of day to day working practice. The Rotherham Relationships Charter sets out how we will make this a reality.

ROTHERHAM'S CORE RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLES

We are committed to putting relationships at the forefront of everything that we do, making every contact count, as we deliver services with, and for, the people of Rotherham and as we build resilience so that people do not require additional contact from the public sector and statutory agencies. To achieve this, we commit to the following:

- Raising awareness of everyone's need for quality relationships and building a greater understanding of the impact, positively or not, that our relationships have on so many important aspects of our lives.
- Promoting quality relationships for all, adopting a holistic approach that makes enquiring about the quality of relationships a normal part of our work and daily life.
- Supporting our workforce so that relationships are part of our training, supervision, assessments, plans, service plans and impact monitoring. So that people can access relationship support as early as possible in the development of a problem.
- Agreeing common language and developing information/advice/and a toolkit that the wider workforce can use when having relationship quality conversations with people.
- Calling upon the community, businesses, and systems leaders to prioritise relationships in their areas of work and consider the impact that their strategic/delivery plans/working practices have on people's relationships.
- Aspiring to better quality relationships for everyone (students, employees, service users, residents, couples, families, adults, children, and young people) that will enhance their quality of life and improve their life chances and build stronger and kinder communities and neighbourhoods.
- Developing Rotherham Relationships Charter Status.

A. Pregnancy and the Early Years

Pregnancy is a time of huge change in terms of lifestyle and responsibility for parents and the wider family as well as a time when the parents prepare for a new set of relationships with their new arrival. The whole dynamic of the couple's previous relationship/s are about to change as the pregnancy brings a wide range of new considerations. This includes the kind of parents they will be, if the baby will be healthy, whether there will be enough money coming in and how they will cope with these new demands, and this can be exacerbated if there are already other children in the home. We also know that during pregnancy those affected by an abusive relationship may find that things get worse. It is therefore important that frontline workers and employers have the skills and tools to prepare expectant parents for the changes and stresses (emotionally, financially, and relationally) that having a new baby brings.

The first attachment that we make with others is with our parents or other caregivers and is often viewed as the most important relationship in our lives. Human babies are born very dependent on their parents, they undergo huge brain development and growth in the first two years of life. The healthy brain development of infants (as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive development) depends on a loving bond or attachment relationship with a primary caregiver, usually a parent. The learning environment in an infant's early years as well as the content of that learning has a critical impact upon a child's ongoing ability to learn and also impacts significantly on the learning style for a child. In the early years we also develop crucial relational skills, language, and communication, and learn how to cope with difference and stress, all of which form key areas of a child's school readiness. The relationships that others' have, set the pattern for our own relationships in adult life.

PLEDGE

- 1 Introduce enquiry about relationship quality into regular staff supervision, not simply to explore potential domestic violence and abuse, but to explore conflicted or strained relationships by using a common relationship quality assessment measure.
- 2 Develop and agree training for staff to ensure an ongoing focus on the quality of relationships, including embedding of common language that is useful for discussing relationships.
- 3 Ensure that the 'digital front door' includes self-serve, universal resources on couple conflict, clear information, advice and signposting.
- 4 Build questions and guidance about relationship quality in assessments across a range of services.
- 5 Include reference to the Rotherham Relationships Charter and the importance of 'thinking' relationships in strategic and operational delivery plans and strategies to embed this approach widely.
- 6 Include Rotherham Relationships Charter in Childrens Centre/ Family Hub Advisory and Partnership Boards.
- 7 Include the impact of a service/organisation's relationship focus in impact scorecards.
- 8 Utilise relationship assessment tools with service users.

How organisations can embed the Rotherham Relationships Charter

- Introduce enquiry about relationship quality into regular staff supervision.
- Provide training for staff – including common language for discussing relationships.
- Provide training to staff on discussing relationships and relationship support.
- Review

B. Children and Teenagers

Younger children learn about relationships by observing those around them, particularly those people that are significant in their lives and this will include learning how to resolve differences. Relational patterns established in the early years and childhood, very often set the pattern for adolescence and later life. Children who are exposed to frequent and unresolved family conflict, experience significantly worse outcomes than their peers.

The importance of positive peer relationships during childhood is well established. Friendships provide children with the opportunity to develop socially through companionship and shared interests. These peer relationships are important in relation to identity, personal growth, communication skills and social adjustment. It's not surprising therefore that positive peer relationships are associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. We need everyone who lives or works children to help them develop the skills to form healthy relationships and build resilience to tackle potential problems associated with conflict and bullying.

Children and young people spend significant amounts of their time in education, and we therefore need to recognise the impact good or poor relationships with their teachers can have on their whole school experience and their sense of well-being. Good quality teacher-pupil relationships are central factors in the child's successful development, not only in terms of academic achievement, but also in the development of positive social skills, social adjustment, and future attainment.

Adolescence is characterised by significant psychological, social, and physical transitions during which identity and a sense of self-worth are formed, where we begin to shape our future social world. During this relatively turbulent time, relational conflict and instability can be at their highest. Higher rates of mental health problems including anxiety and depression are associated with loneliness, isolation and social rejection during adolescence. In 2020, 25% of young people responding to the Ditch the Label national survey reported having been bullied (including cyberbullying) and they reported the impact as being a lower sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Of those bullied: 80% felt anxious or depressed, 33% had suicidal thoughts, 27% had self-harmed, 18% skipped school; 12% developed anti-social behaviour, 12% developed an eating disorder, 11% attempted suicide, 9% had run away from home, and 8% used drugs/alcohol. Over 60% of young people attending CAMHS services reported bullying as an important reason for their attendance.

When addressing challenges with children and teenagers, such as poor school attendance or anti-social behaviour, in the home, community or schools, it is important to develop an understanding of the wider family context, recognising that the whole family may need support to address the presenting issue. The use of a common language and a toolkit of resources may be helpful for all frontline staff, wherever they work, to overcome some of the anxieties relationship quality conversations can bring.

Parents, carers, schools, and partners need to support young people in developing the necessary awareness and skills to build positive, healthy relationships and equally to detect potentially harmful relationships and friendships.

When schools and further education institutions promote pro-social behaviour and anti-discriminatory

attitudes whilst taking firm action to prevent and tackle bullying and abuse in all its forms, young people become more resilient.

Tackling dysfunctional or non-supportive relationships in the teenage years is crucially important to establishing a firm foundation, setting effective relational patterns, and developing an individual's relational confidence for adulthood.

How organisations can embed the Rotherham Relationships Charter

- Introduce enquiry about relationships into regular staff supervision.
- Provide training to staff on discussing relationships and relationship support.
- Enquire about family relationships in behavioural/attendance assessments.
- Review strategic/delivery plans to include a focus on relationships.
- Bullying training/workshops Introduce workshops on positive relationships in schools.

C. Families and Adulthood

For many adults, the nature of their relationships changes radically, as they progress into adulthood. The informal networks of adolescence diminish, and the social world can become dominated by couple relationships, new families, and workplace friendships. Where individuals don't have employment and where they don't form or join a new family then often, they gradually and increasingly become socially isolated. Life transitions such as family breakdown, changing or losing jobs, bereavement and divorce can also have significant and lasting impact on an individual's social network or relative isolation.

The different ways that men and women form and use friendships also become clearer throughout adulthood often leaving men with less friends and less support than women. Social isolation is the most reliable predictor for issues around self-neglect, self-abuse, and suicidal tendencies and this is particularly so for men aged 40+ which is when the poverty of their friendships and social networks begins to have an impact. Loneliness and its impact on physical and mental health is becoming better understood, together with its links to feelings of being without value or worth and, for some, attempts at suicide.

The nature and impact of couple relationships have changed radically in the last 50 or more years. Fewer couples are getting married, and the divorce rate is higher (42% in 2021 which is a 9.6% increase compared to 2020), more couples are co-habiting and there has been a significant increase in same sex couples. Serial monogamy characterises the current pattern. Despite the increased flexibility in couple types, conflict remains a major issue, with increasing numbers of adults living alone (particularly men) and a significant increase in lone parents (particularly women).

Being in a stable positive relationship is closely linked to good physical and mental health as well as low morbidity and mortality. A good consistent relationship is linked to greater life satisfaction, less stress, lower blood pressure and generally better health. Similarly, living as a couple results in less cognitive impairment in later life. In many ways being in a stable and positive relationship creates a protective factor for the individuals concerned.

However, whilst relationships can have positive benefits for all aspects of the couple's health it is important to recognise that being in a poor quality relationship can be more destructive than not being in a relationship at all. Intimate partner violence and domestic abuse is a significant issue impacting on high numbers of adults and children daily. Early identification of couple conflict, prior to escalation to domestic violence or abuse, will allow families to access support to make positive changes – leading to better outcomes and significant cost savings.

In an ever changing, modern society we need to ensure that regardless of who you call 'family' you have the best relationships that you can.

In 2014 the Relationships Alliance estimated that family breakdown in the UK cost £46 billion to public services in one year and that a large degree of this was avoidable had interventions been offered earlier. Evidence tells us that children aren't so much affected by the fact that their parents split up, but by how they behaved towards each other and their children before, during and after the split. Far too many children don't see their non-resident parent because of conflict, and this is a situation that needs to change. We want all frontline professionals, who already work with families, to have the skills and tools to be able to support the adults and their children through these tough times. We know that family life can be challenging, and whatever family structure we live in, it's the degree of harmony that is more predictive of our mental well-being, than the family structure itself.

We need to train the workforce in the use of a range of toolkits and programmes that we know can help. We will make sure that the workforce has the skills to enquire about the quality of relationships between parents and between the children in the family. Again, within our wider offer we would want to include more widely available mediation interventions, convening family problem solving processes and interventions for families where children are violent, abusive, or controlling towards their parents or other caregivers.

How organisations can embed the Rotherham Relationships Charter

- Introduce enquiry about relationships into regular staff supervision
- Provide training to staff on discussing relationships and relationship support
- Make 'every contact count' – to ensure family conflict is identified early
- Include relationship quality in assessments
- Review strategic/delivery plans to include a focus on relationships
- Test the use of relational tools in practice with a view to embedding their use across Rotherham services.
- Ensure Loneliness Strategy includes a focus on relationships and identifying family conflict

D. Later Years

Having already established how important couple, family and work relationships are in adult life, it becomes clear that as people enter later life, family breakdown, divorce, separation, and retirement create a much bigger potential for isolation. An Age UK report in 2014, stated that 3.6 million over 65's live alone and the number of older people in our population is increasing. This stage of life brings about changes in the roles and responsibilities that individuals have. While many people can continue to play an active role well in later life, loneliness and social isolation in this age group is higher than in any other period across life. Age UK report that 1.2 million people over 50 reported that they felt lonely and socially excluded from society.

Conversely, we have also noted that increasingly grandparents are playing more of a role in caring for their grandchildren, including becoming the main carer. Family courts are also reporting an increase in grandparents using the court system to gain access to their grandchildren following relationship breakdown. Services for older people, as well as communities, generally need to be more focussed and creative in designing opportunities, not only to increase social networks for older people, but also to include them in mixed age communities where others can benefit from the wealth of their life experience.

LEADERSHIP AND MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

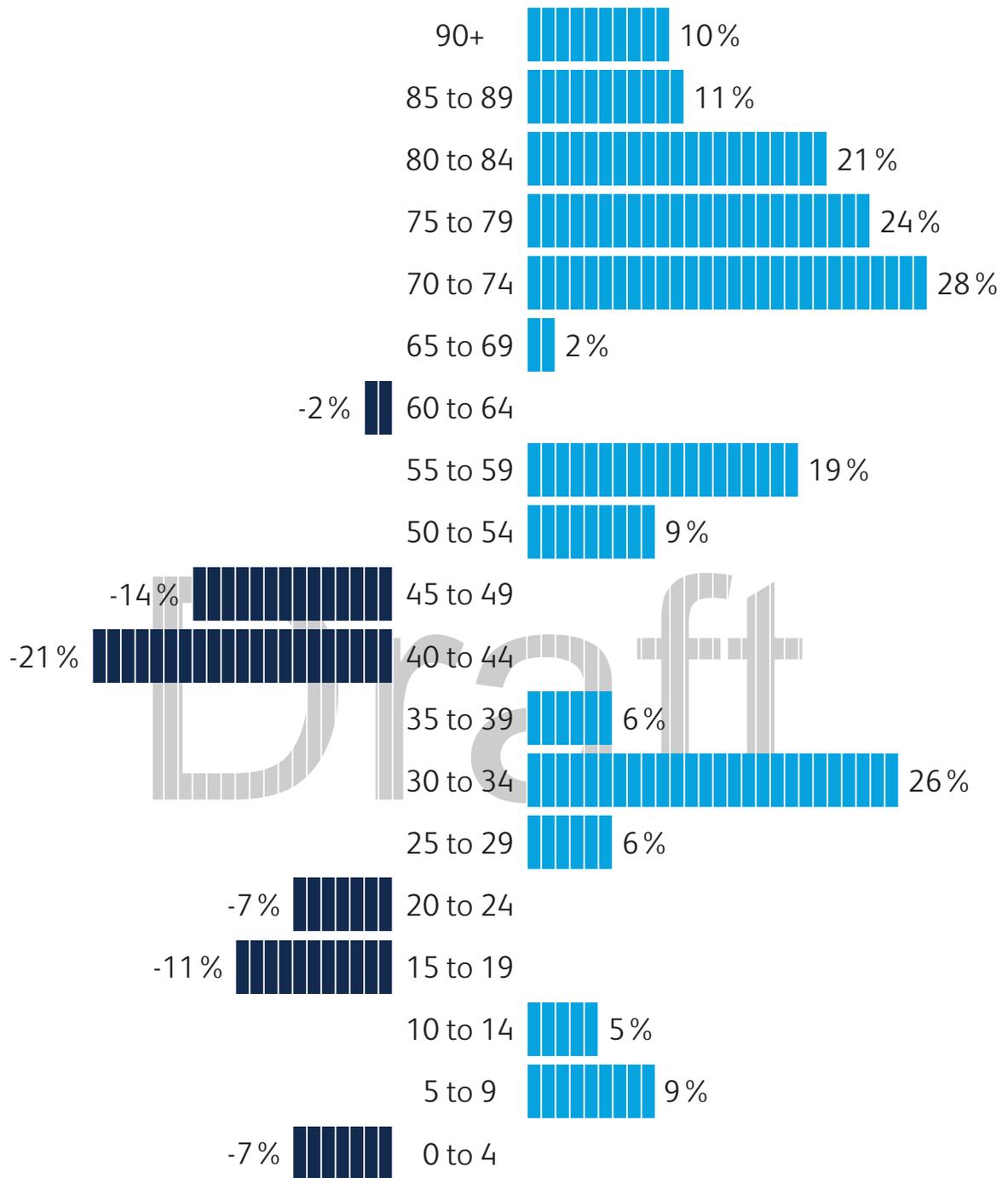
The evidence is clear – good quality relationships not only give our lives meaning, they are also critical to a vast array of outcomes, both positive and negative, for everyone concerned. Yet it will take time and energy to ensure that this Rotherham Relationship Charter has the desired effect of improving relationships across the area. The following will be needed:

A	Departments and organisations commit to the principles and agree to specific actions and timescales.
B	Identify a lead group to monitor progress, with accountability across departments/organisations. Agree who the group will report to and who will hold lead responsibility.
C	Develop a communications strategy, so that talking about relationships becomes embedded in core work (e.g., the ‘virtual front door’ resources, CEO messaging, an email banner, social media, etc).
D	Create a network of Relationship Champions who have attended training, who can provide peer support to each other.
E	Agree a monitoring framework, to measure the effectiveness of the Relationships Pledge.
F	Bravery: we will launch the Mayor’s Love Letter to Rotherham, a competition to find contributions from Rotherham residents, adults, children and young people where they describe what and why they love their Rotherham places and people. With a £500 prize for first place, £250 for second and £100 for third. The winners to be announced on 14th February 2023

Detail

What works to improve relationships?

Population change (%) by age group in Rotherham, 2011 to 2021



This is how Rotherham compares. There has been an increase of 16.4% in people aged 65 years and over, an increase of 0.1% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 2.3% in children aged under 15 years.

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