

Social relationships

A. Imagine for a minute what life would be like without social relationships: not swapping news with your family at the end of the day, not gossiping with your friends about the party you went to last night, not chatting with colleagues at the coffee machine, not having any close relationship involving mutual support and caring. Imagining this kind of life is so difficult as to be almost impossible, which neatly illustrates the importance of social relationships in our lives.

B. From the earliest age, humans want to belong to their world and to feel a sense of connectedness with it. This need for belonging can be observed as the motivation for infants in their earliest interactions with others. From the moment of birth, babies seek to establish an enduring social relationship with their main carer, extending their circle of relationships outwards as skills and circumstances allow. Later, as their social skills improve, children modify their behaviour to others in order to fit in with other people and gain a sense of belonging.

C. Wanting to belong is thought to be a basic need, which makes us set up, keep and – when necessary – repair good social relations with others. It has been suggested that we create social relations for four main reasons: to enable us to compare ourselves with others, thereby reducing uncertainty; to obtain the reward of stimulating company; to be valued; and to gain emotional support.

D. Social comparison allows participants to measure their own uncertainty against that of other people and decide, for instance, whether their fear is justified. It can thus be a strategy for reducing anxiety.

E. Relationships can also be used for information seeking. Just as young children refer to their parents for information in new or ambiguous situations, adults will also seek out someone with more information when in difficulty. Hospital patients facing an operation the next day generally prefer to spend the night with others who have already had the operation and can provide information about the potential danger, rather than with someone who is about to undergo the same operation.

F. In one piece of research, people were asked to specify the conditions under which they would like to be with others. The researcher found that people preferred the company of others in pleasant conditions, such as enjoying a concert, when feeling happy or in the work environment. Company was also preferred in threatening conditions, such as when in danger or feeling afraid. In unpleasant conditions, such as when feeling tense or having just failed a test, people preferred to be alone, as they did in conditions requiring them to concentrate, such as solving a complicated problem or making a decision.

Question 1-5

Answer using **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage.

1. What do children change in order to be accepted by others?
2. What does comparing ourselves to others help decrease?
3. Who is the first person babies build a strong connection with?
4. What do people look for in relationships when they are uncertain about something?
5. When do people prefer solitude instead of socializing?

Question 6-9

Complete the sentences using **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage.

6. From birth, humans have a natural need to feel a sense of _____ with others.
7. Research suggests that people build social connections to compare themselves with others, reduce uncertainty, enjoy engaging interactions, feel appreciated, and receive _____.
8. Social comparison helps people check their own worries by seeing how others feel, helping them decide if their fear is _____.
9. When people are stressed or experience failure, they prefer to be _____ rather than interact with others.