



# Beyond Romance

*Relationships Australia*

TASMANIA

**A**t this time of year, we hear a great deal about romantic relationships – we're encouraged to tell our partners how we feel about them through gifts and cards and messages.

Valentine's Day is traditionally a day to celebrate romance – with chocolates, roses and bubbles all round.

It's true that our romantic relationships are important, and nurturing and celebrating them is crucial.

Couples who take time out to affirm and focus on their connection will have stronger and more resilient relationships, which positively affect our health and wellbeing in so many ways.

But equally important are the other significant relationships in our lives – our relationships with our children, parents, extended family, friends, neighbours, workmates, and crucially, with ourselves.

What value would there be in strengthening and affirming all the important connections in our busy lives? What benefit?

There's quite a bit of research that tells us how beneficial healthy relationships can be. We know healthy relationships give us someone to rely on.

In healthy relationships, we have people who can give us positive reinforcement, affirmation and energy.

- They give us a chance to express love and care towards others.
- They can reduce stress, which improves

our mental health and wellbeing.

- They can encourage and support us in healthy behaviours like exercising or eating better.
- They also provide love, fun and meaning, which we know helps us to live longer, more fulfilling lives.

We don't just get these benefits from our romantic relationships. They can just as easily come from the range of healthy, positive relationships we have in our lives.

Unfortunately, there aren't many dedicated opportunities or reminders to look after these other important relationships.

Valentine's Day is actually a perfect time to broaden our definition of "relationship" beyond the romantic and to celebrate and nurture those other important connections, just as we would with our romantic partner.

So how do we nurture and grow positive, healthy relationships with the important people in our lives?

It's human nature to adapt to the wonderful people around us and this can result in us taking them for granted over time.

A relationship is a bit like a garden. It will survive neglect, but if it's watered regularly and the weeds are kept in check, it will be a much healthier and more enjoyable space for you to spend time in.

Here are some tips for nurturing the garden of our cherished relationships that will help them strengthen and grow:

- Remember when...

Have fun remembering what it was about that person that you have valued from the start, the things you admired, what you first noticed about them. Share your stories with each other, and enjoy revisiting that first sense of connection together.

- Express gratitude

Write down the 20 things that you most appreciate about the person you value. As an inexpensive but original gift, write them on pieces of paper, fold them up and place in a decorated jar to share with them, perhaps taking out one each day to read and reflect on together.

- Be curious

Get into the habit of regularly setting time aside to ask that person how they are feeling about life at the moment - take turns to listen to each other without interruption. Remember how interested you were in this person when you first met them? Give each other the gift of listening.

- Clear the air

If there are any moments of misunderstanding or stress between you, don't wait for these to become big problems before addressing them. Keeping short accounts with each other is like regularly weeding a much-loved garden to make sure that it thrives. Inviting gentle feedback from the important people in your life helps to keep relationship 'weeds' at bay.

At Relationships Australia Tasmania, we're here to help you strengthen all the relationships that are important to you - with your romantic partner, your parents, your children, your community or with yourself.

To find out more about how our services can help you, visit [tas.relationships.org.au](http://tas.relationships.org.au) or call 1300 364 277.

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