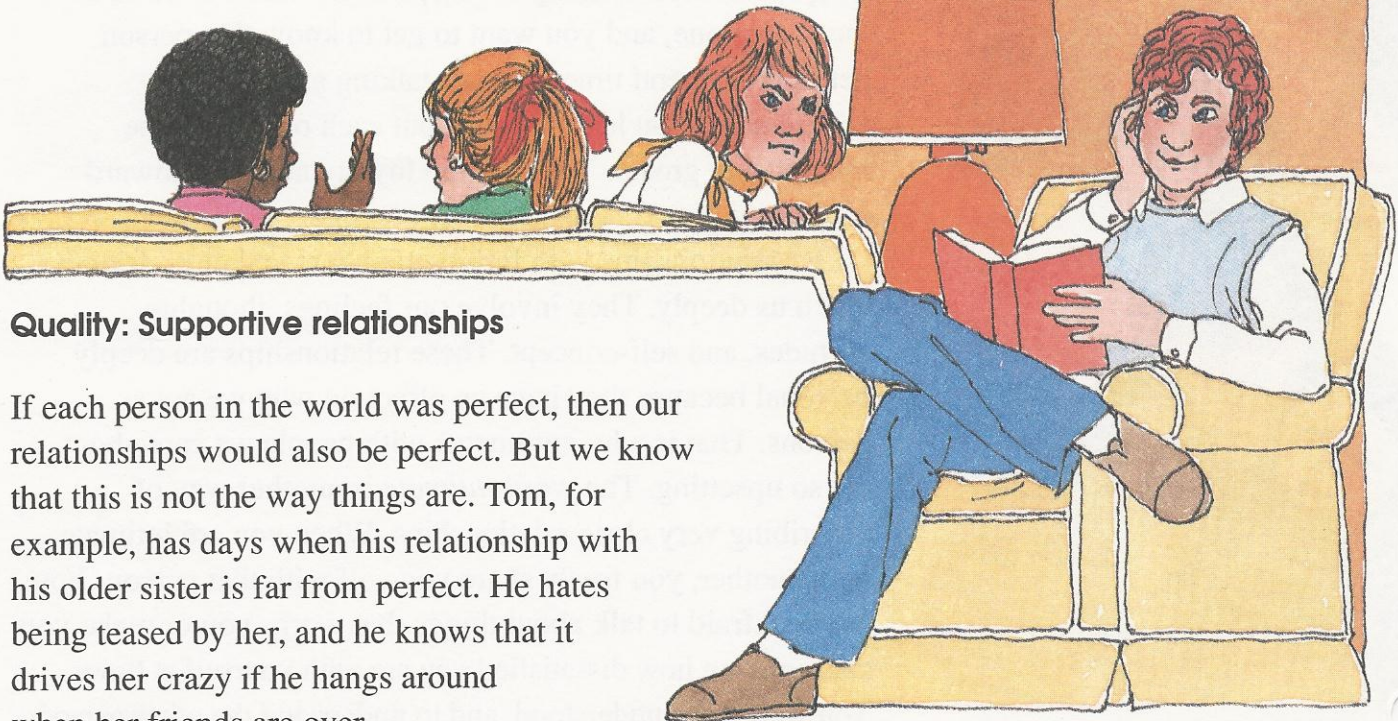
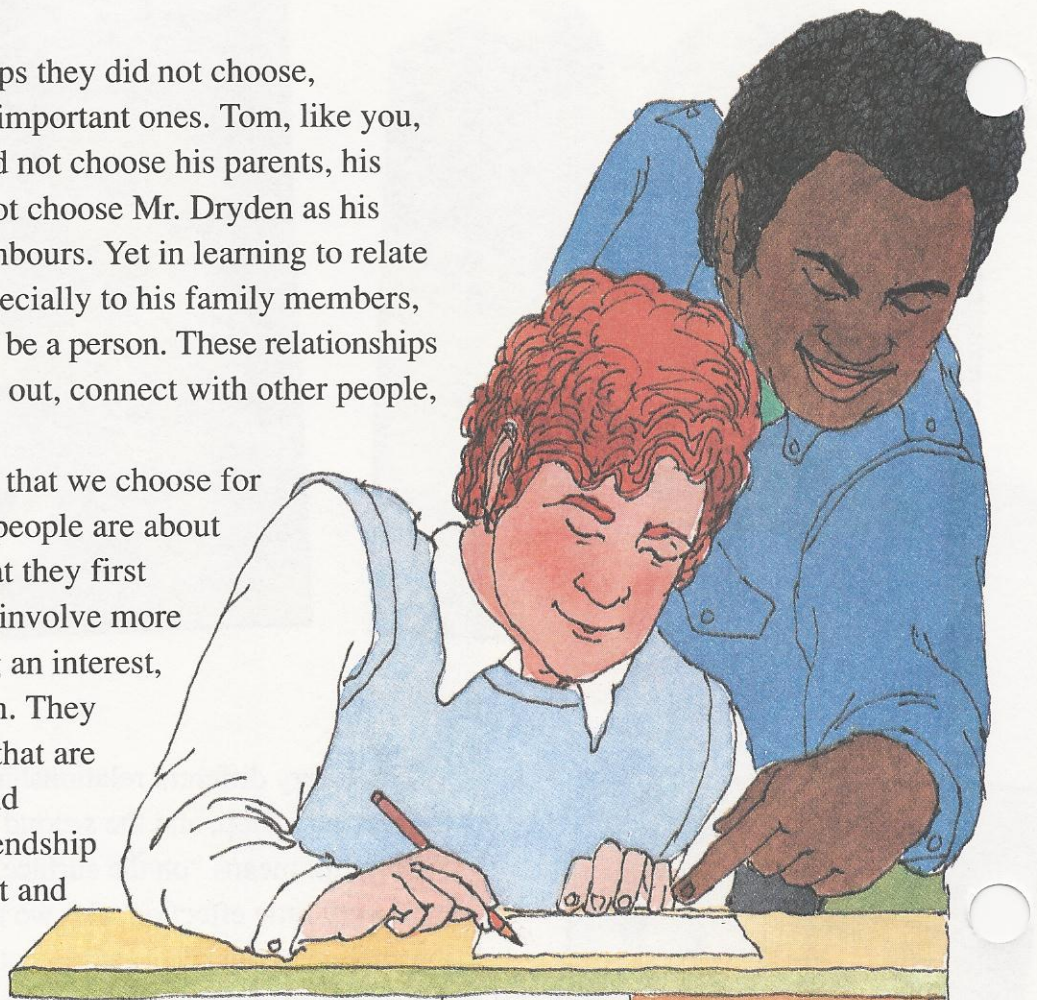


Choice: Learning to Relate

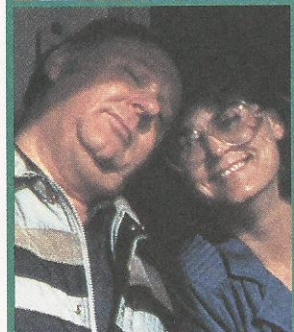
People have many relationships they did not choose, including some of their most important ones. Tom, like you, was born into a family. He did not choose his parents, his sister or his brother. He did not choose Mr. Dryden as his teacher, or his next door neighbours. Yet in learning to relate to all of these people, and especially to his family members, Tom has been learning how to be a person. These relationships have taught him how to reach out, connect with other people, and make new friends.

Friendship is a relationship that we choose for ourselves. It is usually when people are about eleven or twelve years old that they first realize that being friends can involve more than playing together, sharing an interest, or belonging to the same team. They begin to look for friendships that are based on trust, acceptance, and appreciation. This kind of friendship is a choice, and requires effort and brings responsibilities.



Quality: Supportive relationships

If each person in the world was perfect, then our relationships would also be perfect. But we know that this is not the way things are. Tom, for example, has days when his relationship with his older sister is far from perfect. He hates being teased by her, and he knows that it drives her crazy if he hangs around when her friends are over.



We are all inclined to be selfish. When you were very young and someone called you selfish, it was probably because you wouldn't share your toys. A more adult way of understanding selfishness is that it is a refusal to give yourself to other people. Sometimes we are afraid to let people know who we are, and so we hesitate to share our thoughts and feelings. Or we forget that other people have feelings and we put someone down in order to put ourselves up. We are also inclined to worry about ourselves: Will I be left out? Do I belong? Do other people like me?

Part of the answer to these difficulties lies in learning to understand and accept ourselves, and we cannot do that alone. We need a relationship with God and with others to overcome our selfishness. It is through prayer, and through the acceptance, trust, forgiveness, and support we receive from our family members and friends that we become more loving people. We are still left with our faults, our fears, and our worries, but they no longer overwhelm us. Supportive relationships free us from our concerns about ourselves so that we can be more generous with others. Supportive relationships give us the confidence to offer other people acceptance, trust, forgiveness, and support.

