

ACTIVITY

Think for a moment about the area that you live in. Do you have good relationships with your neighbours and people in your road? Recent newspaper articles have said that very few people know their neighbours, and people, especially older residents may be very isolated. Do you know the names of your neighbours?

Community involvement can be seen to have a positive effect on personal development. Activity within the community can be for all ages and areas. Local councils are now recognising that it is important to involve local people in making decisions about a range of plans – such as plans for sheltered housing, schools that are being built, as well as the development of shopping centres, and other facilities used by the residents. Some districts have organised local committee meetings when council officers meet with residents to discuss proposed changes. In one London borough the parks department consulted the local people about developing a skateboarding park. The young people who would use the park gave their opinion about how the skate park should be organised, and they are on a committee to review the building and use of the park. Examples of community involvement can include involving groups that are 'hard to reach'. In one area a large centre was opened that was to be used by different groups – so one day the local Euro-Asian group took over the café and provided food for anyone who wanted to come; in the evening the hall was used by young people learning kung fu. In the same building, a dementia café takes place at weekends when dementia patients and their carers can come and relax and have lunch, while volunteers help with the patients so that the carers have a rest.

KEY TERM

Culture – Culture relates to the way of life of a particular society or group. It can include the following aspects:

- the language used – both spoken and written
- the customs followed – lifestyle and religion
- a shared system of values – beliefs and morals
- social norms – acceptable patterns of behaviour, including dress and diet.

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Find out about opportunities for volunteers in your area. You will be surprised how many things are available. If you work with vulnerable people you will be CRB checked. Also you may have to be 18-years-old for certain voluntary work.

Cultural factors

Cultural factors may affect every aspect of your life. Culture can be about a whole society or a part of society.

Look at the leisure activities listed below. Who do you think are more likely to attend these? Think about the social class divisions we have already discussed when you are thinking about the answers

- go to the Henley regatta
- go greyhound racing
- go on holiday to Scotland
- go on holiday to Spain using a cheap flight offer
- go to the opera
- go to an Elvis impressionist show
- have fish and chips and a beer
- have Lobster Thermidor in an expensive restaurant.

We could say these divisions are using stereotypes but you can see how cultural differences can dictate how we live our lives. There are also stereotypes of what a middle class family is and what a working class family is.

Do you remember the key term stereotype?

Religion

Religion can be defined as a system of belief that influences the way we think and act; if we have religious beliefs we may go to church, or mosque or to other group events where we take part in collective worship.

Religion can be seen as an important influence in a society. This influence can be positive. It can make someone feel supported and helped by being part of a group. However, religion can also cause problems when conflict may occur between different religious groups.

KEY TERM

Stereotype – a fixed and simplistic generalisation about a particular group or class of people. 'They all look like...they all do...'.

CASE STUDY 1 – Ann

Ann came to London to do her nursing training. Ann had no family and had been in care since she was 4-years-old. When she came to London she felt very lonely. One of the girls in her group invited her to go to a party that was being held at the local Baptist church. Ann was welcomed by the people there and she felt part of a 'family' in the church, so she went regularly after that. If anyone asked her why she went to church she always said, 'I feel I belong to a family now, by belonging to the church'.

The numbers of people attending church in the UK has fallen. Religion has become more of a personal matter. The UK is seen as a Christian country and the Queen is Head of the Church of England. However, nowadays there is a range of different religions. You may have studied these at school. People who have a strong religious belief may find that they can cope better with problems in their lives. Most religions mark events in life with particular rituals. Birth, puberty, marriage and death are key times. In the Christian religion these events would include christening the child and confirmation of the teenager. Marriage and death would be marked by church services. Members of the Jewish faith mark puberty with special ceremonies for boys (bar mitzvah) (see Figure 1.18). These rituals give those people taking part a way of expressing their support to the person who is going through these ceremonies.

Marriage rituals confirm the couple's attachment to each other and by taking vows at the service this shows their intention to take married life seriously. Many people find they feel more secure in a marriage. Recent reports show that marriages last longer than relationships in which couples cohabit. There are various rituals carried out when someone is dying, such as prayers and anointing the person with oil. This can give comfort to the relatives, as well as a feeling of acceptance for the dying person.



Figure 1.18 Boy at his bar mitzvah