

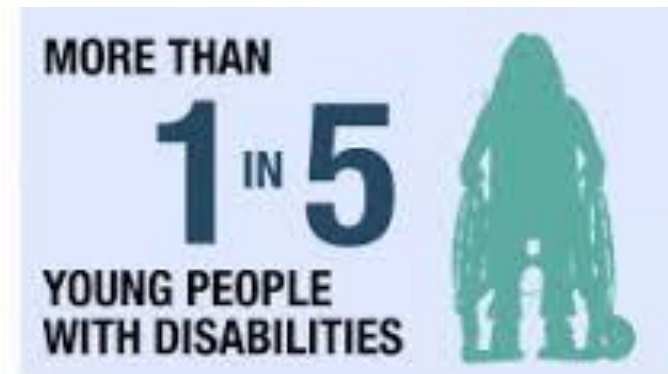
LOVE IS FRIENDSHIP ON FIRE- HOW WILL YOU TEACH YOUR CHILD TO STAY SAFE IN THE FLAMES?

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Honest Talk Ahead

- This may contain information that could be uncomfortable for you to think about and hear....
- but just ignoring or hiding from the inevitable doesn't make it go away or keep them safe



between the ages of 12 and 19 reports experiencing violence (including physical abuse, rape or sexual assault from a stranger or partner)—**more than twice the rate of youth without a disability.***

Preparing for the future

- As your child grows into adulthood, like many of their peers they will be interested in romantic relationships.
- As you know many of our children need extra assistance is navigating new situations and learning complex information
- Tonight's goal is to give an overview of how to assist helping them learn how to survive in the complicated world of friendship, romance and relationships.

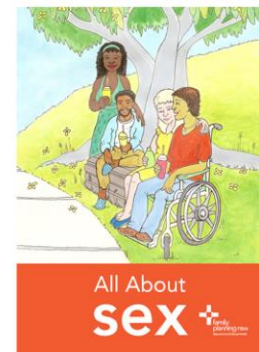


The benefit of parents speaking to their child about dating and relationships is that they can:

- communicate their own values about dating and relationships
- provide correct information
- better understand their child's perspective
- answer questions honestly and using words they can understand
- start the conversation
- tailor the information they share based on their understanding of their teenager's stage of development, life experience, personality and knowledge level
- help their child make good decisions and then stand by them

Teaching Tips:

- Remember to use the same teaching strategies that you have used to teach your children other skills.
- Some of these strategies may include visual or written check off lists, videos, facts in books, pictures of what is happening to their bodies, stories to predict what might occur, code words or redirection strategies or specific terminology.



All About
sex

All About Sex is a series of 19 fact sheets for people with intellectual disability and the people who support them. The fact sheets are easy to read and include illustrations to help people with intellectual disability learn about sexuality and relationships. The fact sheets cover a range of topics including bodies, relationships, sex, pregnancy and reproduction, sexual health and sexual assault.

Some people with intellectual disability will be able to read the fact sheets independently while others will need the support of a family member, teacher, support worker or advocate. The fact sheets have been designed to make it easier for support people to have conversations and provide information about sexuality and relationships.

All About Sex is available as a 108 page book from the [Family Planning NSW Bookshop](#) for \$22 plus postage. The fact sheets are also available for free download below.

Resources:

- *Boyfriends + Girlfriends A Guide to Dating for People with Disabilities* by Terri Couwenhoven, M.S.
- [Teaching sexual health parents section](#)
- [Teaching sexual health information by age and differing abilities](#)
- [Parent center hub sex ed](#)
- [Parent center hub sex ed materials](#)
- [kidshealth.org parents development foyer](#)
- [easterseals resources love-dating-relationships-disability](#)
- [Family planning factsheets](#)
- [ten steps to help teens with autism navigate dating](#)
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When to start and what to expect:

- Generally between the ages of 9 and 13 children begin **puberty**. During this time they experience a great deal of change physically, emotionally and sexually. There is rapid bone growth, increased sexual drive and emotional ups and downs due in part to the uncertainty about what is happening to them.
- Before the changes begin, talk to your child about what they can expect to happen. Knowing ahead of time what will happen can lessen fears and confusion, and help them to build confidence and a healthy self-image.

Adolescence

- Following the rapid changes of puberty, **adolescence** begins. This time can be marked with conflict between children and their parents or caregivers. The conflict is often a result of normal adolescent need for more independence from the family.
- As your child sexually matures, there may be an increase in self-pleasuring behavior and interest in or having feelings toward others which are accompanied by a sex drive that is initiated by body hormones.

Adulthood

- Whether a child has a disability or not, the development stages will follow the same pattern at a slower or faster rate, until the child passes through puberty and adolescence to become a sexually mature **adult**.
- Even though your child may have a disability, all humans progress through the stages of social and sexual development to reach adulthood.



Additional considerations:

- During this time their **peer group** becomes influential and they will want acceptance so more importance is placed on what others think of them.
- They are also starting to define their **personal values** using family, peer and societal values as a guide.
- Additionally they may appear unhappy with **expectations** from parents, but are usually privately reassured that their parents care enough to put expectations on them. This can also be a fall back measure to use when they are confused or don't know how to handle a situation. Think "I'd like to but my parents won't let me go"

Will you always be there?

- Parents have to make difficult decisions at this time about how much independence to allow their children.
- Based on your family beliefs and values and your children's ability, **you will need to decide what you are comfortable letting your children decide for themselves.**
- These decisions may include choice of clothing, hairstyles, **friends** and some activities that they do alone such as visiting the doctor.
- These are all opportunities for your children to express themselves as individuals, separate from you.

So with all of that....

- Let's start at the beginning and the base of all relationships

- **Friendship**



Friendly is not a friendship!

- Some will need friendship skills taught
- Without the base of friendship skills future relationships will not have a solid base to grow on
- Learning friendship skills will teach them how to build healthy relationships and set personal boundaries.



Identify what a friend is:

- You often share something in common.
- They're people you can trust.
- They're people you feel comfortable being with.
- They're people you have experience with across time.
- Requires mutual agreement; both people have to agree to be friends with each other.



Levels of friendships

- **Friendly Greeting:** Someone you're friendly to but really don't know, don't talk to, and don't hang out with at all.
- **Acquaintance:** You have had some small discussions with these people usually because you worked with them in a classroom group or they're friends of a friend so you happened to hang out with them for a short while.
- **Possible Friendship:** This is when you start to seek out people to talk to them.
- **Evolving Friendship:** This is when you start showing that you would like to spend more time with them by consistently hanging out with them and making plans to do things with them. Importance in this level is that the person chooses to be their friend as well.
- **Bonded Friendship:** This is when people are there for each other. They look out for each other, spend lots of time together and share more about your life and feelings. In this friendship level you may have one very close friend that you open up more with and spend more time together.

Teaching friendship skills:

- Identify and talk about what qualities good friends have
 - Honest, kind, loyal, trustworthy, considerate, reliable, understanding
 - Point out friendship qualities in action
- How to communicate with friends
 - How to tell that they want to be friends with you
 - How to have give and take conversations with appropriate topics
 - How to ask them to join you in an activity



Teaching Friendship Skills

- Personal boundaries:
 - Know the difference between public and private information
 - Friendships take time; you can't force another person to your timetable.
 - Recognize that friendships change over time and circumstances
- Ending friendships
 - Friendships can be ended by either person
 - You will feel sad but you have to accept the decision
 - You cannot force someone to be your friend and continually bothering them can get you into trouble

Having a crush on someone



- It means you really like the person and have romantic feelings toward them
- You may daydream about them and think about what it would be like to have a relationship with them.
- The crush doesn't have to be a close friend or even someone they know
- Crushes can be short term or you can act on them and let the person know that you like them and would like to spend time with them
- If they act on the crush, they must be prepared for how to respond if the person does or doesn't feel the same way toward them.

More than friends begins with dating

- First you have to ask someone out or be asked out
 - Recognize that the answer may be no, respect that answer
 - Practice asking or script out the conversation
 - Have a plan, know who is paying and transportation
 - Ask parental permission if needed
 - Think about your hygiene



Start slow

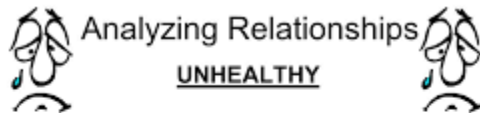
- Do an activity with several friends or double date
- Choose something active to do and go to a public place
- Have a chaperone
- Make sure someone knows who you are with, where you are going and who all you are with
- Practice conversation skills so that you will get to know your date better
- One date doesn't mean that you have to go out on a second date
- Dating may not mean it's exclusive
- Set a curfew

From dating to a relationship

- Strong feelings are developed and they want to spend all their time with that person
- A relationship means that you are dating exclusively
- Have discussions regarding what love is
 - A willingness to prioritize another's well-being over your own
 - A feeling of strong or constant affection for a person
 - Love grows over time by getting to know the other person and having shared experiences
 - Love involves commitment, time, mutual trust, and acceptance
 - Love does not happen instantly

Healthy vs Unhealthy relationships

- Compare to healthy and unhealthy foods- one makes you feel good and strong and the other makes you feel bad
- Gives them signs to watch for that indicate an unhealthy relationship
 - Telling lies
 - Trying to make you do something that you don't want to do
 - Telling you things that you can't do
 - Being mean to you with either actions or words



- **List characteristics of an unhealthy relationship:**
 - Dependency
 - Jealousy
 - Control
 - Selfishness
 - Abuse

Healthy Relationship Characteristics

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| - Happiness | - Comfort |
| - Trust | - Good communication |
| - Love | - Kindness |
| - Affection | - Strong self-esteem |
| - Equality | - Humor |
| - Mutual Respect | - Fun |
| - Friendship | - You can be yourself! |
| - Laughter | - No fear of each other |
| - Common interests | - Honesty |
| - Support | - Independence |
| - Fair arguments | |
| - Acceptance | |

Relationship becomes physical

- **Abstinence** is deciding not to engage in sexual activity
- Your body is **private** and some parts are more private than others
- No one can touch your body without your **permission**
- **No one can force** you to have sex or do anything sexual that you do not want to do- that is sexual assault and is against the law
- No one can see your body without your **permission**, and no one should be asking you for pictures of your private parts
- If they need help with personal care activities- they need to recognize what touch is necessary and **when they can refuse the touch**

Relationship becomes physical

- Don't show your body to someone that doesn't want to see it
- Know there is good touch and bad touch
 - Hugs and kissing can be good if you both agree
 - If the touch is scary or hurts or just doesn't feel right it is a bad touch
 - Ask for permission before you touch someone
 - If they say no, don't touch them or try to change their mind
 - Recognize the legal aspect- under 18 years old is a minor
 - [Consent for kids](#)

Relationship becomes physical

- Teach response if they are touched inappropriately
 - Say no- be assertive
 - Get away- walk or run away and get to a safe place
 - Tell someone you trust- have them identify who that is



Tips for discussing sexuality

- Remember that you and other family members are their role models
- Open the lines of communication early
- Be clear on what is public and what is private behavior
- Allow them to ask questions and answer them truthfully and openly. This can be a good time to emphasize when it's okay to share personal information and when it is not
- Use teachable moments- such as when you're watching TV together or when you hear of things happening in the community
- Play the what-if game. Ask them situational questions and discuss consequences
- Provide resources for them
- Communicate your values honestly and model them

From dating to intimacy-Informed consent

- The person that they chose for a relationship may not be one that you would chose for them
- An individual can choose to have a sexual relationship as long as they understand what they are agreeing to and are of the legal age of consent

consent

/kən'sent/

noun

permission for something to happen or agreement to do something.
"no action may take place without the consent of all partners"
synonyms: agreement, permission, support, thumbs-up, green light

From dating to intimacy-Informed consent

- Teaching what consent to a sexual relationship is
- Sexual activity ranges touching private parts to intercourse
- They need to know what the act of intercourse is and how you lead up to it
- At any time they or their partner can say no and you have to respect that
- A partner can say no through body language
 - Pulling away or pushing you away
 - Shaking their head
 - Crying



With sexual activity comes responsibilities and consequences

- Sexual intercourse can lead diseases
 - Use protection
 - Get checked and know the signs
 - Know your partner's history
- Sexual intercourse can lead to pregnancy
 - Know what contraception is- it's not just birth control pills
- Social & family consequences
 - Changed reputation
 - Family reaction
 - Does your religion say no sex before marriage

Putting this all together

- Whether your child has a disability or not, all humans progress through the progress through the stages of social and sexual development
- This is not a one-time discussion, conversations and learning continue through their lifespan
- Don't talk down to them or tell them how they must feel, speak to them with maturity
- Recognize that you can't control all of their actions. Give assurance that you may not approve of their actions but that you will always love them

Most importantly

- Know how important love is and as your child matures so will the love that they are seeking

