

Information Sheet:

Supporting autistic teenagers to learn about romantic relationships

How can parents help to prepare their child for dating and intimate relationships? This information sheet is aimed at parents of autistic teenagers.

Self Confidence

Adolescence is a difficult time and a young person's self-esteem can be quite low as a result. If your child wants to start dating, it is important support them in working to build their self-esteem. This can give them the confidence to approach others, but also a sense of their worth so they will set good boundaries and not accept being treated poorly.

Some tips include:

- Praise their achievements and give them positive attention for the things they do well.
- Encourage participation in activities the young person is good at.
- Give specific feedback about appropriate social behaviour.
- Teach social skills in a structured way, such as how to make a phone call to ask a friend to do something together. Encourage social encounters of all kinds in order to practice these skills.

Attitudes to Dating

You can also help your child develop a healthy attitude towards intimate relationships.

- Explain that sexual relationships are a normal part of life.
- Convey that intimacy is an acceptable topic of conversation during private times.
- Teach your child not to use sex for popularity or acceptance.
- Encourage your child to be sceptical about 'locker room' talk (peers bragging about sexual encounters) and gossip.
- Teach your child that they never have to do sexual things they feel uncomfortable with.

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Attitudes to Dating continued

- If sensory issues include being touched by others and this is something they want to work on, exercise, meditation and some medications can assist in desensitising to touch - an occupational therapist may be able to help with this.
- Explain to your child that there is probably a difference between parent rules and what other teenagers see as acceptable behaviour.



Avoiding Bad Relationships

Help your child to recognise signs of a bad relationship, such as:

- The other person only wants money or gifts.
- The other person does not want you to meet their friends and family.
- The other person does not give much attention, affection, or compliments in return.
- The other person uses 'put downs' or says mean things.
- The other person is physically abusive (which includes hitting, but also restraining, pushing - any kind of physical coercion).

Resources

Family Planning Victoria

For more detailed information about sexual health and safety for young people, visit:

<https://www.fpv.org.au/resources/reproductive-and-sexual-health>

References

Newport, Jerry and Mary (2002). *Autism-Asperger's and Sexuality: Puberty and Beyond*, Future Horizons.

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