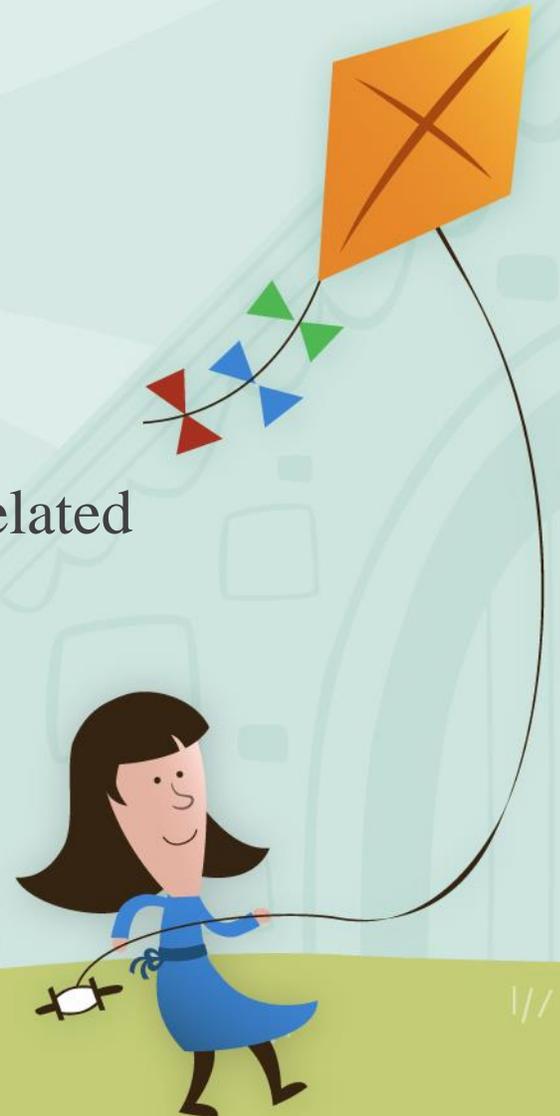


Navigating Friendship and Love (For Individuals on the Autism Spectrum)

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Love: a feeling of intense fondness and affection towards another

This can be:

*Romantic love—a specific object of someone's desire that they are also physically attracted to

*Platonic love-affection felt towards pets, family members, close friends, etc.

Friendship = a relationship of mutual trust, caring, and respect between individuals





For many individuals, finding and making friends during the teen years can be a challenge.

Individuals with autism and related disabilities may have difficulty understanding where and how to find “true” friends.

They may have difficulty distinguishing between actual friends and acquaintances, and what is appropriate to share with each.

Making Friends

*Encourage teens to make friends with individuals who share their interests.

*Emphasize choosing appropriate friends who are kind, respectful, and reciprocate feelings of friendship

*The following books/tools provide some excellent insight into teaching strategies for making and maintaining friendships:

*The PEERS Treatment Manual: Social Skills for Teenagers with Developmental and Autism Spectrum Disorders by Elizabeth A. Laugeson and Fred Frankel

*Making Sense of Sex by Sarah Attwood (has a chapter/section on the social rules of making and keeping friends).

(Laugeson and Frankel, 2010), (Attwood, 2008)



Making Friends

- It is important to discuss and help individuals distinguish the difference between making good friends and attempting to establish relationships with individuals who will have a negative impact on their well-being.
 - Good measures of friendship include finding someone who is nice and kind to you, has similar interests, is (usually) a similar age, is not likely to get you into trouble, is interested in you and your accomplishments, and makes you feel included, etc.
 - Bad measures of friendship include attempting to forge friendships with someone who bullies, makes mean comments, or teases you, doesn't defend your choices (when they are positive ones), hangs out with people who are not nice to you or others, or gets in trouble frequently, etc. (Laugeson and Frankel, 2010)
 - **Quickcues** is an app that provides social scripts to help individuals navigate through tricky social situations
 - **Hidden Curriculum for Kids** provides various social scenarios to help kids and teens problems solve and engage in conversation
 - **The Social Navigator** and **FriendMaker** are some more apps to help with social skills during various situations
 - **How Rude** by Alex J. Packer, Ph.D. is a great book to teach adolescents about social skills and appropriate etiquette.



Distinguishing Between Love and Friendship

- Discuss the differences between friendship and dating
- Provide a clear definition of what dating entails in your household and family
 - Define boundaries and rules in terms of what is or is not allowed:
 - Phone calls, being alone, curfews, etc. (Baxley and Zendell, 2011)
- Discuss appropriate vs. inappropriate intimate behaviors and social boundaries
 - Use social stories regarding appropriate hugging, kissing, personal space, etc.
 - 3 great resources include:
 - [Sexuality Across the Lifespan for Children and Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities](#) by DiAnn L. Baxley and Anna L. Zendell
 - The Circles Approach by James Stanfield (www.stanfield.com)
 - Connecting with Others: Lessons for Teaching Social and Emotional Competence (www.researchpress.com)



Distinguishing Between Love and Friendship

- Review and impart the importance of listening, conversing with, and respecting others (Baxley and Zendell, 2011)
 - Some more great resources include:
 - [Decoding Dating](#) by John Miller
 - [Be Different: Adventures of a Free-Range Aspergian with Practical Advice for Aspergians, Misfits, Families, and Teachers](#) by John Elder Robison
 - The Relationship Video Series #1 and 2 (www.yai.com)



Recognizing One-Sided Interest While Dating

*Sometimes, unfortunately, when it comes to relationships and dating, the object of one's interest does not share mutual feelings

*It is important to discuss ways to recognize mutual interest in relationships and ways to cope when someone does not return affection in the way one might wish

-Look for mutual interest: does the object of your affection seek out your attention, talk to you, call you, agree to spend time with you outside of obligated situations? If so, they are most likely interested! If not, it is best to respect their wishes and move on.



Recognizing One-Sided Interest While Dating

*Look for and discuss signs that someone is not interested in the same way (not agreeing to spend time together or canceling plans frequently, not asking you questions, not sharing your in interests, etc.)

*Reading “The Turtle and the Bagpipe” by Shel Silverstein is a great way to illustrate this concept to teens

*Autism and Falling in Love: To the One That Got Away by Kerry Magro is another great resource



Dealing with Letdowns and Rejection

- Unfortunately, it will happen-every once in awhile you or someone you know will have to deal with feelings of rejection (someone was not interested in a relationship, someone did not want to be friends, etc.)
- It is normal to feel sad and upset, but it is important to discuss **appropriate** ways to deal with these feelings
 - Some strategies for dealing with rejection include:
 - Accepting the news positively and giving the other person space
 - Acting like what the other person said does not bother you
 - Leaving the situation/walking away
 - Spending time with other people, etc.
 - The PEER treatment program/manual has some great strategies for dealing with rejection, as well (Laugeson and Frankel, 2010)



Resources

- Attwood, S. (2008). *Making Sense of Sex: A Forthright Guide to Puberty, Sex, and Relationships for People with Asperger's Syndrome*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Baxley, D.L. & Zendell, A. L. (2011). *Sexuality Across the Lifespan: for Children and Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.
- Laugeson, E.A.& Frankel, F. (2010). *Social Skills for Teenagers With Developmental and Autism Spectrum Disorders: The PEERS Treatment Manual*. New York: NY: Taylor and Francis Group.

