

# 12-Part Sexuality Series for Parents with Children with an Intellectual Disability

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## *Part 8 of 12: “You Want to What?”*

“You want to what?” may be the go to response for a myriad of statements our children may say regarding relationships.

I want to go on a date.

I want a boyfriend/girlfriend.

I want to get married.

I want to have sex.

I want to have a baby.

The knee jerk reaction that may follow is “NO.” This reaction may be especially true when the person making the statement has a disability. Pause for a moment and question if a dismissive “no” is the best answer or if these questions are our cue that we need to teach our growing children how to have healthy relationships

Education on the difference types of relationships, the progression of relationships from first meeting to marriage, consent, relationship rights and responsibilities, and personal safety become the necessary topics of conversation. Additionally, remember that relationships take time and in most situations, it is not necessary to get ahead of ourselves, but rather best to start with the basic first steps of relationship building. The question becomes what is a healthy relationship. A healthy relationship has the following traits:

- Evolves gradually over time
- Involves two people caring and respecting each other
- Feeling safe to sharing personal thoughts and feelings,
- Allows for both time together and apart.
- Supports each other even when opinions differ

- Generally make us feel happy

On the other hand, an unhealthy relationship involves

- An imbalance of power with one partner making all decisions
- Isolation from family and friends,
- A lack of caring, honesty and respect
- Physical or verbal abuse
- Feelings of anger, fear and jealousy.

Since childhood, the skills to get along socially have been taught and are now expanded upon to include how to be a part of a healthy relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Compromise, sharing, assertiveness and respect become the cornerstones of any healthy relationship. Be there to support your child when a relationship goes awry and are no longer considered to be healthy. There will always be a need to listen, share information and advice.

In addition to education, it is necessary to allow for safe opportunities to develop healthy adult relationships. Maybe that means joining a club or team, having friends to your home or allowing privacy within the family home. Whatever works for your family to allow the opportunity to develop friendships that may or may not over time result in the dream of having a special person in their lives.

As relationships develop or end there will no doubt be need to continue to provide education and guidance and to question if you are providing the necessary support to nurture a healthy relationship. The development of a healthy relationship is a gradual process that if we are lucky may result in much happiness.

## **References**

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**Written by:** Eleanor Gibson, Behaviour Consultant, Lake Ridge Community Support Services

**Part 9:** Stage 9-The Biggest Worry (September 2015)