

family  
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Reproductive & Sexual Health

# relationship goals: planning for success with friendships and dating

a booklet for people with intellectual  
disability and autism



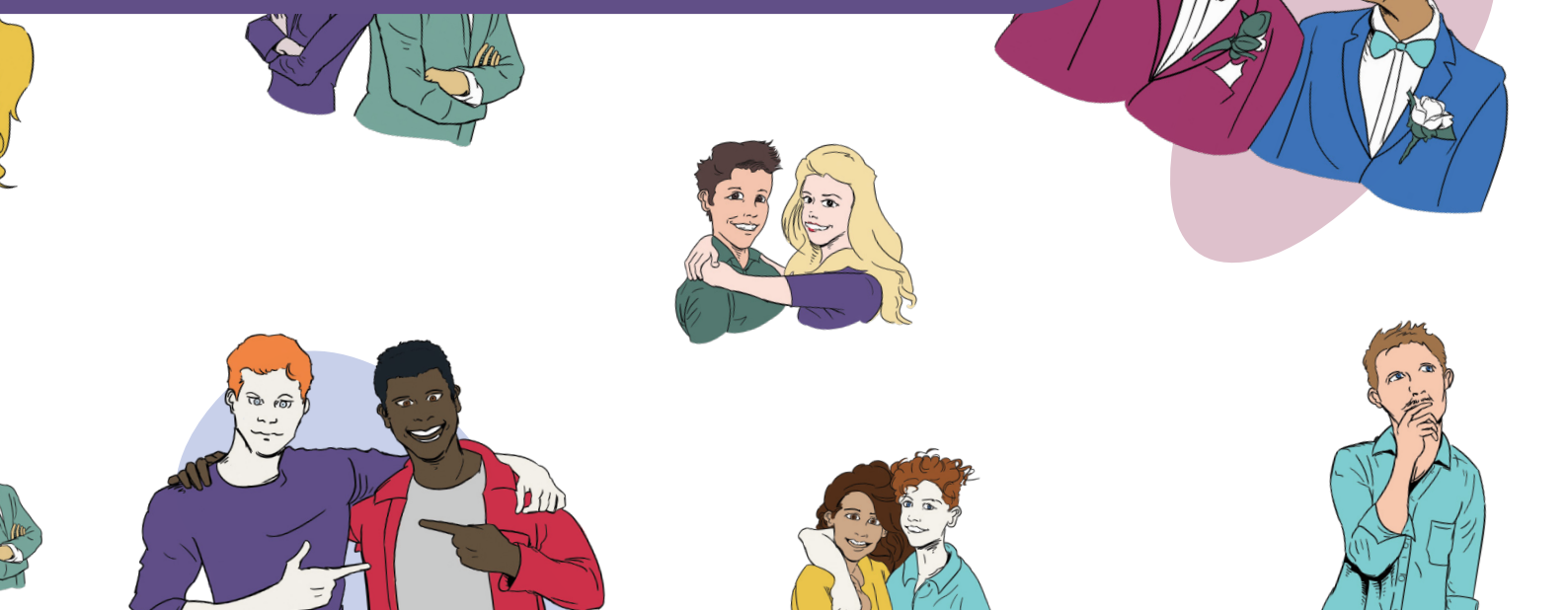


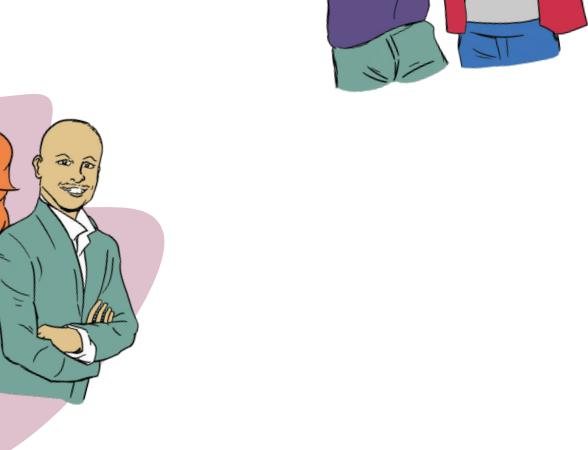
Relationships can be tricky. It can be hard to know where to start when you want to make a new friend or find a partner.

This booklet has been written with advice from young people with intellectual disability and autism to help you learn about making and growing new relationships.

This booklet has space inside for you to write your answers to important questions.

These questions are important because they can help you learn about yourself and learn about your relationships. They can also help you set some goals for relationships.





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# What are the different relationships in my life?

A relationship is when people know each other.

Relationships are an important part of everyone's life. They can be lots of fun and can make you feel safe and supported.

**Let's look at some of the relationships you might have in your life.**

## **Jess says:**

I like to do things at home that I enjoy like listen to music. It's good to do whatever you need, relax at home or have a coffee at a cafe.



## **Yourself**

The most important relationship you have in your life is the relationship you have with yourself!

There are lots of different things that make you who you are. These are things like:

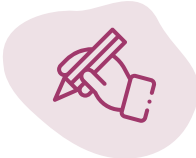
- what you think is important
- your culture
- your identity
- who you are attracted to
- what you like and what you do not like

Knowing about what makes you special can help you to communicate about what you want and need in your relationships.

This can also help you feel confident in making choices about your relationships and choosing the kind of relationships you want to have.

You need to have a good relationship with yourself before you can have a good relationship with another person.

**What are some things that make you special?  
Write them below:**



## Family

Family are the people that you are related to you.

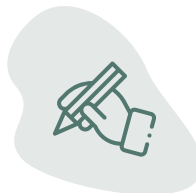
This might be your mum, dad, brother, sister or cousins.

Some people have small families and some people have big families.

Some people have close relationships with their families. Some people do not have close relationships with their families.

Every family is different and this is OK.

**What is the most important thing about family for you?  
Write it here:**



# Friends

Friends are people who you can talk to and share experiences with. To have a friendship, both people need to say it is OK.

Some people have friends that they have known since they were little. Some people have friends that are new and their relationship is still growing.

Some people have lots of different friends and some people have a smaller group of friends.

Some people might find it hard to make new friends and some people are not interested in having friends.

All of this is OK.

Friendships take a lot of work and can change all the time. Friendships might grow but they can also end.



You might not want to be somebody's friend. Somebody might not want to be your friend.

This is OK.

It is important for you to know what you want from a friend.

**What is the most important thing about a friend for you?**

**Write it here:**



# Romantic relationships

People in romantic relationships might enjoy:

- going on dates together
- finding fun activities to do together
- talking with and learning about each other
- showing respect and care for each other
- seeing and touching each other's bodies in a private place with consent

Both people in the relationship must agree for it to be a romantic relationship.

People in romantic relationships always need to ask each other if it is OK to touch, kiss or have sex. This is called consent.

Romantic relationships take a lot of work and can change all the time. It is normal for people in romantic relationships to argue sometimes or want to have space from each other.

Romantic relationships can grow but they can also end.

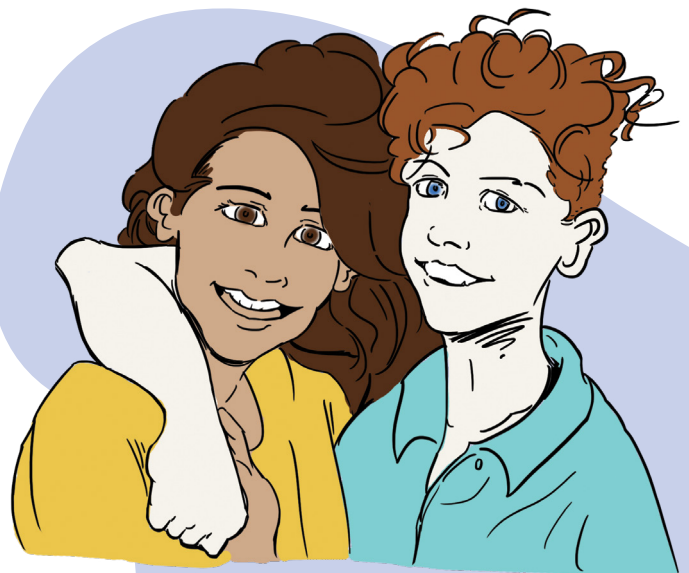
You might not want to be in a romantic relationship with someone. Someone might not want to be in a romantic relationship with you.

This is OK.

It is important to know what you want from a romantic relationship.

**What is the most important thing about a romantic relationship for you?**

**Write it here:**



# Getting ready: the important relationship skills



## Professional relationships

You might get along well with someone who is supporting you. This might be a support worker, a therapist or someone who runs an activity you go to. This is called a professional relationship.

In a professional relationship, it is their job to help you.

It is important to have good professional relationships but it is also important to remember that professional relationships are not friendships or romantic.

It is important to have friendships outside of your professional relationships.

## Consent

Consent is when one person agrees or gives permission to another person to do something.

- One person asks for consent to do something before it happens
- The other person thinks about what they want to do. They can choose to give their consent. They have a choice to communicate 'yes' or 'no'
- Both people can change their mind later on

It is important to ask the other person for their consent before doing something and then wait for them to give an answer.

You could ask:

- Would it be okay if I held your hand?
- Is it okay if I kiss you?
- Did you like that?



Before you start making new relationships, there are a few things that are important to learn.

If you know these topics already, you can check them off the list. If you do not know some of these topics, that is OK.

You can circle any topics you do not know about and ask a trusted person to help you find more information.

**Who are your trusted people?**

**Write their names here:**



**Steve says:**

Consent is so both people agree. Both people have to say yes. If not, I don't think it will be good that way.



Listen to what the other person says. If the other person says nothing, says no, or looks unhappy you should stop touching them. If you say nothing, say no, or look unhappy, the other person should stop touching you. Both people have to say 'yes'.

Consent is important for all types of touch, including having sex. In New South Wales, the law also says that people need to be 16 years old or older before they can say 'yes' to sex.

Nobody should touch you without your consent. You should not touch anyone else without their consent. If you are worried or not sure about consent, you should speak to a trusted person.



## Communication

Communication is how we share information with other people.

Everybody communicates in different ways. Some people speak, some people use sign language and some people use technology or communication boards.

These are all great ways to communicate!

It is important to know how you communicate best so that you can get to know other people.

# Healthy and unhealthy relationships



A healthy relationship should give you positive feelings and experiences.

In a healthy relationship you should have:

- trust
- safety
- kindness
- respect

In a healthy relationship, both people give their consent to be in the relationship.

An unhealthy relationship is a relationship where you might feel sad, angry or unsafe.

Some things that can happen in unhealthy relationships are:

- getting hurt
- being yelled at
- having your money taken
- not getting any help
- being ignored
- being controlled

It is not okay for anyone to:

- hurt you
- control you
- make you feel scared
- force you to do things you do not want to do (including sex)
- stop you seeing your friends and family.

There are laws that keep us safe from being treated this way. Talk to somebody you trust or the Police if you think this is happening or has happened to you.

## Your rights



Young people with intellectual disability and autism have the same rights as everybody else.

This means that you can choose to:

- have relationships
- have sex
- have a partner
- get married

If somebody is trying to stop you having a relationship, speak to somebody you trust.

### Nidhi says:

Your rights are important because they provide a ground for your safety against the law. They make you feel valued. The rights are there to make you feel valued and supported by the law. It also makes you feel safe. The rights are there for your safety.

# Making new relationships: where is everyone?

If you are looking for a boyfriend or girlfriend, it is important to remember that being friends can be a first step to having a romantic relationship.

It can help to get out in your community and try new activities so that you can meet new people. Meeting new people is the first step to making new relationships.

Some places you can meet new people are:

- school, university or TAFE
- social groups
- activities like sports, gaming or drama
- events like concerts, comic conventions and expos
- volunteer activities or work

## Martin says:

I met my friends in high school and at the youth centre. We record music, message, write and have a good time. We love gaming and movies.

Meeting new people in places where you are doing an activity like sports or an event like an expo can be great because there is something in common to talk about. It will also mean that you can have a good time even if you do not meet anybody new.

You could also ask a trusted person, family member or another friend if they know anyone who might want to meet new people.

**Can you think of any places where you can meet new people?**



# Here are some tips to meet new people.



## Dress to impress

It is important to make sure you have good hygiene when you meet new people.

Good hygiene can include:

- having regular showers or baths
- washing your hair
- using deodorant
- cleaning your teeth

It is important to feel good and feel comfortable. Wearing your favourite clothes or your favourite fashion style can be a great way to feel confident when you meet new people.



## Learn conversation skills

Getting to know new people is about sharing information back and forth. You will want someone to listen to what you have to say. You will also need to listen to what they say.

Here are some quick tips for conversations

- **Ask the other person questions:** try questions that are about things that are current like *“did you see the new Marvel movie?”*
- **Answer the questions you just asked:** if someone has answered your question, you can respond with your answer and add a bit more information *“I saw it as well, my favourite part was the big fight!”*
- **Find common interests:** when you ask and answer questions, you can figure out what good topics to keep talking about are - *“I think we both really like movies”*
- **Share the conversation:** it is important to make sure that everyone has equal time to talk. It is good to not talk for too long so that everyone else can share their thoughts.
- **Do not interview people:** asking a person too many questions in a row can make people feel uncomfortable.
- **Do not get too personal too fast:** if you do not know someone very well, some questions like religion, politics or their identity might be too personal and can make them uncomfortable. It is best to talk about shared interests when you meet a new person.



**Nidhi says:**

You can be introduced by another friend. Or you can make a group activity that you both like to share. Or sometimes you even meet them at work because of something you've done in the past. And when you've stopped working with them you can still remain friends!



**Practice your skills**

It is OK if you feel nervous or uncomfortable when you meet new people. It is also OK if you do not find anyone that you want to talk to or be friends with. The more you practice the better you will get at meeting new people and making new relationships.

If you are interested in being friends with a new person, you might ask for their phone number or their social media so that you can contact them.

If they say NO, that is OK. You can find another person.

If they say YES, then you can work on growing the relationship.

It is OK if you need some more support to meet new people. Asking a trusted person to help you think of new places to go or groups to join can be a great way to get out into the community and start making friends.

# Growing relationships: friends or something more?



**Nidhi says:**  
We love movies, sports, gym, TV, toys, games, getting fit and food!

## Friendships

It might take some time and energy to grow your new relationships into friendships. This is OK.

Taking time to grow new relationships should be a positive experience where you can see if new people could be great friends.

To grow a friendship, you will need to take time to learn:

- what your friend's hobbies are
- what your friend likes and does not like
- whether your friend is trustworthy and safe

You might also need to learn about what you and your new friend disagree on and the things that you do not share in common.

Your new friend will also need to learn these things about you!

You might grow a friendship by doing things together like:

- texting or chatting on the phone
- going to events together like concerts or expos
- being active together like going for a bushwalk or swimming
- doing activities together like an art class or the movies
- going out to eat at a café



**What are 3 activities you can do with a new friend?  
Write them below:**



It is important to remember that growing a friendship is the responsibility of both people, not just you. If someone stops responding to you, makes you organise all the activities or makes you pay for everything, they are not a good friend.

If you are worried this is happening, talk to a trusted person for advice.

**Martin says:**  
If someone isn't putting in effort, you should step back!

# Dating

Dating is when two people go out together because they are, or want to be, in a romantic relationship.

You might meet a new person and want to date them straight away. This is OK.

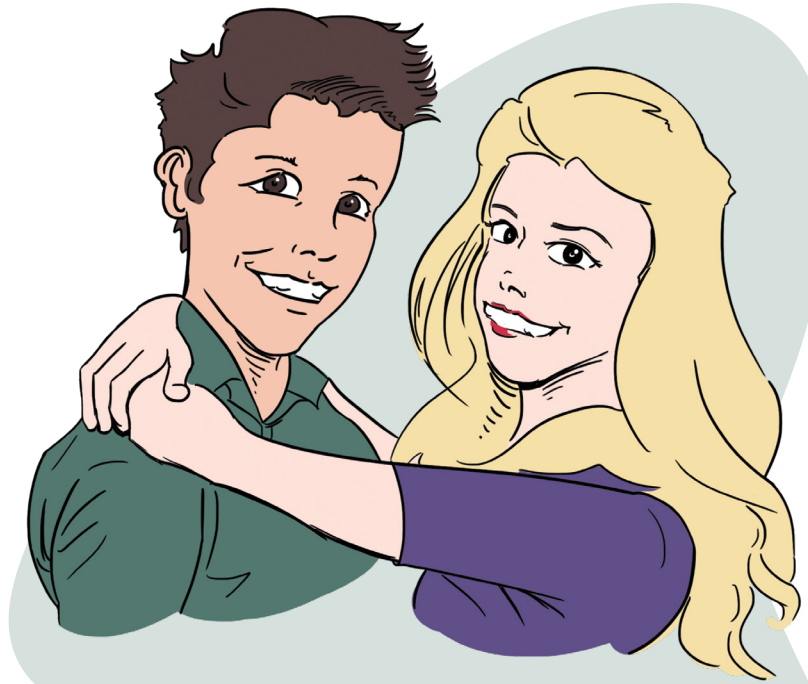
You might also make a new friend and find that as you get to know them, you want to date them. This is OK as well.

If you want to start dating, it is important to have good friendship skills. This is because a lot of the skills you use in making friendships are the same for finding romantic partners.

These are skills like:

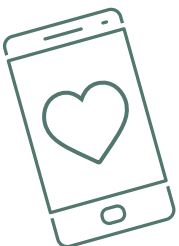
- knowing where to meet new people
- communicating and having conversations
- finding things in common with each other
- doing activities with other people

It is also good to have a think about what dating and having a boyfriend or girlfriend means to you.



## Ana says:

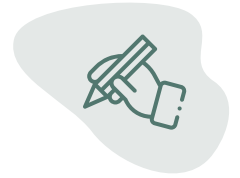
I think it makes you feel empowered and inspired. That is the relationship that you want. You want a relationship that is true to your values and to your soul to your mind and being awesome. You want someone with a positive energy. Someone who's on the same page and who understands you for who you are. Someone who really accepts you for who you are at present.





**See if you can answer these questions below.**

**You can ask a trusted person to help you  
and talk about the answers together**



What is the difference between a friend and a boyfriend/girlfriend?

What things do boyfriends/girlfriends do that friends do not do?

Is it okay if a person does not have a boyfriend/girlfriend?

What should you do if you like somebody, but they do not like you?

What should you do if somebody likes you, but you do not like them?



## How do I date?

Knowing how to date someone can be tricky.

While dating is different for everyone, we have some quick tips below to help make it easier

1. Spend some time getting to know the person you want to date so that you can be sure they are a person you want to spend time with
2. Look for signs that they might be interested in a date. This might include things like:

- smiling and looking at you
- touching you
- asking questions about you
- listening to you

If you are not sure about how to tell if someone is interested in you, have a think about some of your favourite TV shows and movies. How do they show people they are interested?

3. Text, chat online or call them to ask about their week



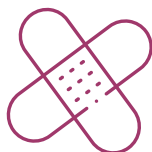
4. If you ask them on a date, be clear that it is a date so you can both give consent
5. Choose date activities that are fun for most people. This might be eating at a café, going to the movies or visiting a museum. Both of you should agree on the activity
6. Keep in contact after a date. You might send a text or a message after a date to say you had a good time and would like to go on another date. This way you can tell whether they want to continue to date, and maybe grow into a boyfriend or girlfriend
7. If they do not respond positively to a date or conversation two times, you should not try again. Find a new person you might want to date.
8. It might take you a long time to find someone you want to date. This is OK!
9. It is better to spend some time finding a person that is right for you rather than being in a relationship that makes you feel bad.



# Ending relationships: how to keep your cool

**Steve says:**  
You could play with a puppy! Or go for a walk, talk to someone you know.

Relationships can end for lots of different reasons.



You might decide that you do not want to have a relationship anymore, or someone might decide that they do not want a relationship with you. This can be hard.

Everybody will have a relationship end at some point in their life. This is normal.

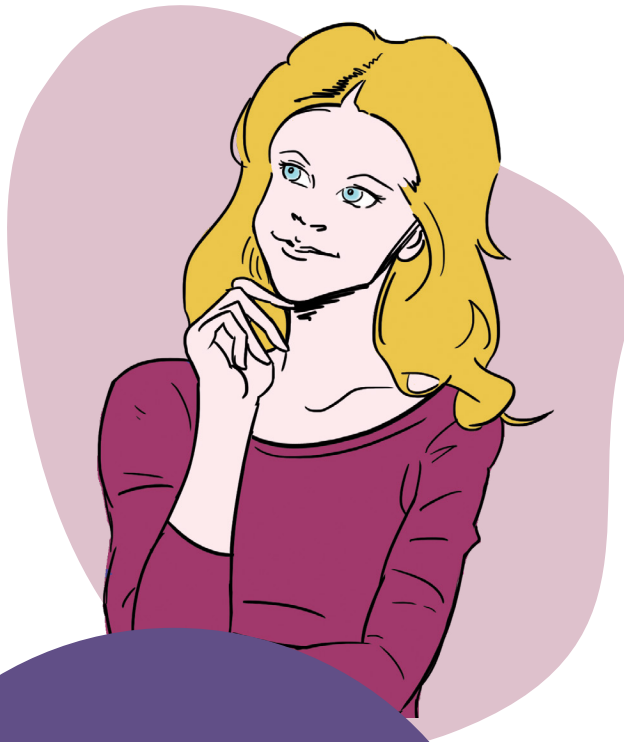
Relationships might end because:

- your interests change
- you grow apart or stop seeing each other as much
- you have too many fights or disagreements
- there is someone else you want to date
- you just do not feel like having a relationship anymore

All people have the right to choose to be in a relationship or not. This is an important part of understanding healthy relationships.

Both people have to agree for there to be a relationship. Sometimes relationships end, and it is not always someone's fault.



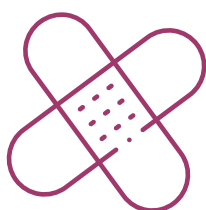


**Nidhi says:**

Take time for yourself your own mental health. Yeah. Do fun activities that you like to do, because you're kind of being self-aware then of, of being positive within yourself.

If you have ended a relationship or had a relationship end, it is important to remember these things.

- That there is nothing wrong with you – this was not the right relationship. There is nothing to be ashamed of
- Just because one relationship ends does not mean you cannot have another one in the future. People can have more than one close relationship in their life
- It is better not to be in a relationship at all than to be in a bad one or in one where the other person does not feel the same way as you do
- It is OK and normal to feel hurt, angry or to miss the other person, even if you were the one who ended the relationship
- These feelings will not last forever. Give yourself some time to get over the loss of the relationship, but remember: You have so much more in your life to look forward to
- Try to look at the positives – it is a good opportunity to learn more about yourself and what you want in future relationships



# Social media and relationships: what's the buzz?

Using social media can be a great way to communicate and grow your relationships. It can also be useful for finding new friends.

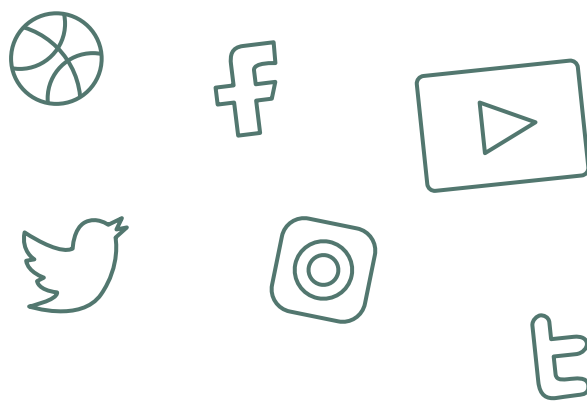
On social media you might

- find groups about special interests
- share funny videos and memes with friends
- keep in contact with people you used to go to school with or know from social groups

You and the people around you are probably already using social media, so it is important to know how to use it safely when you are making and growing relationships.

Things you can do to stay safe

- check your privacy settings regularly and learn how to 'block' people



- do not give our personal information like your work, your school or your address
- if someone on social media asks you for personal details, passwords or money, they might be a scammer. stop talking to them and 'block' them
- only add or 'friend' people that you know or have met in real life
- take your time when you chat to people online. remember to take turns as you would in a real-life conversation
- remember that everything you do on the internet is public and not private
- if you organise to meet up with someone, meet in a public place and tell a trusted person where you are going

## **Martin says:**

Social media brings new people. They might have things that are different. You can connect and try to get along!

If you are looking for someone to date, it can be safer to use a dating website or app rather than social media.

Online dating can be a great tool for people with intellectual disability and autism. This is because you can:

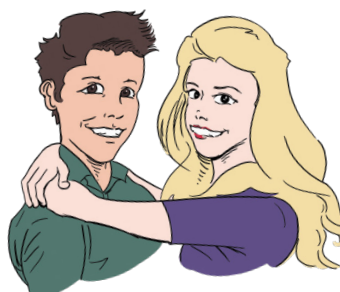
- have more control about how you want to present yourself
- be more clear about the activities you like and the types of relationships you want
- meet people outside of your regular social groups
- have more time to communicate
- choose if and when you tell someone about your intellectual disability or autism

You will need to follow the same safety tips for using social media as you do with online dating.

Just like dating in person, finding someone to date online might take a long time. This is OK.

### **Nidhi says:**

Online dating is good because you do get friendships and then you can get a feel of whether a relationship can progress to the next stage. It also gives you a barrier because you're just talking to them online. There's a safety barrier.





# Who can you talk to? Support & information

There is a lot of stuff to know about making, growing, and ending relationships!

Remember, this is different for everybody.

If you need some extra help and support, you can contact the organisations below. They can give you some extra information, or help you find a service to support you to reach your relationship goals



**Family Planning NSW**  
fpnsw.org.au  
Phone: 1300 658 886

**E-Safety Commissioner**  
esafety.gov.au/  
young-people

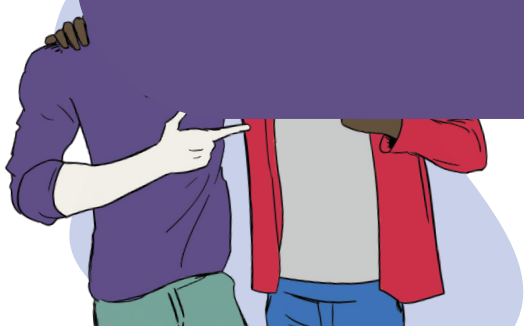
**Kids Helpline**  
kidshelpline.com.au  
Phone: 1800 55 1800

**Our Site** (for women with disability and autism)  
oursite.wwda.org.au

**Headspace**  
headspace.org.au

**People with Disability Australia**  
pwd.org.au

**Autism Launchpad**  
autismlaunchpad.org.au





**family  
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**fpnsw.org.au**  
**talkline 1300 658 886**

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