

Sexuality and Dating on the Autism Spectrum

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Presenter Viewpoint (Positionality)

I do not have an intellectual or developmental disability, so my experiences are different from those of the people I study. I want to learn from people in the I/DD community. My goal is to conduct respectful research that includes everyone and focuses on their needs. I also recognize that I have certain privileges and limitations due to my own background.



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CONTENT WARNING

Purpose

- Make it normal to talk about sexuality and dating with autistic individuals
- Sexuality and dating are important parts of human experience...



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Outline

- Myths of autism and Sexuality/Dating
- Discussing Sexuality and Identity
- Dating Barriers and Challenges
- Dating Supports
- Promoting Healthy and Safe Relationships
- Conclusion and Key Points



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Myths

What are some myths
about autism and sexuality?

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Myth: Autistic
People Don't Have
Sexual Desires



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Fact: Most Autistic People Have Sexual Desires

- Sexual desire is a spectrum
- Asexuality or not feeling sexual **IS** valid
 - Approx 1-4% of population
- Autistic people want sex too
- Sex and relationship education can help!
 - Bodies and what they do
 - Safe sex practices



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Myth: Autistic
People Shouldn't
be Parents



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Fact: There are Many Types of Families

- Autistic people deserve the right to make decisions about having families called reproductive rights
- Many families include members with disabilities
- Sex and relationship education can help!
 - Family/reproductive planning
 - Parenting education



Myth: Autistic
People Don't
Want
Relationships



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Fact: Many Autistic People Want Relationships

- Relationship desire is a spectrum
- Some people want partners and others don't
- Sex/Relationship education can help!
 - Relationship and communication skills
 - Self protection and advocacy



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Myth: Autistic
People Can't be
LGBTQ+



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Fact: People Can Understand Their Own Identity

- Sexual and Gender Identity can be understood
- LGBTQ+ rates are HIGHER in autistic populations
- Sex and Relationship education can help!
 - Gender and sexuality education
 - Identity exploration



Sex/Relationship Education Should Be...

Systemic (using systems such as friends, family, community)

Developmentally Appropriate (meet people where they are at)

Comprehensive (include many topics)

- Anatomy and Physiology
- Sex Differences
- Pregnancy
- Birth Control
- Safe Sex Practices
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)
- Identity



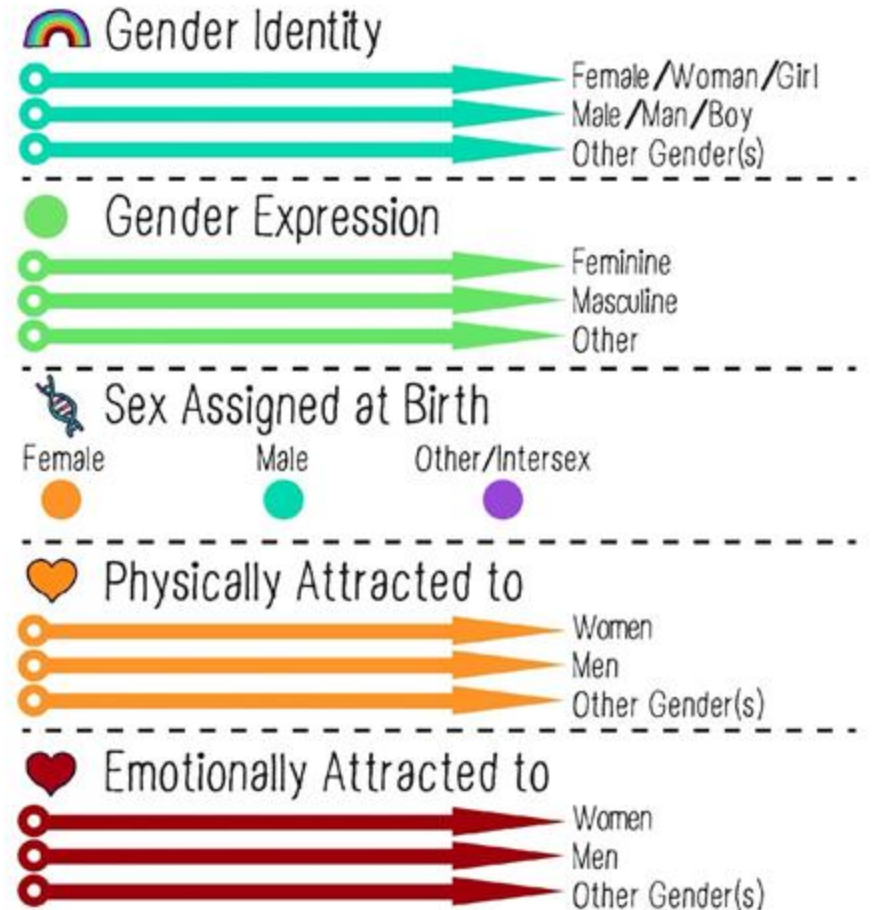
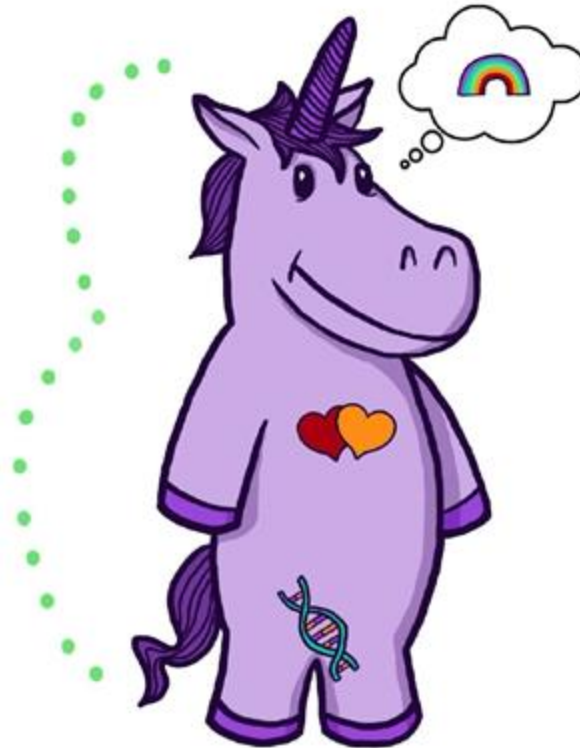
Sexuality and Identity

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The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015. "The Gender Unicorn."

Dating Barriers and Supports

Barrier	Support
Limited chances to date	Teach where to find romantic partners (e.g., through mutual friends, social activities, dating apps etc.)

Dating Barriers and Supports

Barrier	Support
Difficulty interpreting unwritten “dating rules”	Teach socially helpful and socially risky behaviors for: • Showing Interest (Flirting) • How to ask someone out • How to tell if someone is interested

Dating Barriers and Supports

Barrier	Support
Risk of exploitation or being taken advantage of	Teach consent and boundary skills
Risk of misunderstandings because of social differences	Teach qualities of healthy relationships and social skills for dating

Promoting Healthy Relationships

Boundaries

- Relationship boundaries
 - Letting a partner know when I am uncomfortable with something
 - Sharing thoughts and feelings with a partner
 - Moving on if I am not interested (Dating is a CHOICE)
- Personal Boundaries
 - What I am okay doing with my body
 - Separating my feelings from a partner's feelings
 - Sharing differences and diagnoses

Qualities of a Healthy Romantic Relationship

- Sharing of common interests
- Kindness and caring
- Support
- Commitment and loyalty
- Honesty and trust
- Equality (both partners' needs matter)
- Good communication
- Feeling safe and secure
- Comfort being yourself
- Thoughtfulness and consideration
- Dependability and reliability



Qualities of a Healthy Romantic Relationship

- Openness and sharing feelings
- Feeling close and connected
- Respect each other
- Shared values
- Showing appreciation
- Empathy (feeling with each other)
- Physical and sexual compatibility
- Respecting personal boundaries
- Compromise
- Conflict resolution



Key Points

Everyone deserves sex and relationship education

Understanding barriers helps us understand supports



TAKEAWAYS

Sexuality and dating are important topics

Dating is a CHOICE

Now Enrolling: PEERS[®] for Dating

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 **UCLA PEERS[®] CLINIC**
SOCIAL SKILLS PROGRAMS



NOW ENROLLING ADULTS WORLDWIDE!

- Participants are taught evidence-based dating skills through didactic lessons and role-play demonstrations.
- Skills are practiced during online socialization activities with other group members.
- A family member or peer of the participant's choice attends separate classes simultaneously and are taught how to provide dating coaching.
- Classes are taught for 90 minutes each week for 20 weeks.

Participants will learn about:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| • Finding and choosing a romantic partners | • Conversational Skills |
| • Online Dating | • Consent and Safe Sex Practices |
| • Letting someone know you like them | • Handling conflict and rejection |
| • Asking someone on a date | • Maintaining romantic relationships |
| • Helpful Dating Practices | • Healthy Relationship Boundaries |

LEARN MORE



To enroll, please contact:
(310) 267-3377
peersclinic@ucla.edu

For more information, visit
<https://teams.semel.ucla.edu/peers>

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