

PREVENTING DATING VIOLENCE IN AUTISTIC YOUTH

TIPSHEET FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS & TEACHERS

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WHAT IS AUTISM?

- Human beings have many diverse characteristics.
- 'Neurodiversity' describes the many ways people see and interact with the world. Autism is one of many ways youth can be neurodiverse.
- Neurodiversity is an important part of what makes people unique, rather than something that needs to be treated or 'cured.'

WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

Dating violence includes physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse including stalking of a past or current dating partner. Dating violence can occur online and in-person.

Dating violence can look like:

- Hitting a dating partner
- Unwanted sexual advances towards a partner
- Nonconsensual photo sharing
- Online stalking

To learn about the warning signs of dating violence [click here](#).

AUTISM AND DATING VIOLENCE

- Due to ableism (the unfair treatment of people with disabilities), Autistic youth are more likely to experience dating violence than non-Autistic youth.
- For Autistic students, dating violence can have more serious impacts on their well-being than non-Autistic students (e.g., increased impact on academic performance).



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAMMING

- Healthy relationships programming that prepares youth to navigate dating and sexual relationships can help prevent dating violence.
- Many programs do not consider the unique needs and experiences of Autistic youth.
 - Autistic youth often do not get the support they need to navigate the social complexities of sexual and romantic relationships (e.g., flirting, expressing love or sexuality).
 - Building positive relationships and community can support healthy relationship development among Autistic youth.



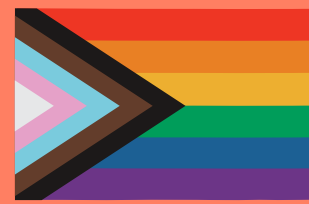
BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS SKILLS AMONG AUTISTIC YOUTH

MISCONCEPTIONS

- Take time to reflect on the assumptions you have about Autistic youth. Consider the following questions:
 - Do I feel the need to protect Autistic youth from sexual education?
 - Am I assuming a youth's understanding of healthy relationships based on their age instead of their skill level?



REPRESENTATION MATTERS



- Including neurodiverse youth in program development and delivery can ensure content is relevant to their lived experiences and help them feel connected to the program.
- Including 2SLGBTQIA+ information and representation throughout programming supports Autistic youth's identity development as Autistic youth are more likely to identify as gender and sexually diverse than non-Autistic youth (possibly because of their comfort challenging social norms.)

PROGRAM DELIVERY

- **Begin offering healthy relationships and sexual health education in early adolescence.** Early education is particularly helpful for skill development among Autistic youth.
- **Meet youth where they are at.** It is important to listen to the needs of Autistic youth and ensure programming aligns with their individual skill levels. Check in with youth to see if the material is relevant and understandable.
- **Provide multiple learning opportunities.** Consider including in-person discussions, role playing, online learning modules, and videos to create a flexible learning environment that builds on the strengths of each youth.
- **Reflect on the language used within program content.** Using direct language that avoids metaphors or common sayings (e.g., 'the birds and the bees') can best support learning among Autistic youth.
- **Consider how you can involve caregivers in the learning process.** For example, teaching caregivers how to support their child's healthy relationship skills, or working with caregivers to offer programming.

RESPONDING TO DATING VIOLENCE AMONG AUTISTIC YOUTH

ADDRESSING DATING VIOLENCE DISCLOSURES

- Have youth complete "healthy dating" quizzes to help them think about whether their relationship is healthy or not.
- Use language that affirms youth's sexual and gender identities.
- Create an individualized plan for youth to stay safe and healthy in their relationships.
- Offer multiple ways for youth to report dating violence and receive support (i.e., in-person, online meetings, phone calls, messaging).
- Support youth across all areas of life. Consider the ways dating violence may impact their mental health (i.e., increased anxiety), school performance (i.e., poor academic functioning), and friendships (i.e., may be less involved with friends.)

RESOURCES

Dating Violence Support

- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- [Victims Services Directory](#)

Affirming Language Guides

- [Egale Pronoun Resource for Teachers](#)
- [Egale Affirming and Inclusive Language](#)

Healthy Relationship Quizzes

- [Is your relationship healthy?](#)
- [Am I in a healthy relationship?](#)

Healthy Relationships Program Resources

- [Safer Dating For Youth on the Autism Spectrum](#)
- [S.T.A.R.S. 2: Relationship Building and Sexual Awareness for Kids with Autism](#)
- [Preventing Youth Dating Violence: How Educators Can Help](#)
- [Healthy Relationships Posters Created BY Youth FOR Youth](#)
- [High School Educators Toolkit](#)
- [Middle School Educators Toolkit](#)



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