

Relationships

“Our assisted living homes are disgraceful in their infantilizing and warehousing of people who could be working and contributing, loving and breaking up like everyone else.” –Survey Comment

What is the vision of the future for Relationships?

Inclusion & Human Rights

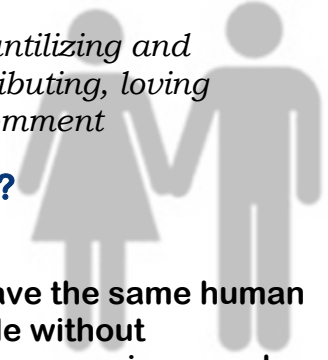
- It is taken for granted that people with disabilities have the same human needs and desires for healthy relationships as people without disabilities, including friendships, sexual relationships, marriage, and family.
- People with disabilities have the right to be treated with respect and dignity at every stage of life, with the same basic human rights afforded to people without disabilities.
- At every stage of life, all people are safe from abuse and neglect, prejudice, exploitation, and violence in every social environment, including homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.
- People with disabilities are included in the social patterns of life appropriate for each stage of life in school, work, and community, characterized by an interdependent network of support with a diversity of people, including family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

Access to Information & Supports

- Education about healthy relationships, covering a full range of knowledge, skills, and safety appropriate for each stage of life, is available to all people, including people with disabilities.
- Supports for people with disabilities encourage and assist with the development and maintenance of healthy relationships appropriate to each stage of life, including friendships, sexual relationships, marriage, and parenting, always respecting the dignity of the individual and the balance of choice, risk, safety, and privacy.

Choice

- People with disabilities have the same rights as other people to make choices in their social and relational lives based on their own exploration of self, in the context of the social, family, moral, cultural, and religious mores they choose to guide them.
- Supports for people with disabilities foster healthy choices in relationships by offering a diversity of safe and inclusive social opportunities in contexts appropriate to each stage of life, respecting the boundaries of privacy and each individual’s rights.



Policy & Regulation

- Policies and their alignment with funded supports fully allow for and support the same social and relational choices for people with disabilities as enjoyed by people without disabilities, including marriage and housing options that support choices in relationships.
- Flexible supports are driven by a diversity of individual needs and priorities revised over time through each stage of life by people with disabilities and their families in consultation with professionals.

What are priorities for Relationships?

The top priority in Relationships is for **safety from abuse, violence, unfair treatment, and exploitation** chosen by 70% of respondents. The second highest is for flexible supports driven by individual needs and priorities (46%), followed by staff respect for the dignity of risk, boundaries, and the balance among individual choice, safety, and privacy (43%). Over a third of respondents (35%) also chose recognition for equal human needs for healthy relationships and equal human rights. Table 5 shows the total response.

Table 5: Priorities in Relationships

Rank	Priority Statement	%Response
1	Safety from abuse and violence, unfair treatment and exploitation	70%
2	Flexible supports driven by individual needs and priorities	46%
3	Staff respect the dignity of risk, boundaries, and the balance of choice, safety, and privacy	43%
4	Equal human needs for healthy relationships and equal human rights are recognized	35%
5	Network of natural supports that help each other	28%
6	Inclusive education about healthy relationships	25%
7	Right to make choices based on self-exploration	14%
7	Policy allows for equal social and relationship choices	14%
8	Included in social patterns of life	13%
9	Policy includes incentives for marriage	4%
Total Respondents: 268		100%

Note: The number of respondents varies in the tables reporting prioritization results because participants were given the option to skip questions they chose not to answer.

What strategies were suggested for Relationships?

Strategies for Inclusion & Human Rights

- **Make information/education for developing skills in human relationships, appropriate to each stage of life, readily available for everyone.**
- **Provide integrated opportunities to practice and develop social skills appropriate to each stage of life, such as organized groups for play, peer support, and dating.**
- **Educate the public about people with disabilities and their rights, dispelling myths and stereotypes. Ideas:**
 - **Incorporate education about disabilities in the K-12 curriculum for all students**
 - **Utilize media resources**
 - **Support self-advocacy and seek out venues for people with disabilities to have a public voice**
 - **Utilize role models**
- **Integrate people with disabilities in the social patterns and environments of life, fostering family, peer, and community relationships. Examples:**
 - **Preschool and childcare**
 - **Summer camps**
 - **Primary, secondary, and post-secondary education**
 - **Social gatherings**
 - **Community events**
 - **Faith-based activities**
- **Provide education and support for caregivers to encourage and foster social relationships for children, teens, and adults with disabilities. Ideas:**
 - **Plans for attending social and community events**
 - **Peer partner clubs**
 - **Peer support for dating**
- **Provide supports for communication (e.g., assistive technology).**
- **Increase effectiveness of response to reports of harm committed by care providers.**

Strategies for Access to Information & Supports

- **Utilize appropriate resources to make education about developing healthy relationship accessible to people with disabilities. Ideas:**
 - **Friendship and Dating groups**
 - **Training in social-emotional and communication skills**

- Venues to role play and practice developing social skills in different social environments
- Sex education curriculum that is the same as or adapted from what is used for everyone
- Ensure education covers:
 - Safety, avoiding violence, disease, toxic relationships, and reporting abuse/neglect
 - Healthy relationships, boundaries, responsibilities, and the dynamics of relationships over time, particularly what is relevant to dating and marriage
 - Consequences relevant to pregnancy, birth, and parenting
- Provide training for caregivers and providers in encouraging, fostering, and supporting healthy relationships. Ideas for training topics:
 - Normalizing healthy human relationships for people with disabilities at every stage of life
 - Openly communicating about healthy relationships, including the general and personal consequences relevant to pregnancy, birth, and parenting
 - Setting goals for a diversity of healthy relationships at every stage of life (Individualized Family Support Plan-IFSP, Individualized Education Program-IEP, Plan of Care, etc.), including planning for supports for pregnancy, birth, and parenting
 - Utilizing existing resources, such as the Special Education Service Agency (SESA), pediatricians, and other healthcare providers
 - Respecting human rights and personal choices, and appropriately deal with conflicts with one's own values, culture, and beliefs
 - Allowing time for relationships, and respect privacy, particularly regarding intimate relationships and what is documented in records
 - Awareness of trauma and its impact on social relationships, trauma-informed services and supports
- Provide supports for healthy relationships in families, especially in rural areas.

Strategies for Choice

- Focus advocacy and self-advocacy efforts on respecting and enforcing the rights of individuals with disabilities regarding choices in their social and relational lives, based on the beliefs and values they choose to guide them.
- Create safe spaces where people with disabilities can have open dialogues about relationships and get answers to their questions.

- **Foster safe and informed access to the same relationship resources used by peers without disabilities, including technology and online relationships.**
- **Train and support self-advocates to stand up for their rights to have the means to develop healthy relationships at every stage of life.**
- **Encourage flexibility for healthy relationships in more restricted housing (e.g., assisted living homes) to allow for privacy and intimacy.**

Strategies for Policy & Regulation

- **Reform regulations so that they support choices in healthy relationships without disincentives or penalties (e.g., marriage, housing options that support healthy relationships).**
- **Provide funding for fostering healthy relationships, including access to the social spaces appropriate to each stage of life.**
- **Incorporate more flexibility in supports so they encourage rather than restrict choices in social activity. Examples:**
 - **Do not restrict meals to in the home**
 - **Increase discretionary funds**