

TALKING ABOUT SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

A Guide For Parents, Guardians &
Carers of a Young Person With
a Learning Disability



TALKING ABOUT SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

A Guide For Parents, Guardians & Carers of a
Young Person With a Learning Disability

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
TALKING TOPIC 1 Talking about different types of relationships	6
TALKING TOPIC 2 Talking about choosing who to have a relationship with	8
TALKING TOPIC 3 Talking about how a relationship makes us feel	10
TALKING TOPIC 4 Talking about what is a healthy relationship	11
TALKING TOPIC 5 Talking about what is an unhealthy relationship	13
TALKING TOPIC 6 Talking about sex and intimacy	18
TALKING TOPIC 7 Fixed ideas & stereotypes about how men & women should behave	22
TALKING TOPIC 8 The importance of getting help and support when you need it	25
SUPPORT FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND CARERS	26

INTRODUCTION PART 1

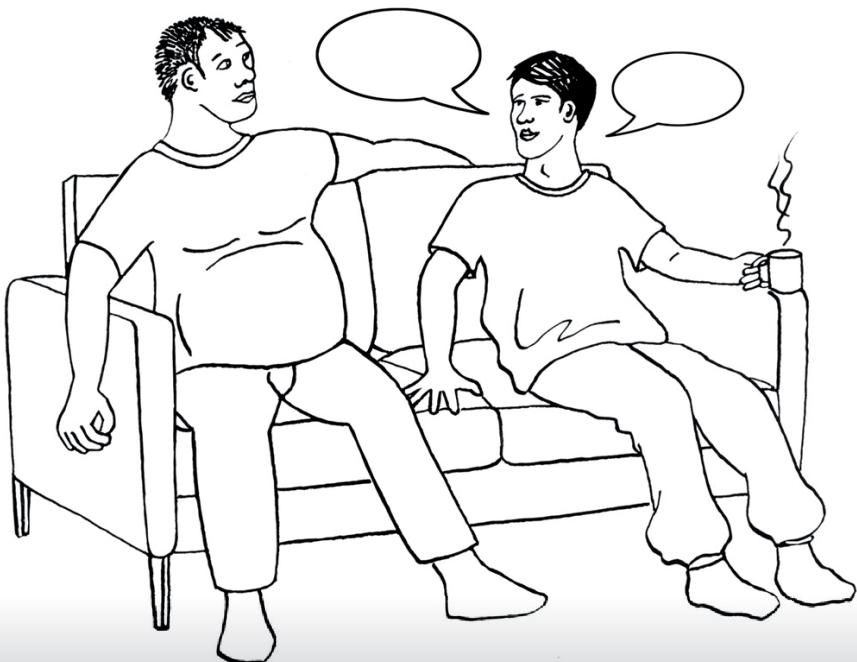
This booklet aims to help you talk to a young person with a learning disability about sex and relationships. Parents asked for this resource to get them started in having these conversations that they sometimes find challenging. In each section there are some talking points, visual aids and questions that maybe helpful.

We hope it will help support positive attitudes to relationships and consent and encourage open discussion about some of the feelings people might have in relationships. We want to help parents and guardians to support the young person to make choices about who they have relationships with and how they behave so that they are safe in these relationships.

These conversations can be difficult or embarrassing so it is good to think about how to overcome this. It might be a good idea to break these conversations up and do them a bit at a time and again when issues come up that are relevant.

SOME TIPS TO DO THIS ARE:

- Find a quiet and comforting space to talk with the young person.
- It might help to make a drink or have some snacks.
- Give each other plenty of space to think and talk.
- It might help to practice this conversation alone, or with a friend or family member first.



INTRODUCTION PART 2

- It is okay to stop the conversation if it gets difficult and come back to it at another time.

THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT EMOTIONS

It is important to speak with the young person about having different emotions and how sometimes they feel very good and sometimes they feel bad. It is important to help them understand that there is nothing wrong with having emotions but how we deal with them and behave is very important.

For example help them understand that:

Sometimes other people can make you angry. This is normal. But how you deal with both love and anger can be healthy or unhealthy. Anger can make us say and do things we don't really mean and upset other people. But anger is usually a secondary emotion. For example people are angry because they are upset first, or scared.

EXAMPLE:

Someone doesn't phone you when they said they would, you are upset and worried they might not care about you first, and then you become angry.

Talking about why you are angry can help you control your anger. In this case telling someone that they have upset you when they didn't call and that if they can't call when they promised maybe they



INTRODUCTION PART 3

could send you a text instead. They may have not called because they had their hands full or were stuck in traffic.

THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Help the young person understand that communication is very important in a relationship, especially if there is a disagreement. Talk together about how there are ways to get through arguments without anyone being hurtful or abusive.

These include:

1. Staying Calm
2. Asking questions
 - You don't always know why someone is upset. Ask them and listen to their answer.
3. Finding out how the other person feels
 - Ask them how they are feeling and let them know how you feel too.
4. Trying to find a solution when there are different views and actions



TALKING TOPIC 1 PART 1

TALKING ABOUT DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS

HELPFUL TIPS:

Talk about how there are things they might do with a friend or close family member that they also might do with a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife, like going to the cinema together.

Talk about how there are also things they would NOT do with a friend or close family member that they might do with a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife, like holding hands, kissing or any sexual activity.

Think together how this might also be different for different people like if they are religious or are from a different culture. Some people hug their friends; some people only hug their romantic partner.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

What kinds of activities do people in different types of relationships do?

What kinds of things would they do with a teacher?

What would they do with a friend?

What kinds of things would they do with a romantic partner?

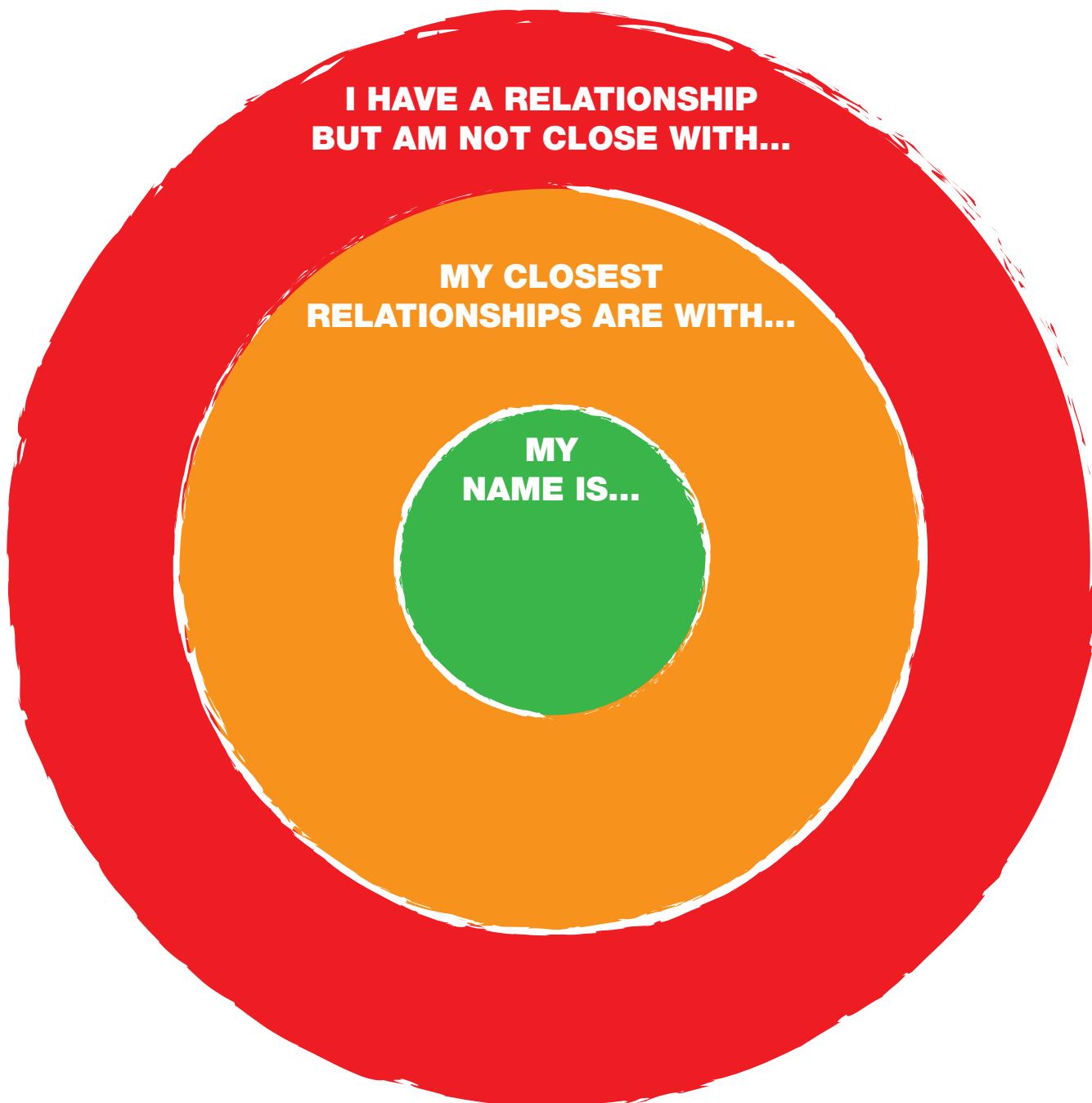
ASK THEM TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP CIRCLE ON THE NEXT PAGE TO HELP THEM.



TALKING TOPIC 1 PART 2

TALKING ABOUT DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONSHIP CIRCLE



TALKING TOPIC 2 PART 1

TALKING ABOUT CHOOSING WHO TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH

HELPFUL TIPS:

Talk about how everyone has the right to choose if they want to have a friendship or a romantic relationship with someone. This means that not everyone they want to be friends with will want to be friends with them and they don't have to be friends with anyone they don't want to be friends with.

Talk about how this also means that not everyone they have romantic feelings for will want to be their romantic partner. This is okay and most people have this experience.

Talk about how they cannot force someone to like them in a romantic way, just like no one can force them to like the other person in that way either. It is their choice to be in a relationship with someone.

Talk about how sometimes families might arrange for them to meet someone that they think the person might want to marry. This is okay, but they do not have to marry them if they don't want to.

Talk about how sometimes people in relationships are very similar to each other, and sometimes they are not. The most important thing is that they respect each other and each other's interests. Help them understand that nobody is perfect and it is unlikely that they will be in a relationship with someone that is everything that they want in a person. Again, the most important thing is that they respect each other.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

What kind of person would they like to be friends with? Would they be funny? Smart? Would they like the same things as them?

Does it matter if someone doesn't like all the same things as them? For example if they really like football is it okay if the other person doesn't like football?

Ask them about the people they know who are in relationships. What makes them similar and what makes them different from each other? Maybe if you have a partner, your relationship can be an example of this.

SEE NEXT PAGE WITH DIFFERENT QUALITIES ON IT.

TALKING TOPIC 2 PART 2

TALKING ABOUT CHOOSING WHO TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH

FUNNY	UNIQUE	OLDER THAN ME	POPULAR
INDEPENDENT	HONEST	CONFIDENT	NICE TO OTHERS
ROMANTIC	SMART	RICH	MOVIE FANATIC
ATHLETIC	GOOD LISTENER	SUPPORTIVE	ARTSY
WEIRD & WACKY	ADVENTUROUS	OUTGOING	PASSIONATE

TALKING TOPIC 3

TALKING ABOUT HOW A RELATIONSHIP MAKES US FEEL

HELPFUL TIPS:

Help them understand that a relationship should make them feel good and cared for. This is important in any relationship, whether it is a dating relationship or the relationship you have with a friend, sibling, or parent.

Help them understand that sometimes people don't always get along and sometimes people argue and it is okay for people to have disagreements sometimes. In a good relationship they will make up later.

Help them understand that some relationships are sometimes not good for them. They might be arguing all the time, or they might not be respected.

Help them know that sometimes people who are having problems with their relationship talk to other people, like family, friends or a counsellor and try and fix their problems. Sometimes this works. Help them understand that it is okay to end a relationship if it doesn't feel good anymore.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

Ask them to share with you some ways people have treated them that have helped them feel good about themselves. Can they think of a time where someone:

- Encouraged them?
- Trusted them?
- Showed they cared about them?
- Listened to them?

What are some ways people have treated them that have made them feel bad about themselves? It might be helpful to then talk again about how people have helped them feel good about themselves



TALKING TOPIC 3 PART 1

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

HELPFUL TIPS:

Talk about how both people in a relationship should feel like equals. This means both people are as important as the other and they respect each other.

Talk about these signs of a healthy relationship:

- Shared power
- Making important decisions together.
- Fairness and compromise
- Settling arguments by 'meeting in the middle'.
- Non-threatening behaviour
- You should never be scared of the person you are in a relationship with.

RESPECT

Listening to each other and not judging each other. You don't always have to agree on everything, but it is good to be able to try and think about it from the other person's viewpoint. This is 'putting yourself in their shoes'.

TRUST AND SUPPORT

People in healthy relationships trust each other and are confident that the other person won't do anything to upset them on purpose. They support each other's goals and respect their friends, activities and opinions.



TALKING TOPIC 3 PART 2

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

HONESTY & TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

This is when people agree to try and learn from their mistakes, and are honest about their actions and admit it when they have been wrong.

SELF CONFIDENCE AND PERSONAL GROWTH

This means people respect who each other are and encourage each other to be their own person. People in relationships don't always have to have the same interests, friends or opinions. For example not stopping them seeing friends or applying for a new job.

COMMUNICATION

This is where people are comfortable to talk to each other and share their problems.

AFFECTION

Having affectionate feelings towards each other and feeling able to show these feelings.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

- What does a healthy relationship look like?
- What are the signs of a healthy relationship?
- How could a problem be solved in a healthy relationship?



TALKING TOPIC 5 PART 1

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

HELPFUL TIPS:

Help them understand that sometimes relationships that used to be good, turn bad. This can be this is nobody's fault. People may change as time goes on and just don't get on anymore.

Help them understand that sometimes people in relationships hurt each other when they don't mean to. Sometimes they are sorry and they learn from their mistakes. Sometimes they are sorry but they keep hurting the other person.

Help them understand that sometimes people are abusive in relationships, they may not mean to be, but this doesn't mean a person should continue to have a relationship with anyone who is abusive to them.

TALK ABOUT THESE SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP:

BLACKMAIL

Threatening to tell other people their secrets, share personal information about them or even naked photos.

ISOLATION/ EXCLUSION

Always leaving someone out, making them stay at home, not allowing them to have friends or see their family.



TALKING TOPIC 5 PART 2

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Controlling what someone eats, where they go, what they do, who they see, and not letting them have privacy, like reading their texts, or not letting them be their own person. They might make all the important decisions without them or treat them like a servant, like making them do all the housework.

SEXUAL PRESSURE

Someone might be made to have sex when they don't want to. This might be by getting them drunk, or threatening them, or pressuring them by asking all the time or making them feel bad if they don't want sexual contact.

Sexual pressure may also be used to ask them to send naked photos of themselves.

THREATENING BEHAVIOUR AND INTIMIDATING BEHAVIOUR

This could be making threats to hurt the person or themselves. They may break things or shout. They might act in a way that makes the person feel worried or scared.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

For example hitting them, grabbing them, pulling them or holding them down, or hurting the person's body in any way.



TALKING TOPIC 5 PART 3

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

This can be things like calling them names or insulting them. They might make the person feel bad about themselves.

MAKING THE PERSON DOUBT THEMSELVES

This could be by telling them that they are making stuff up, saying something didn't happen when it did. It could be questioning their memories or lying when the other person does something wrong.

JEALOUSY

Talk about how jealousy and insecurity often go together. For example how they might get jealous that their partner is spending a lot of time with someone else. This might be because they are insecure and worried that the person doesn't want to be with them, and are jealous of the other person the person is spending time with. This might be because their partner is not giving them enough time. Help them understand that they need to talk together about this.

Sometimes being jealous or insecure can mean a person treats someone badly.



TALKING TOPIC 5 PART 4

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

EXAMPLE

If they are worried that the other person wants to be in a relationship with a friend and not with them, then they might tell the person that they can't see their friend anymore. This is not okay.

EXAMPLE

They might try and control the other person, make them spend all their time with them, and force the person to like them more. This will not be a good relationship.
If they are jealous or insecure help them understand that sometimes it is good to talk to someone about how they feel. This could be their partner, but if it might upset them they could also talk to a friend.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

What are some things that happen in an abusive or unhealthy relationship?
What should they do if someone is doing any of these things?

If someone hurts their feelings but they didn't mean to what should they do?

Do they ever feel jealous? What kind of things do they feel jealous about?

What do they think is a good thing to do if they are jealous?

What should they do if their partner is jealous of them spending time with other people?



TALKING TOPIC 5 PART 5

TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

Take a look at these sentences.

WHICH OF THESE THINGS ARE HEALTHY, UNHEALTHY OR ABUSIVE?

- Checking partner's phone
- Always checking where their partner is
- Encouraging their partner to go to college
- Calling their partner names in front of the partner's friends
- Telling their partner they are upset and why
- Pressuring their partner to send them nude photos
- Deciding where to have dinner together
- Making them feel guilty when they are with a friend
- Pressuring their partner to have sex
- Getting jealous and showing this when their partner gets a new job



TALKING TOPIC 6 PART 1

TALKING ABOUT SEX AND INTIMACY

HELPFUL TIPS:

Try to talk with the person as they grow up and become an adult about the basic facts of what sex is and what they have learnt about this at school and college and from their family and friends.

Think about their abilities and whether or not they understand enough to have capacity to consent to have sex. Talk with other people who know and support them about this. If they lack capacity to consent then it is against the law for another person to have sexual relations with them even if they have got married. If they lack capacity to consent to sex then they lack capacity to consent to marriage and any marriage would be against the law and seen to be a Forced Marriage.

If you do not feel comfortable about talking with them about these things then think about who in the family or the person's circle of support may be able to have these conversations.

TALK ABOUT AND HELP THE PERSON UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS:

- Sex can be an important part of a relationship.
- It is important that both people are comfortable and happy to have sex first.
- They should not pressure anyone into doing anything they do not want to do.
- They should not do anything they don't want to do if they think the other person expects it, even if they have said they will.
- If anything doesn't feel right, then they don't have to do it. They can stop at any time. It is wrong and against the law for anyone to continue having sex with them if they tell them to stop. This is also true when they are married.



TALKING TOPIC 6 PART 2

TALKING ABOUT SEX AND INTIMACY

It is important for them to talk to their partner about sex, what is okay with them, and for them to let the other person know if there are things they are not okay with.

Some people have religions and cultures which mean they might wait to be married to have sex. This is okay too.

Discuss how if they want to have sex but do not want to have a baby, then they need to use contraception. Encourage them to discuss what contraception to use with the other person to make sure they choose the best method for both of them.

Discuss how some contraception can also help them not get sexually transmitted illnesses.

There is easy to understand information here:

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/contraception-safe-sex/



TALKING TOPIC 6 PART 3

TALKING ABOUT SEX AND INTIMACY

REVENGE PORN

Talk about and help the person understand what revenge porn is. Explain that sometimes people in relationships send each other naked photos of each other or talk about sex over text.

Explain that sometimes when people get angry with each other or split up they share these photos or messages with other people or put them on the internet. This is called revenge pornography and it is against the law. Sometimes other people can see these pictures or messages because their phone is lost, stolen or lent to someone.

- Help the person think about the risks of sending intimate messages.
- Help the person think about the risks of taking intimate photos of themselves and other people.
- Help the person think about how much they trust someone before sending any pictures or messages like this and how they would feel if the pictures or messages were shared with anyone else, even if this happens by accident.
- Help the person understand that if they are unsure or worried about what to do, they can talk to a friend, a family member, or to a social worker, carer or support worker.



TALKING TOPIC 6 PART 4

TALKING ABOUT SEX AND INTIMACY

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

What should they do if someone wants to have sex with them but they don't want to have sex with that person?

What should they do if they ask someone to send them a naked photo but the other person says they don't want to?

What they should do if they want to have sex but do not want to have a baby?



TALKING TOPIC 7 PART 1

FIXED IDEAS & STEREOTYPES ABOUT HOW MEN & WOMEN SHOULD BEHAVE

HELPFUL TIPS:

Help the person understand that a stereotype is something that people assume about a person based on things like their race, religion, sexuality or gender. Gender stereotypes mean how people assume or expect women and men to act because of their gender.

In the past men and women have been treated very differently to each other and were expected to act in a certain way.

For example it used to be very common that in a family the man would work and the woman would stay at home to look after children and keep the house clean.

Some women wanted to stay at home and look after the house and the children, but not all women wanted this. Some women stayed at home to look after children because they felt they were expected to and would be treated badly if did not do this.

Similarly some men wanted to stay at home and look after their children but were expected to go out to work.



TALKING TOPIC 7 PART 2

FIXED IDEAS & STEREOTYPES ABOUT HOW MEN & WOMEN SHOULD BEHAVE

Talk together and help the person understand that gender stereotypes can be things like;

- Men are strong, women are weak
- Men like sport, women like shopping
- Women are emotional and cry, men don't show emotion and are aggressive
- Men are good at fixing things, men pay for dates, women wear make-up.

Not all these things are true for all men or all women, and some of these assumptions can lead to problems.

For example it is not very healthy to stop yourself from crying or showing emotion because you are a man. And it is not good for women to feel they owe a man sex because he paid for dinner.

Sometimes gender stereotypes can contribute to abuse taking place or becoming worse. For example a man might not be able to talk about his feelings because he has always been expected to hide them and this might make him angry and hit out at his partner.

A man might feel very ashamed when other people hurt him and he thinks he should always be strong so he may not tell anyone about this. Or a woman might hide her emotions because she is worried about appearing over emotional because she is a woman.

Help them understand that it is important to think about how they feel and get support with this.



TALKING TOPIC 7 PART 3

FIXED IDEAS & STEREOTYPES ABOUT HOW MEN & WOMEN SHOULD BEHAVE

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

If a girl does not wear makeup & loves to play sports, does this make her less of a girl?

If a boy likes knitting, does this make him less of a boy?

What things do they think they like that fit with their gender?

What things do they think they like that do not fit with their gender?

Has anyone ever told them that they shouldn't do or like something because of their gender?



TALKING TOPIC 8

THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING HELP & SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

HELPFUL TIPS:

Talk together and help the person understand that it is important to ask for help if they are having problems in their relationship.

This could be someone in their community, a friend or family member. They could ask their GP about meeting with a counsellor or therapist or they could contact their local learning disability team about getting some help and support.

Help them understand that they need to always ask for help straight away if they are being hurt or abused.

Help them understand what it means to be in danger from another person and that if they are in danger they should immediately contact the police and talk with them about how to do this.

Help them understand that it is important to support friends and family when they have problems too.



SUPPORT FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS & CARERS

As we said at the beginning of this booklet it can sometimes feel difficult to talk with the young person about sex and relationships. You may decide that some things feel very embarrassing or become aware that the young person is hiding important things because they feel embarrassed.

You may feel confused about what to say.

Talking about these things with a young person may make you become aware that there are things about yourself that you do not understand and you may want help and advice for yourself.

Talking about these things with a young person may make you become aware that there are things in your own life and relationships that you are not comfortable about or that you feel someone is not treating you well in a relationship.

It is important that you get help for yourself.

If you need help in supporting the young person with a learning disability then you can contact your GP or contact your social worker or local learning disability team.

If you need help for yourself then you can contact your GP about meeting with an individual counsellor or therapist or relationship counsellor.

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU OR ANYONE IN YOUR FAMILY IS IN DANGER OR AT RISK OF HARM THEN YOU NEED TO CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES OR THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY.



TALKING ABOUT
SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

RESPOND))
from hurting to healing

TALKING ABOUT
SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

RESPOND 
from hurting to healing