

# Appropriate Relationships

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There are a few unspoken rules or guidelines around what makes an appropriate relationship and what doesn't. These rules apply to all different kinds of relationships (e.g. dating, friends, mentor, etc.)

## Behaviour:

- It is never appropriate to be violent or cause harm to another person. It doesn't matter what kind of relationship it is (parent, friend, dating, babysitter, etc.).
- Bullying and constant criticism are not appropriate.
- If someone blocks you on social media or text, it's generally not appropriate to keep making new accounts to get to them (especially if they block the second account you make).
- It is inappropriate to try to control or dictate what another person can do or who they should spend time with. This includes telling them what clothes they can and can't wear, what colour they can dye their hair etc.
- It is not appropriate to send intimate photos to unsuspecting people or people who did not consent to them. Ask for permission first.
- If someone says they are uncomfortable with something you are doing, it is not appropriate to continue if it impacts them. For example, if someone says they are uncomfortable with you flapping your hands, that does not have anything to do with them so it is fine for you to continue. However, if someone is uncomfortable with you touching their belongings, then you should stop.

## **Expectations:**

- Being autistic, it can be common to get into routines and expectations of how things might go. It is important that if you get into an intimate relationship with someone, you never expect sex as part of a routine or after any particular activity (unless agreed upon with your partner). Sex should always be something you both enthusiastically wish to participate in, not something that happens simply because that is what you do after going out for dinner for example.
- It is not appropriate to expect or ask a child to keep secrets especially from one or both parents/guardians.

## **Privacy:**

- It's inappropriate for a professional working with a client or student, or a mentor to break confidentiality unless they are concerned about someone's safety. That means it is important they don't share private information in a manner that will identify who they are talking about. You can make a complaint if you feel there has been a breach of confidentiality or involve Health and Disability Advocacy Services (depending on which organisation you're working with).
- It's not appropriate for people to get private information about customers or clients for their own personal use (for example, looking on a work database to get the number of a customer whom they thought was attractive). If this happens to you, you can make a formal complaint to the organisation whom the person works for or call the police if the person won't leave you alone or you feel unsafe.

## **Boundaries:**

- It's not appropriate for professionals to connect with clients or students via personal social media accounts. Some organisations will have public social media accounts for this purpose (such as youth workers).

- It's not appropriate to cross someone else's boundaries. However, boundaries should generally be things that you can control for yourself because you can't control other people's behaviour. For example, a boundary might be "I'm not going to respond to messages on Tuesday nights", or it might be "If this person continues to use my belongings without my permission, I will no longer remain friends with them" (perhaps you've asked them to stop or they have been causing damage to your property). It is important to communicate your boundaries with people and make sure they are reasonable.

## Age:

- It is generally not appropriate for an adult (over 18) to be in a dating relationship with a minor (under 18). There are obviously some grey areas in the sense that it'd be okay for a 17 year old to be with an 18 year old. It's also not appropriate for an adult to have a platonic relationship with a minor with the intention of dating them when they come of age, or for a person who was in a position of authority to enter a relationship with the minor they were caring for (e.g. a teacher or a babysitter).
- It's important to be conscious, particularly as you become older, that participating in activities with groups significantly younger than you may not be appropriate either. For example, if you are an adult or late teen, it may not be appropriate to attend a sleepover with a group of young children (especially if their parents do not know you). This can be very nuanced so it's helpful to check with other people if things are okay or not.

## Gender:

- There are instances where your gender plays a part in whether the interaction is appropriate or not. For example, a male authority figure typically should not be the one to pull up a female on a dress code violation if it involves clothing being too revealing. Instead, they should seek out a female or non-binary authority figure to have that conversation. Again, this can be quite nuanced so it depends on the situation.

## Consent:

No means no. If someone says no, you should not try to convince them to change their mind. If someone says yes, they can change their mind at any point. You should always respect their wishes. There is one exception to this rule, however. That is if there are concerns about a person's safety or wellbeing. Keeping people safe is of utmost priority and sometimes people don't want to keep themselves or others safe so you have to go against their wishes.

Aside from that, consent applies to everyone and everything, not just dating and intimate relationships. If a person does not want to be hugged, they do not have to. If they say no, that's it, it's not up for conversation or guilt tripping. It doesn't matter if you're family or if you haven't seen each other in a long time. No one is entitled to anyone else's affection or touch.

If someone does not want their belongings to be used, or someone else to go through their messages or social media, they don't have to give consent. In terms of belongings, consent isn't as clear cut for minors who are under the age of 16 because parents or guardians can overrule this consent. However, allowing young people autonomy and the right to say no, teaches consent in multiple contexts which keeps them safe, it teaches independence and fosters trust in your relationship.

Intimate relations should always involve enthusiastic consent from all parties involved. It should not be half hearted, giving in, or one sided. If one person is not interested, don't engage.