



Script for Parent-Child Communication Audio Clip

Our kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities may learn in different ways or at different paces than our kids who don't have them. But that doesn't change our desire as parents and caregivers for them to have lives that are rich with learning and a full range of positive, healthy experiences. We are their most important teachers, and we have a prominent role to play in what they learn, how they learn it, and when those lessons happen for them.

Even though many of our kids with IDD will eventually have romantic relationships, they often don't get the same reproductive health and relationship education at school as their peers without disabilities do. Because these lessons are more complex and nuanced than many of those that we helped them learn earlier in life, teaching these things can feel like a much bigger ask of us. If like many people, we didn't get great education around puberty and romantic relationships ourselves, we may not feel as prepared to talk to our teens about these things as we have about others. But they need and want to know this stuff; and they need and want to know that we – the people they most trust - support them in this learning, too.

We can help them, even if we're not quite sure how. We don't have to know everything, but we do have to be open and remind them regularly that we are a safe place to ask questions and discuss ideas about sex and relationships. Using simple but concrete words and concepts instead of slang can help reduce confusion. Listening closely and repeating back what they've said shows them we really want to understand. And sharing with them our values about relationships and sexuality, even if theirs aren't exactly the same, helps them think through their own.

Finally, we don't have to do this alone. We can seek out information and tools for having these conversations, making sure we're getting the information and support we need from reputable sources.

We love our kids. We want them to have the kinds of happy and healthy relationships that will bring as much depth and warmth and support as possible to their whole lives. How they navigate and engage in romantic relationships – and how they protect themselves against relationships that might exploit or harm them – is really important information for them to have as they go through adolescence. Talking to them about it is key to making sure they get the relationship and reproductive health education and skills that they deserve. When we do this, we set them up for the kinds of rich, full, supportive relationships that we dream of for them and that they dream of for themselves.