

# Healthy Dating & Relationship Support Checklist for Families

## A practical guide for supporting adults with Down Syndrome

### 1. Give Permission

- I let my loved one know it's okay to like someone.
- I encourage open conversations about crushes, feelings, and relationships.
- I avoid "conversation stoppers" like "You're not ready" or "Maybe when you're older."
- I respond with curiosity instead of fear.

### 2. Provide Clear, Simple Information

- We've talked about what dating is and what people do on dates.
- We've discussed boundaries, privacy, and appropriate touch.
- My loved one understands the difference between friendship, dating, and paid helpers.
- We've reviewed what consent means and how to give or receive it.

### 3. Build Social Opportunities

- My loved one participates in activities where they can meet peers.
- We support involvement in both disability-specific and mainstream groups.
- We help them explore new hobbies or interests to widen their social circle.
- We reinforce that caregivers, staff, and family members are not dating options.

### 4. Teach How to Show and Read Interest

- We've practiced:
  - Smiling
  - Saying hello
  - Starting conversations
  - Giving compliments
  - Asking simple questions
- My loved one knows how to notice:
  - Positive signals
  - Neutral signals
  - Negative signals
- They understand that dating only works when both people are interested.

### 5. Support Date Planning

- We help them decide:
  - Who to ask
  - What to do
  - When to go
  - How much it will cost
  - Who will pay
  - How they will get there
- We provide support with:
  - Transportation
  - Scheduling
  - Money management
  - Chaperoning (if needed)
  - Privacy

### 6. Build Core Dating Skills

- Introducing themselves
- Starting conversations
- Flirting appropriately
- Asking someone out
- Planning a date
- Handling rejection
- Respecting boundaries
- Defending their own boundaries

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### 7. Evaluate Relationship Health

My loved one can identify:

- **Healthy Signs**

- Kindness
- Honesty
- Respect for boundaries
- Shared decision-making
- Enjoying time with family and friends
- Dependability

- **Unhealthy Signs**

- Jealousy or control
- Lying
- Rushing the relationship
- Ignoring boundaries
- Pressure to keep secrets
- Physical or verbal aggression

### 8. Teach Communication Tools

- We practice “I” statements:

- **I feel...**
- **When you...**
- **Because...**
- **Please...**
- *Example: I feel upset when you call me nicknames because I asked you not to. Please stop calling me nicknames.*

- My loved one knows how to express feelings without blaming.

- They know how to ask for changes respectfully.

### 9. Prepare for Rejection & Breakups

- We've talked about what rejection is.

- My loved one knows it's okay to say “no” and okay to hear “no.”

- They have coping strategies:

- Talking to family or friends
- Journaling
- Listening to music
- Doing hobbies
- Spending time with loved ones

- They understand that breakups happen when people no longer want the same things.

### 10. Discuss Touch, Affection & Sexuality

- We've talked about:

- What types of touch feel okay
- Asking about a partner's boundaries
- Respecting boundaries
- Avoiding PDA

- My loved one understands:

- Consent
- Equal power
- Equal understanding
- Privacy
- Protection
- Mutual enjoyment

### 11. Create a Supportive Environment

- We model healthy relationships in our own lives.
- We stay open, calm, and non-judgmental.
- We check in regularly without taking over.
- We celebrate independence and emotional growth.