

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.