

Relationships and Sexuality

This informative publication ensued from the collaborative works of Family Network on Disabilities and ASAN. Family Network on Disabilities understands and respects the beliefs and opinions of those who choose not to use “Person First Language.”
At FND, we respectfully prefer to use “Person First Language.”

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H328M110010 and #H328M110026. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer: Greg Knollman.

Introduction

In order for all of us to live in relative harmony with one another, we form relationships and interact with each other in such a way as to become friends, gain trust, and create strong emotional bonds. In time, we may find a person we wish to spend the rest of our lives with. But these relationships never come about automatically. They require practice, effort, patience, understanding, and experience. We've arranged this series of tip-sheets to help you on your way toward forming the relationships we hope you will be able to sustain for the rest of your life.

Consent and boundaries are important to keep in mind. This is how we tell others how close we wish to be with each other, or how distant. However, when these concepts are misunderstood or mistreated, the potential for abuse and exploitation exist. That is why communication is so important when forming relationships and understanding sexuality. The more we understand each other, the better the chances for meaningful and symbiotic relationships become.

Before we begin working at understanding others, it may become necessary for us to understand ourselves. We must also work at feeling comfortable in our own skin. We all only get one body. We might as well make the best out of it that we can.

When you get down to basics, we are *all* different from one another. No two people are the same. When we form relationships, we come to understand that we may be more alike than we realize at first, but there will always be differences to consider. It is because of these differences that forming relationships and understanding sexuality becomes so important. We hope you will find the following tip-sheets insightful and helpful.

Consent

- **What is consent?** Consent is a choice to do something, or an agreement: consent is a deliberate yes. Everything in a relationship must be consensual, up to and including sexual activity.
- **Why is consent important?** Consenting to sex means that someone is saying yes to have sex. Sex without consent is rape.
- **What does consent look like?**
 - “Yes.”
 - “No I don’t want that, can we try this instead?”
 - “Do you want to have sex?”
- **Consent and autism:** Communicating with an autistic person can be different from what your partner(s) is used to. It's important that your partner(s) understand how you communicate, and it is also important that you understand how your partner(s) communicate.

Some autistic people find it difficult to form words, especially when they have a lot of sensory input. During sex, you may need to communicate with hand signals, sign language, or an AAC device. Communication between participants in sexual activity is important, so everyone can consent. (See the section on Communication for more information.)

What are the basics of consent?

- **Consent is about everyone involved deciding to have a sexual interaction.** This means that no matter what gender someone is, or what a person's sexual history is, consent is still important. A man who says no to sex is not consenting. A person who has had sex many times, but is saying no this time, is not consenting. Even the person who asked for sex to begin with has a right to say ‘no’ to sex later on. For sex to be consensual, everyone involved must ask their partner if they consent, everyone needs to say whether they consent or not, and, most importantly, everyone must accept and respect each other's answers. Respecting answers means stepping back as soon as anyone indicates they need to stop.
- **Consent can be withdrawn by anyone at any time.** Consent is not a binding contract. Changing your mind at any time is allowed. Also, just because someone consented to sex yesterday does not mean they are consenting today.

- **Consent is never automatic. Consent is always necessary.** This means no matter how long you and your partner(s) have been together, even if you are married, you still need to make sure they consent before you do anything with them. There is no relationship in which consent is pressured or automatic. Someone saying that they love you is not consent for intercourse. Someone who consents to one action is not consenting to any further action. For example, someone who says yes to kissing is not saying yes to any further touching. As mentioned above, even if you have been sexual together many times in the past, it does not make them obligated in any way to continue to have sex in the future.
- **Some situations make consent impossible.** In some situations, even if a person is saying yes, they are not giving consent. When someone is drunk, high on drugs, or intoxicated by any other means, they are unable to give consent, even by agreeing. If someone is asleep or passed out, they are unable to give consent. If someone cannot understand what they are being asked for, they are unable to give consent. If someone is in any of these situations, it's best to not even ask about sex. Also, when someone is under the age of legal consent, they cannot give consent. This is because children may be used to people telling them what to do

and may not feel that they can say no. Asking someone about sex if you can tell that they are afraid to say no is not acceptable. It's important to note that in some circumstances, people with disabilities, including autism, have more laws which apply to their legal ability to consent. You and your partner(s) should research and be aware of these laws.

- **If you don't have consent, you must stop.** If someone is not consenting -- which includes verbal and nonverbal signals to stop -- the sexual activity must stop. If the person who does not consent is then asked or pressured to keep going, that is unacceptable behavior. If the person who does not consent is emotionally coerced or physically forced to have sex anyway, it is sexual assault. If anyone is not consenting, or being kept from communicating their consent or non-consent, then what is happening may be considered rape, sexual abuse, or sexual assault.
- **Not saying "no" does not mean "yes".** It is very important that this distinction is made. Consent is only given when a person says "yes", either verbally or nonverbally. In the case of nonverbal communication, it must be a signal that each of you has discussed and understood before the sexual activity has begun. If you and your partner(s) have not discussed a signal beforehand, you must assume it does not mean "yes".

What are some important things to discuss before having sex?

- It helps to know what each person enjoys and dislikes during sex before engaging in sexual activity. Otherwise, it can be frustrating to try and guess what your partner likes by trying things and getting "yes" or "no" answers. If possible, let each other know what things are okay and what things are not ahead of time. You may not know those things. For example, if you have no sexual experience, you may not know what you like or dislike. If this is the case, let your partner(s) know that it will be a new experience so they will be prepared.
- It is important to know what actions may trigger you or your partner. Triggers are events or actions which overwhelm you with bad emotions, and which can keep you from communicating. It is best to try and keep in mind signs that your partner(s) may be being triggered, so that you can stop even when they are unable to ask you to.
- Everyone's cues are different and everyone's triggers are different. Even if you have engaged in sexual activity with other people, learning your partner's cues is important. Things that may have been fine with other partners may be triggering or uncomfortable with someone else. In the same way, things that others may have done to signal stop or to consent may not mean the same thing when someone else does them.
- If you are verbal, but think you will or might become nonverbal during sex, it is important to let your partner(s) know ahead of time. This way you can discuss nonverbal signals to express consent or lack of consent when the time arises.
- It is also important to know how often you should "check in" with one another. Checking in is asking if everything is okay. It allows each of you to withdraw consent if you are feeling overwhelmed or pressured in any way. It's a good practice to check in with your partner any time that you do something new with them, as well as at intervals you determine throughout the experience.
- It may also be useful to come up with signals for when something feels very good so you and your partner(s) know when to keep doing what you are doing. It is also important to discuss and decide on which contraception you plan to use. A condom would be the most practical and safest form of protection against sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

How do I know if I want to consent?

- You are comfortable doing it. It's normal to be nervous or excited about sexual activity, especially if it's something new or with a new person. However, if you feel bad or uncomfortable about it, you may not want to consent.
- It is something you *want* to do, and not something you *have* to do. If you are feeling forced or coerced in any way, it is usually best to not consent.
- You trust the person enough to consent or withdraw consent at any time. If you feel okay with consenting at the start but uncertain later, you are in an unsafe situation. You may need to discuss boundaries and consent before consenting.
- Are you worried about your partner's reaction if you say no? If you are, you are probably being pressured into something you don't actually want to do.
- Do you feel like your wishes have been and are being respected? It is important to trust your partner(s). It is also important for them to earn that trust.
- How are you going to feel afterwards? It's important to think of what consequences may come from consenting. Sometimes this will be the deciding factor on whether you should or shouldn't consent.

Ways to check in:

- Would you like it if I did _____?
- Are you comfortable with this?
- Is this too much?
- Does this feel good?
- Would you like me to keep going?
- Do we need to go faster/slower?
- How are you doing?
- Try to avoid questions which assume answers, like "Everything good?" or questions which put the burden on your partner(s), like "Tell me if you want something different."

How can I tell if my partner is not respecting my ability to consent?

- If you feel pressured to have sex when you don't want to.
- If you ever have sex to "keep the peace."
- If your partner wants to have sex after a fight when you don't want it.
- If you just lay there during sex because resisting felt too risky.
- If your partner starts to have sex with you while you are sleeping or intoxicated.
- If your partner refuses to practice safe sex even when you ask them to.
- If you feel that your partner has used sex to control or punish you.
- If your partner gives you a hard time about wanting to stop midway through.
- If you have been forced to do anything against your will.
- If your partner puts you down or makes fun of you about sex.
- If your partner sees other people without talking to you about it first.
- If your partner puts you down during sex.
- If your partner talks to others about your sexual inadequacies.
- If your partner demands that you tell them your fantasies.
- If your partner violates your limits, boundaries, or safe words/gestures.**

Boundaries

- What are boundaries?** Boundaries are the guidelines we set about what we are comfortable doing with other people. They can help interactions be pleasant. People have a right to decide what to do with their bodies and their minds: once you and the people you know understand each others' boundaries, it's easier for you to avoid areas where you might disagree or things that might trigger bad feelings. Understanding, however, is not essential to boundaries. It is important to remember that, even if you don't understand why a boundary exists for someone, you must respect it. They should give that same respect to you.
- Do I need to have the same boundaries with every person?** No. For example, you might want to talk about intense emotional things with one person and not another. You might like one person hugging you, but not another person. These different ways of interacting in relationships are brought about by boundaries.

- **Do boundaries change over time?** As time goes on, your relationships will change and your boundaries may need to be updated. As you get to know someone, you may have fewer or more specific boundaries with them. If you were close to someone because you both had an interest that you don't have any more, you will be less close to them. Sometimes, the amount of time or energy you can give to others is more limited than it was in the past, and you need to set more boundaries with many people.

- **What if setting boundaries doesn't feel right?** It may feel unnatural or awkward if setting boundaries is new to you. Likewise, some people may not like that you are setting boundaries -- they are used to getting their own way with you. However, these people should not be used to that; if they truly care about you, then they will hear what you have to say and respect you. Someone who loves you would not be okay with hurting you just because it's more convenient for them.

Why are boundaries important?

- When you set boundaries, you only put as much of your energy as you want into each relationship. This keeps other people from over-tasking your abilities and draining you, allowing you to be generous with your friendship and love to more people over a longer period of time.

- Setting boundaries in a relationship tells other people where you stand, making your relationship a safer environment for you and your friend or loved one.
- Boundaries make the behavior of individuals in a relationship conscious of their actions, allowing both of you and the relationship to grow and change.

What sort of things might someone do to prompt setting boundaries?

- Shouting at you.
- Urging you to decide something too quickly.
- Rushing you to reply more quickly than you can process. For example, making fun of stuttering or slow speech.
- Being critical of your appearance or any other part of your identity. For example, talking unkindly about your weight.
- Pushing you to commit to something you either don't want to do or don't have time for. For example, telling you that "if you were really their friend," you would skip your previous commitment and hang out with them instead.
- Asking to borrow many things from you. For example, asking to borrow money when they already owe you money from the last time they borrowed money from you.
- Touching you in ways you do not want to be touched.

How do I set or update my boundaries with someone?

- Write about ways that you have been left feeling unhappy or hurt in the relationship.
- Think about what the other person's motivations might be. If you trust the other person, you might ask them directly.
- If the other person was not motivated by unkind feelings - if your hurt feelings came from a misunderstanding or miscommunication - it's time to say that you want to set a boundary, so that you don't end up feeling unhappy or hurt again.
- Write a sentence about each boundary you would like to set. For example, "Please don't make fun of my hair."
- If you are comfortable doing so, write a sentence of explanation so that the other person understands why you don't like them to cross that boundary. For example, "I used to get teased in middle school about how my hair looked."
- Write a third and final sentence discussing how you would like to be treated instead. For example, "I would prefer if you would just tell me when my hair looks out of place so I can fix it."
- Show what you wrote to the other person, and discuss until both of you are satisfied.
- Sometimes you don't have time to follow all these steps. If someone is crossing a boundary you've set for yourself it is OK to just say "stop".
- Sometimes it may take awhile for someone in a relationship with you to be able to get used to a

boundary. If this is the case, it may be helpful to give the other person some time to adjust. It should still be made clear when the boundary is crossed during this time, to remind them that it shouldn't be crossed any more.

What if the other person doesn't respect my boundaries?

- Unfortunately, it may be important to set your boundaries with consequences, especially if you don't trust the other person or if they have shown a lack of respect for your boundaries in the past.
- These consequences may be negotiable, but remember that, if someone respects, you they will respect your boundaries.
- Let the consequences fit the relationship. Don't automatically jump to "or I will never speak to you again," unless that makes sense to you given the relationship, its worth to you, and the boundary being broken.
- Don't make consequences which you cannot back up. This will make it obvious to the other person that you are not serious, and they may keep disrespecting your boundaries.

What are some examples of consequences for overstepping boundaries?

- An effective beginning consequence is to simply tell them when they overstep your boundary. For example, mentioning that you had just talked to your friend about how you cannot lend him money until he pays you what he already owes you back.
- Removing yourself from the situation whenever they overstep. For example, leaving the room if they continue to talk over you when it is your turn to speak.
- If it becomes necessary, do not be afraid to make leaving the relationship a consequence. Just make sure that you have examined what that means for you, and that you are willing to back it up.

How do I tell someone that a boundary is no longer necessary?

- Examine why you think the boundary is no longer necessary. Perhaps you are feeling like you have moved past something that may have triggered you in the past. Maybe you set a boundary that you really didn't need to set and you actually feel less comfortable with the boundary than without.
- Make sure you are doing it for *you*. Examine your motivations. If you feel like you are being pressured to remove your boundary, it is potentially a dangerous and abusive relationship (see the next section on Abuse for more information).
- If you have decided that you want to remove the boundary, then explain that to the other person.
- Note: The other person still may not feel comfortable crossing that boundary even though you are removing it. It's important not to pressure the other person. They have boundaries, too!

Abuse

- There are many forms of abuse. There is physical abuse, which is unwanted physical contact. There is sexual abuse, where the abuser initiates sexual contact without consent. There is financial abuse, in which the abuser controls another person's financial resources and deprives them of a say in how their money is used. There is also emotional abuse. Emotional abusers degrade their victims, belittle them, deny or minimize their experiences, and otherwise use communication and emotions to hurt and control their victims.
- Autistic people and people with disabilities can face disproportionate risk of abuse for many reasons.
- Professionals often abuse people with disabilities. A New York Times report in 2011 found that employees of group homes often sexually abused the residents, and they were almost never held legally accountable. If a professional who provides disability services to you attempts to initiate a romantic or sexual relationship, this is unethical and abusive. You have the right to say no.
- Abuse is never the victim's fault. All too often, victim blaming is used to shame and silence survivors of abuse. Focusing on a victim's clothing, drinking, or how long they stayed with an abusive partner is victim blaming. When you are talking with a survivor, do not imply that it was their fault they were abused. If you are an abuse survivor, it is NOT your fault.
- Abuse survivors often have triggers. These are sensations or discussion topics that can uncomfortably evoke their past trauma, sometimes even causing flashbacks, in which they begin to experience the feelings of abuse again. If you think something may be triggering, attach a trigger warning or ask for consent before discussing or showing it. Always respect people's boundaries and needs. If something triggers you, recognize that you have the right to assert boundaries around it.
- If someone abuses you, there are resources available to help. Across the country, there are domestic violence centers and rape recovery centers that seek to help survivors of abuse. To find resources like this in your area, visit <http://centers.rainn.org/>

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

- **What is sex?** Sex is a biological term. It is a way of categorizing bodies based on physical differences. Human beings come in three sexes: males, who usually make sperm; females, who usually make eggs; and intersex people who always make both or neither. People who make sperm usually have a penis (and facial hair). People who make eggs usually have a vulva (and breasts). However, people are diverse and there are plenty of exceptions to these rules. Many people have a mix of features. People whose bodies don't fit neatly into either category are called intersex. But this is all biology! It doesn't talk about how people relate to each other. That is where gender comes in.

- **What is gender?** Gender is the word for all the ideas that cultures attach to the different sexes. "Man" and "woman" are two genders that exist in this culture. Below you will find a list of other possible genders which are recognized or beginning to be recognized in western cultures. Unfortunately, human societies often mistake gender for sex and sex for gender. For example, western culture generally assumes that men (which is a gender) all have facial hair and a penis and sperm (which are characteristics of sex). It is even assumed that all men share certain personality traits, like being more

competitive or tougher. Likewise, there are similar assumptions about women, their bodies, and their personalities. Many people think that these assumptions are true and place a lot of importance on them.

- **What is identity?** Identity is a sense of "self." Identities can be useful; they can help you find people like you, and form a community with them. Identities can also be harmful, especially if applied to you by others. It can feel like you are being forced into a group where you don't belong. It is important to respect every person's right to choose their own identity in life. Sometimes you may find that two people may use the same word for their identity, but each person means something different. This is because identity is a very personal thing. For some people, gender and sex are very important parts of their identity. Others feel it is not important. There is no right or wrong way to identify.

- **Is identity forever?** Yes and no. People's ideas about sex and gender can change over time. Sometimes it takes a long time to figure out who you are, and sometimes who you are can change. Some people may find an identity which suits them and label themselves that way for the rest of their life. Others may find it more useful to shift their identities over time. Both of these methods are okay and that identity is a personal journey for everyone with no right or wrong method.

Also, there is no specific time in a person's life where sexual orientation and gender identity must be decided. It's okay to be uncertain, even if everyone around you seems to be certain. It is also okay to date people of any gender even if you are uncertain. People may date someone of a gender they later decide they are not attracted to. Someone who is a lesbian may have dated men in the past, and someone who is a straight man may have dated men in the past, too.

- **What is sexual orientation?** Sexual orientation is about who people are sexually attracted to. This identity can be labeled in many different ways: heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay or lesbian), bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer. Sexual orientation is separate from romantic orientation and is only a measure

of who people want to have sex with.

However, even though rigid categories exist, it's important to note that these are just ideas that people have thought up. Actual human experience may be very different than the categories people have come up with.

- **What is gender identity?** Gender identity is the label you choose to identify your gender. Some examples are: cisgender, transgender/transsexual, genderfluid, genderqueer, androgyne, and agender.
- **Am I allowed to be anything?** Generally, yes, you can identify in any way you like. Unfortunately, our society discriminates against people who are not heterosexual and who are not cisgendered. Many people prefer to not let this discrimination stop them from identifying the way they identify. However, it is sometimes safer to keep identities a secret to the general public, if those identities are discriminated against. It can be dangerous to tell the wrong people about your sexual orientation or gender identity, so be cautious about revealing that information until someone has gained your trust.

- **Autism, sexual orientation, and gender identity:** It is a common misconception that autistic people are all or mostly asexual. In fact, autistic people, like any other people, can identify with any sexual orientation. Likewise, you may have seen studies which say that many autistic people are agender or transgender. While it may be true that there are more gender-nonconforming autistics than in the general population, there are still plenty of cisgender autistic people.

What do sexual orientation labels mean?

- **Heterosexual:** Or “straight.” A heterosexual person is someone who’s attracted to the “opposite sex”. In this case, society has deemed the gender identities of male and female as opposites. If you are a male and you are attracted to female people exclusively, then you can consider yourself heterosexual. Likewise, if you are female and attracted solely to males, you can identify as heterosexual.
- **Homosexual:** This term is commonly called "gay" or "lesbian." A homosexual person is someone who’s attracted to the same sex. If you are a male who is attracted to other males exclusively, then you can call yourself ‘gay’. If you are a female and find yourself attracted only to other females, you could consider yourself a ‘lesbian.’
- **Bisexual:** Or "bi". A bisexual person is attracted to both males and females.

- **Pansexual:** Or “pan.” A pansexual person is someone who is attracted to people regardless of their gender identity.
People often confuse this with bisexual, especially if they do not understand gender identity. The main difference between the two is that “bisexual” only refers to attraction to men and women, but does not refer to people outside of the gender or sex binary, like intersex people or genderqueer people.
- **Asexual:** This is not to be confused with the scientific term of the same name. An asexual, often referred to as “ace”, is someone who is not sexually attracted to anyone. This does not necessarily mean that the asexual person does not engage in romantic relationships with others.
- **Queer:** The term queer is more difficult to define. It is a “reclaimed” term, which means that it has often been used as a slur in the past, but some people have recently begun using it in a positive way. Because of its history, the term “queer” can still be viewed as hurtful. If you do not know if someone identifies as queer, it is best to not use the term about them. A person who identifies as queer usually feels that the other sexual orientations do not fully express their identity. Using this identity sometimes means you are challenging the gender binary with your sexual identity.

- **A note about sexual orientation:** As you may have noticed, sexual orientation labels for the most part only talk about people who identify as women or men. Below, you will find that there are quite a few other ways to identify. Because of this, some people who identify exclusively as either straight or gay/lesbian may still be involved in relationships with people who are not cisgendered.

What do gender identity labels mean?

- **Cisgender:** When you were born, a doctor probably designated you (correctly or incorrectly) as a male or a female. The status quo says that if you are designated a male at birth, you are a boy or a man. Likewise, if you are designated as a female you are a girl or a woman. Someone who feels that this designation and gender assignment is accurate for them would be considered cisgender or “cis”. A female-designated person who identifies as a girl or woman is called a cis woman. A male-designated person who identifies as a boy or a man is called a cis man.
- **Transgender/Transsexual:** Sometimes, however, linking a person's designated sex and gender is not the right thing to do. A person who is designated male might feel that they identify as a woman. In this case, that

person may identify as a trans woman. In the same way, a female-designated person who identifies as a man may identify as a trans man. Sometimes, trans men or women will change how they look to appear more like the opposite sex-designation than was decided for them at birth. People who do this sometimes identify as transsexual.

Some transsexual or transgender people prefer to identify just as the gender they have transitioned to - a transsexual person who was female-designated but identifies as a man might not identify as a trans man, but as a man. In addition, transgender or transsexual people may also refer to themselves as genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, androgyne, or other terms.

- **Genderfluid:** A genderfluid person, sometimes referred to as two-spirit, is someone whose gender identity shifts over time and wants to express that in their identity label. A genderfluid person can identify as male one moment, female the next, or something entirely different the next.
- **Genderqueer:** A genderqueer person, sometimes referred to as third-gender, is someone who feels that their gender identity lies outside the binary of man/woman. They feel that

neither category describes their gender experience adequately.

- **Androgyne:** An androgyne usually feels that they have a combination of femininity and masculinity which makes identifying as either man or woman undesirable. They prefer to identify as something in between or in the middle of the man/woman binary.
- **Agender:** Someone who is agender or neutrois identifies as genderless. They may feel that none of the other genders describe their experience. Alternately, they may feel that gender is an unimportant or unwanted concept when describing their identity.
- **About gendered pronouns:** Respect the gender identities of people you meet and try not to misidentify them with the language you use. Everyone has their own boundaries as far as what pronouns they prefer, so it is important to find out which pronouns the people in your life prefer. Some may be comfortable with only male pronouns (he/him) or female pronouns (she/her). Some may be comfortable with both. Others may be comfortable with neither and prefer gender-neutral pronouns (they/them, zhe/hir, etc). Because there is so much variation, you should ask if you're not sure which to use.

Relationships

- In our society, the majority of romantic relationships eventually become exclusive, monogamous relationships. However, some people choose polyamorous relationships, in which the partners may have romantic or sexual relationships with more than one person. Some polyamorous relationships are limited to a set group of partners, while others are open relationships. All of these different relationship forms are valid. A relationship's rules about exclusivity and what constitutes 'cheating' should be discussed and norms should be set that all participants are comfortable with. Whatever norms are eventually agreed upon, it is important that all participants respect each other and are honest with one another.
- Relationships often entail bringing together people with different neurotypes, abilities, worldviews, and preferences in intimate and loving ways. This can create a need to compromise. When negotiating these compromises, take your partner's needs and preferences seriously, even if you find them strange. Always respect their boundaries. Give them space to communicate in ways they are comfortable with.
- One difficulty many people with disabilities face is that we are often dependent upon others, and then subjected to their authority. This can happen because we live with our parents or other family members, it can happen because we live in group homes, or it can happen because we need assistance from aids and caretakers that may unfortunately exercise power over us. In situations like this, those we are dependent upon may attempt to make decisions about our relationships for us. Always remember that decisions about relationships are decisions between the participants in a relationship. Do not allow others to control or suppress your romantic and sexual relationships.
- In the course of a relationship, the participants may choose to live together in the same home. This is a big decision with big consequences, so take it seriously. Before moving in together, it may be worthwhile to test living together for an extended period. This allows you to determine whether the decision is right for you and to see what difficulties may arise. When planning a living space with someone, it may be important to consider and discuss your sensory needs. Lighting, noise, and the textures of fabrics can all pose sensory issues for autistic people. Discuss your sensory needs in depth before moving in together.

- When partners move in together, they may not always want to share a bedroom, and that's okay. Our society has an unfortunate tendency to evaluate the seriousness or depth of a relationship based on superficial factors like whether a couple sleeps in the same room. However, there are good reasons people may not want to share a room. These include an emphasis on independence, different sensory needs for sleeping (some may need white noise while others need silence, different mattress preferences, etc.), or different sleep schedules.
- Your relationship may not look like the relationships you see on television, or the relationships your peers have. That's okay. The test of a good relationship is whether it enriches the lives of those in the relationship.