



How best to support me...

# Friendships and Relationships





Voice for All is a self-advocacy group based in Chorley, Lancashire, who believes that people with a learning disability have the same rights as anyone else to friendships and meaningful and loving relationships. We believe we all have the right to fall in love if we want to.



Self-advocates and members of the Voice for All Advocacy Group met to talk about the support we need from our support staff when it comes to making, developing and maintaining friendships and relationships.



Making friends, finding love and having a special relationship with someone of your choice are important to us all.

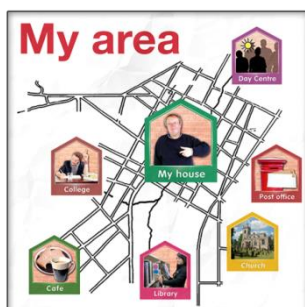
People with a disability are no different to anyone else. Friendships and relationships are really important to us too!



This leaflet will give you some guidance about what people with a learning disability feel is important when supporting them with their friendships and relationships.



First and foremost, **get to know us!** not only as a person but as an individual. Find out and ask us about; our likes and dislikes, our hobbies and interests, and our talents, gifts and skills.



Support us in getting to know what is going on in our local communities and what is available.

Help us to find and explore various and new opportunities to meet and make friends and to form relationships.



Help us to make arrangements and to plan when we are going out.

Help us to make our own choices of who we see, where we go and what we do.



Help us to find ways we can stay in touch with our friends and family ourselves

*(like getting a mobile phone)*



Help us to learn and develop the skills we need to use a phone and computer and anything else that will help us to communicate and stay in touch.



Show us how to connect with people.

Teach us how to text, use FaceTime, Skype, Facebook or any other social media.



Help us to remember important dates and to celebrate important events, like our friend's birthdays or anniversaries.

Help us to remember to write and send cards and exchange gifts if we want too.



Help us to keep our relationships map alive and up to date.





Help us to build our confidence and be better at communicating with other people.

This might mean we need to practice, try various role plays, or even find different ways of communicating other than using words and speaking.



Help us to speak out and be more assertive. This is important in making sure we make our own choices and decisions and stay in control of our lives.

Following the 5 main principles of the Mental Capacity Act will help you do this.



Help us to meet people and make new friends.

Suggest things we could do or say to people we might like to get to know.

If you are supporting me when we are out and about and you bump into someone you know, please introduce me to them.



Help us to understand body language as a way of communicating with others.

Help us to learn and get better at reading the signals other people may be giving and sending to us.



Help us to learn how to listen to other people.

Hearing what other people think and feel helps us to make new friends and connect with people.



Treat my friendships and relationships with respect and ask me about them in private

*... presuming I am comfortable and happy to talk about them with you in the first place*



Please understand that talking about our relationships and personal feelings takes time.

It will help us to develop trust if we are regularly supported by the same support workers and members of staff.



Personal and intimate relationships can be difficult and complicated for all of us.

We understand you may find it hard to talk about them with us.



If you find this kind of conversation difficult please don't just ignore us.

Ask us if we would like to speak to someone else and help us in finding the right person.



Help us to understand how friendships and relationships grow and develop.

It may also be helpful for us to work with and get to know the care provider and members of staff who support my friends, boyfriend or girlfriend.



Help and support us in finding a boyfriend, a girlfriend and going on a date.

Help us to contact people or places who can help us to find love. This may be joining a 'dating agency' or going to a 'speed dating' event.



Whenever we are going on a date, help and support us to make all the necessary arrangements and to look our best.

This may include helping us to choose a venue, book a restaurant or helping us with our hair and makeup and buying a gift or special outfit.



Help us to make our date the best it can be.

Help us to know what is ok and what should happen on a date.

But also help us to know what is not ok and what shouldn't happen on a date.



When we are with our friends or partners, please recognise and respect that we may want to spend some time alone.

Please respect our right to privacy.



Help us to understand and recognise what makes a good and healthy relationship and what makes a bad and unhealthy one.

This will help us to keep safe.





Help us find and access training and accessible information so we can better understand and learn more about relationships, love and sex.



Give us the support we need when we experience the different feelings and emotions when in a relationship.

This might be when we get excited, aroused, frustrated, confused or upset.



Let us know where we can get information that will help us to stay healthy in our relationships.

There may be lots of other people or professionals that can help and support us in our relationships too.



Give us the help and support we need to stay healthy and safe when in a sexual relationship.

This may include visiting the Sexual Health Clinic for help, advice and information about protection and contraception.



Please don't make any assumptions or judgements about me or the decisions I make.

You may not know enough about me or how I really feel.



Exploring new opportunities, experiences, taking positive risks and making choices in everyday life are our rights as an adult. This includes making choices in friendships and relationships. Please make sure you respect and protect these rights.



Give us the freedom to express ourselves and let me be the person I am. Support us in being with the people we want and choose to be with. Our sexuality and the choices we make may not be the same as yours.



Help us to enjoy and share our gifts, skills, hobbies and interests with our friends and help us to find new ones. Help and support us to see and meet our friends on a regular basis, and help us to spend many happy times together. Help us to live life to the full.



Help us to share and make the best use of the limited resources we have available, by being flexible, creative, positive and proactive.

*This could include flexible rotas, sharing staff support hours or transport.*



Finally, to all our support staff...

We want to thank you for giving us your best support in helping us with our friendships and relationships. And a special thank you for the friendship and relationship we have with you.