

## Lesson I Relationships (How we feel about ourselves and others)



### Contents

1. You are your most important relationship!
2. Different types of relationships
3. Personal space and boundaries
4. Body language
5. Trust
6. Ways in which relationships change
7. Creating and maintaining relationships

- People with strong friendships have been proven to live longer, have healthier hearts, enjoy better mental health, and feel less pain.
- Family ties provide affection and encouragement, and foster healthier future relationships.
- Romantic relationships are an important source of intimacy, social connection, and sexual relations.

The Mayo Clinic Health System believes that “positive relationships can be as important to your health and well-being as nutrition and physical activity”.  
That's pretty important!

How can we teach the people we love who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) how to recognize, develop, and function within different kinds of relationships, according to their age and ability?

This unit will explore the feelings, behaviors, and connections that make healthy relationships.

A person's cognitive age is not always the same as their chronological age. However, while everybody and each body is different, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities physically mature at the same rate as people without disabilities, and should therefore receive age-appropriate sex health information. This curriculum is intended for *all* transition students ages 14-21.

"Regarding sex education: no secrets!" - Albert Einstein

According to the Public Library of Science, comprehensive sex education helps students "feel more informed, make safer choices, and have healthier outcomes."

This is exactly what we want!

Our purpose is to guide you through a comprehensive and accurate home-based sex education curriculum, ensuring that you have all the information you need to teach effectively.

For Parent/Caregiver/Teacher to **read to yourself**:

You may be uncomfortable with some of this material, and that's okay. Our kit is designed so that if any of the topics is in conflict with your religious or moral beliefs, you may simply skip over those parts and pick up at a place at which you are more comfortable. You may also want to adapt or adjust certain lessons, and that's okay too.

As for the parts that are simply embarrassing, uncomfortable, or feel icky, we ask you to keep pushing through! It is important that your student/loved one gain all the knowledge they need to make safe, healthy, informed decisions as they become more independent. And that means, well, talking about stuff that we don't feel great talking about.

Just remember: The more you talk about it, the easier it gets.

For Parent/Caregiver/Teacher to **read aloud before each session**:

We are going to talk openly here, ask questions, and allow each other to express ourselves without judgement. There are no silly questions and no wrong feelings. This is a safe space. This is a learning space. If you hear something that you do not understand or that upsets you, please speak up. You can take breaks or leave the room for a while if you need to. We are going to learn together.

This unit is about RELATIONSHIPS.

That begins with your most important relationship: Your relationship with yourself!

**Topics will include:**

**Types of relationships**

**Boundaries**

**How relationships change**

**Recognizing social cues and body language**

If any of these topics is a trigger for anxiety or negative feelings, please speak up so we can skip those areas or talk through what bothers you.

**You will need:**

- Pen or pencil
- Magazines
- Worksheets 1 - 11

**Learning objectives for this lesson:**

- Recognizing and accepting personal attributes
- Identifying different types of relationships
- Distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate behavior according to relationship
- Recognizing whom to trust
- Understanding that relationships can change, and how this can happen
- Identifying boundaries - what they are, how to set them, how to respect those of others
- Identifying verbal social cues, non-verbal social cues, and body language

**You may read this lesson as it is written or use your own words.**

**And because everyone's abilities are different, you may choose to skip some worksheets.**

**Section 1: You are your most important relationship! ★**

What is a relationship?

A RELATIONSHIP is a connection, usually with other people; it's not just the way you feel and behave toward others, but the way they feel and behave toward you.

Believe it or not, your most important relationships is with YOU. You are the person you are with more than anyone else. You are the person who is with you when you eat, when you sleep, even when you are all alone in a room. It is your thoughts that you hear and your hunger that you feel. Wish you had a best buddy to hang out with all the time? You do – it's you!

So it is important to love ourselves, to appreciate the best parts of ourselves, and to accept our imperfections (let's face it, we can be crabby in the morning but still be a great person!).

This kindness toward yourself is a form of *self-esteem*.

SELF-ESTEEM is how you value yourself, knowing what is wonderful about yourself.

Self-esteem makes us mentally and physically healthier, as well as happier. Science tells us that people who have higher levels of self-esteem are also easier to get along with and are better at compromising. So, being kind to ourselves improves our relationships with others!

Let's take a few minutes to get to know ourselves a little bit better and appreciate both what is great about us... and the things we need to work on!



Take out **WORKSHEET 1, "What Makes Me, Me?"** and fill it out together. Take turns answering and discussing those answers. It's a great way to learn about ourselves and each other!

**BONUS:** Add some questions of your own!

## Section 2: Different types of relationships

How many different types of relationships are there?

It depends on who we ask! For instance, friends can be their own type of relationships, while others like to break it down further into Best Friendship, Second Best Friendship, Family Friendship, Lunch-But-Not-Dinner-Together Friendship... It is up to us to decide how we think of each person in our life.

Even so, there are categories of relationships, and they each come with their own set of behaviors.

Let's explore...

**FAMILY** is any group of people closely related by blood or marriage. People in a family share relatives with us or have married our relative. Some family members live together, but others - like cousins, aunts, uncles, and even grandparents - might live in their own homes. We often spend holidays together and see each other at weddings and family events.

**FRIENDSHIP** is a state of enduring affection, esteem, intimacy, and trust between people. It is about enjoying someone's company and trusting them. We spend time laughing with friends, sharing our feelings, and listening to what they have to say. We enjoy spending time together.

**ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS** are connections that come with feelings of love and attraction, like a crush. Romantic relationships often involve hugging or kissing, and sometimes lead to marriage. Romantic relationships differ from friendship because the people involved are attracted to each other and often want to express that with their bodies.

**ACQUAINTANCES** are people one knows slightly, but who are not close friends. We recognize them when we see them, maybe they are in our class or hang out in the same park, but we don't share experiences or call or text each other. Just like people on TV or famous athletes, we recognize them but have no real connection to them.



HELPERS are the group of people who work for an organization or business. They are paid to provide certain care and services for us. They may know a lot about us, but we usually don't know much about their lives. These relationships are often friendly, but is not actual friendship because they are paid to provide us with different services.

STRANGERS are people we have never met or spoken to. We may never have even seen them before. Even though it is grouped as a type of relationships, there is no actual relationship with them.

Can we have more than one kind of relationship with just one person? Yes!

We can be friends with our brother. FRIEND and FAMILY

Our cousin can be our dentist. FAMILY and HELPER

We can have an aunt we have never met. FAMILY and STRANGER

We and our friend can fall in love. FRIEND and ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

We might even trust our best friend so much that we consider them family. And that's great!

Take out **WORKSHEET 2, "The People in Your World."**

Look at each group and discuss people in your life who fit into each category.



Talk about how you behave with each group. For instance, maybe you laugh and joke around with friends, have holiday meals with family, shake hands with the doctor. Think about what it would be like if you had a holiday meal with your doctor or shook hands with your cousin. What would feel comfortable or uncomfortable?

Even if we have a relationship with someone doesn't mean we can behave any way we want with them. How we behave with someone isn't just about what feels comfortable, it is about what's *appropriate*.

APPROPRIATE means "suitable or proper; what is acceptable or ok."

Ask yourself:

Would I rumple my teacher's hair? That would not be appropriate - they would not like that.

Would I want a stranger to kiss me? That would not be appropriate - that could even be dangerous.

(We should not kiss a stranger for the same reason!)

And how would you say goodnight to a parent? Many ways might be appropriate - you might kiss them, hug them, or even salute! Your relationship with your parents is much closer and more comfortable than with, say, your teacher, so you have more options for how to behave with them.



Take out **WORKSHEET 3, "How Should I Say Hello to This Person?"** Look at all the different people on the worksheet, then choose an appropriate way to say "hello" to them from the menu at the bottom. There is more than one appropriate way to greet each, so pick what works for you!



Take turns exiting and then entering the room. As you walk in, announce who you are. "I am your math teacher!" "I am your best friend!" "I am a stranger!" Your partner will then come up with different - but appropriate - ways of greeting each person! Play it as often as you want; remember: *repetition helps us remember things!*

You can also discuss what is and isn't appropriate to say to different people. A "yo, what's up?" might be ok with friends, but not a policeman!



Take out **WORKSHEET 4, "What is the Relationship?"** Let's put our knowledge to the test! Look at each picture and try to figure out the relationship between the two people just by looking at their facial expressions. Hint: there may be more than one right answer for each! Discuss why you think your answer is the right one.

### Section 3: Personal Space and Boundaries ★

Our personal feelings are part of what make us who we are.

Understanding those feelings - what makes us comfortable and uncomfortable, what we want and what we don't - is an important way of being kind to ourselves. Your feelings are important!

We just learned about appropriate behavior. But, just because behavior is appropriate does not mean we always like it. Have you ever been told to kiss an aunt or uncle when you didn't want to? Or, has a friend ever sat a little too close when you felt you needed more space?

Those feelings of wanting more space, wanting to decide who touches our body and where, and wanting these feelings to be respected are all examples of our *boundaries*.

**BOUNDARIES** are limits, almost like a fence that no one else can see but that you can feel. That fence might be around part of your body or it might be around your entire body, keeping everyone out so they can't touch you at all. And sometimes the boundary isn't about a body part, but about the behavior; maybe you don't mind someone shaking your hand, but you don't want someone kissing your hand. These are your personal boundaries and only you know where they are!

Remember: We are allowed to have boundaries with anyone, in any relationship, even if it is our closest family member, best friend, even our doctor. Our body lets us know when something feels wrong or uncomfortable - trust that feeling. We are allowed to have boundaries!



Take out **WORKSHEET 5, "Boundaries."** Think about the relationships in your life. How do your boundaries change with each? Do you want no one to touch you at all? Do you want no one to touch your on the arm? Are you okay with someone touching you on the arm with their hand, but not when their hand is cold? Maybe you are okay with only your caregiver touching you on the arm with a cold hand, but not anyone else! Boundaries change according to how we feel, who we are with, and how we feel about those we are with. Think of different things you do not want - and where, how, and by whom!

Take out **WORKSHEET 6, "My Boundaries List"** and add these boundaries to it - then, hang it up!

Our personal feelings are part of what make us who we are inside.

Understanding those feelings - what makes us comfortable and uncomfortable, what we want and what we don't - is an important way to honor and be kind to ourselves. Our feelings are important.

We are going to spend a lot of time talking about boundaries in upcoming lessons. That is because setting and speaking up about our boundaries is one of the most important things we can do in our life. (So is listening to and being considerate of others' boundaries!) It helps us create relationships, feel in control of our body, and remain safe around others. Later, we will learn how to communicate our boundaries, but for now let's just get comfortable understanding our personal boundaries!

Did you know that setting boundaries isn't only for honoring, or being kind to, your body?

Sometimes we need to set:

Emotional Boundaries - setting a limit on what or how much information is shared with us.

Time Boundaries - setting a limit on how much time someone asks of us; sometimes it's too much!

Intellectual Boundaries - setting a limit on what issues we are asked to discuss, and where.

Material Boundaries - setting a limit on how much we are willing to share the things we own.

You may want to include those on your "My Boundaries List!"

Letting people know our boundaries is the only way to make sure they honor them.

That includes telling others what our boundaries are and listening when they tell us theirs.

It is important to be honest when we talk about our boundaries; we should not let someone else convince us that we do not actually feel the way we feel. They may want us to have fewer or different boundaries - but they are ours and we decide what they are!

So, when is the right time to talk about boundaries with another person?



Sometimes we won't be able to tell someone we have a boundary until they have crossed it. A nurse may take us by the arm to lead us to an exam room, not realizing it is a boundary of ours, or a new friend may begin talking about a topic, not knowing that it makes us uncomfortable. In that case, we can kindly let them know that we are not comfortable with that.

Other times, we will be able to let someone know our boundaries before they cross them. If we find we are going to be spending time with someone, whether spending a day at the beach or doing a school project, we can take a moment to let them know our feelings beforehand. We can smile and say, "I'm excited to hang out with you. I do need to leave in 45 minutes, though," or "Just a heads-up, I don't want to go in the water. But I'll hang out in the sun with you!"

Keep it light and friendly - a smile goes a long way. But you don't have to apologize. You have the right to your boundaries!

Sometimes, it is the person we are with who needs to communicate their boundaries. If they do, simply honor (accept) them as you would want them to honor yours. Some good responses are, "Thanks for letting me know," "Okay, no problem," or "Got it!" It's not personal, and you haven't done anything wrong.

They just wanted to let you know how they feel and how you can have the best time together.

A great thing to do is to ask a person about their boundaries! If you are sitting down for a meal, you might ask if you are sitting too close to them; if you want to tell them a scary story, you can ask if they are ok with that. It's a great way to find out how they feel and to show you care!



Take out **WORKSHEET 7, "How to Talk About Boundaries!"** It's time to practice setting boundaries and respecting others' boundaries. (Remember: *repetition helps us remember things!*) Practice saying and repeating the phrases on the worksheet until you get comfortable with them. You can even tape them up on a wall or place them on the refrigerator to remind you to practice!



Take turns setting different boundaries, expressing them differently every time. You can use the phrases on the worksheet or make up your own! As long as it is firm (they should know you mean it) but friendly (there's that smile again), you can't go wrong. When your teacher sets their boundaries, practice accepting them.

## Section 4: Body language ★

Sometimes, the people we are with will not know how to tell us their boundaries. Or maybe they don't use words to communicate. In these cases, it is good to start noticing other people's *body language*.

BODY LANGUAGE means "communicating without words, but with facial expressions and gestures."

If you approached someone to give them a hug, what would your body language look like?

You'd probably be smiling, with arms open wide; a happy stance.

If you approached somebody with arms open wide and they crossed their arms tightly in front of their bodies, frowned, and took a step back, what would their body language tell you?

It would probably mean that they do not want a hug.

If they smiled back at you, stepped toward you, and opened their arms wide, their body language would probably indicate that they want to hug you back!

Body language can tell us how a person feels, even if they don't use words to tell us!

Let's say you ask a friend to meet you in the park that afternoon. If they look happy, nod, and give a "thumbs up" sign, what would their body language tell you?

It is probably telling you that they want to meet at the park!

Let's say you are at the park together later, and you decide to put your arm around their shoulders; their body stiffens up and they do not look you in the eye.

How do you think they feel about your arm being around them?

Their body language probably tells you that they are not comfortable.



Take out **WORKSHEET 8, "Body Language."** Look at the pictures and decide what Gigi might be feeling at the moment. Discuss how you came up with each of your answers. What is her face doing? What is her body telling you? What word would you use to describe how you think they are feeling? **BONUS:** Talk about how you would interact with this person at this moment. If she is frowning and crossing her arms, would you give her more physical space? If her eyes were cast down and her head hung, would you ask if she want to talk about something that is bothering her?

Take turns using body language to convey your boundaries in different situations. Use your face, your body, and your gestures to communicate how you are feeling, and whether your boundaries are being respected or not.



BONUS: After each turn in the body language role play game, try using a phrase to tell the other person your boundaries. They can be one from Worksheet 6 or one you've come up with on your own! It is a fun way to get in a little more practice, because (let's say it together): *repetition helps us remember things!*

## Section 5: Trust

Remember how we learned about different relationships?

And remember how we learned about boundaries, and what makes us comfortable and uncomfortable?

Now we are going to bring these two ideas together to figure out who should be part of our closest relationships.

It all comes down to *trust*.

TRUST is the belief in somebody's reliability, truth, strength, and ability. It is believing that you can come to that person or people with your secrets, with your needs, and with your boundaries and that those people will honor (be kind about) them.

Take out **WORKSHEET 3, "The People in Your World"** again. Notice how the family/guardians/best friends group is closest to the picture of you (right next to you!) Next comes friends, acquaintances, helpers, and, finally, strangers. This is no accident! That's because the people who are closest to us in the picture - our family, caregivers, and best friends - are also closest to us in our lives. They are the ones we are most comfortable with, who we see the most, who we trust to be good to us and treat us kindly and fairly. Look at each group of people and discuss who in your life belongs in which group... and why!



We should not trust someone with important things unless they belong in one of the closer groups. People in our family/caregiver/best friends are probably the best people to tell our secrets, to rely on, and to honor our boundaries. We may want to share less with acquaintances, because we don't know them as well and they probably haven't proven their trustworthiness (being deserving of trust!). But just because someone is a family member or friend doesn't mean you have to trust them if you feel like you shouldn't. Remember, you should trust your feelings before you trust other people!



The one exception is helpers, who may need your private information in order to do their jobs. Doctors need to know what is going on with our bodies; dentists need to know information about our teeth and mouths. Teachers may require information about your homelife!

However, our family, caregivers, best friends, and helpers may lose our trust at some point. Perhaps one of these people disregards your boundaries, repeats a secret of yours, or disrespects your feelings.

It is OK to be angry and to tell them how you feel. People not only need to earn your trust (by proving that they will treat you kindly) but they need to maintain your trust (continuing to treat you kindly).

If you stop trusting someone, talk about it with someone you care about. It's ok to feel that way.

## Section 6: How relationships can change ★

Sometimes relationships change. This can be a happy event - maybe you are introduced to a stranger and they become an acquaintance; an acquaintance grows into a friend; a friend becomes a romantic partner - and they move into a closer group to us. Or, it can be a sad thing - you and your romantic partner break up, a friend sees us less often, a dentist retires and moves from helper to acquaintance.

And sometimes it is our choice - we break up with someone else, or we see them less - and sometimes the other person wants the relationship to change, whether we want it to or not. Relationships can also change by growing stronger or weaker. Your love for your puppy, for instance, grows stronger every day. Friendships get more solid with every shared experience. The longer your therapist knows you, the better they know you! But there are friends who may feel less and less close as time goes on, or romantic love will fade. We can't force people into a relationship, and if someone makes it clear they don't want it, we have to accept that.

Many of our relationships will stay the same and others may flow between groups, getting closer at some points in our life and more distant at others. This is how relationships work. They sometimes feel good, sometimes they hurt, and sometimes they change!



Take out **WORKSHEET 9, "How Relationships Can Change."** Discuss the ways that relationships in your life could change. How does that make you feel? What can you do to keep the relationships you love from changing? And how can a relationship changing be a good thing, even it moves to a group farther away from us? What can we learn from this?

Having family, friends, and romantic relationships can feel great, but even the people closest to us can make us feel bad sometimes. That's why it is helpful to have different groups of people in our life: we can talk to our caregiver or family about problems with friends, we can get advice from our friends about our family or other friendships, and we can usually talk to a doctor or therapist about all of our feelings.

Talking through our emotions and hearing what close friends or caregivers think is a good way to release some of the feelings that may feel bad inside of us. Expressing these feelings helps us calm down and can prevent getting overwhelmed. And they can help remind us of our boundaries. They'll do that for us, and we can do that for them! That is a relationship!

### **Section 7: Creating and maintaining relationships** ★

What are some qualities you look for in a friend? You probably already have someone or a few people in your life who you consider to be a friend. Can you name who your friends are? How do they make you feel? And what do you do to be a good friend to others?

Sometimes, it may feel hard to make new friends. But there are things you can do to make it easier:

- Make eye contact. It lets people know you are paying attention.
- Ask questions. People will know you are curious about them.
  - "What did you do this weekend?"
  - "Do you like music? Who's your favorite singer?"
  - "I have a dog named Jimmy. Do you like animals?"
- Answer their questions. Let others learn about you!
- You can also let people know you are interested by gazing and pointing at things.
- Greet them when you see them with a "hi," raise your hand for a fist-bump, or show them your amazing smile.



Take turns pretending to meet each other for the first time, as strangers. Keep eye contact, introduce yourselves, and ask each other questions. You can even give silly answers or make up crazy characters! BONUS: Practice meeting someone you have already met before, as acquaintances. How does this change the way you speak to each other? What are some questions that you can practice asking each other?

## Spotlight



Steve Jurvetson

Temple Grandin is a famous writer, professor, and scientist who also has autism. She believes that we should make **friends** with people who have the same interests as us. "Horse activities enabled me to make friends through a shared interest in horses," she explains. Participating in sports, doing arts and crafts, watching movies, and reading are some great shared interests - they are not only activities to do together, but you can have fun talking about them, too!

After you have met someone and gotten to know each other, it can be difficult to keep the relationship; just like a plant needs water to grow, friendship needs a lot of care!

So how do we find the *motivation* to stay in touch?

MOTIVATION is the desire or willingness to do something; what you want to do.

In other words, how do we make sure we continue to contact our friends when it may make us feel uncomfortable, stressed, or just tired? First, remember this - relationships help boost our confidence and fight loneliness. They also help us develop and practice social skills so that being a friend gets easier as you do it! Practice these tricks to help you stay motivated in your relationships:

- Participate in what you enjoy (sports, movies, music) with the people you enjoy - you'll be more likely to get in touch with a friend if you know you will be doing activities you like!
- Look to your caregiver for support - have them remind you to reach out or set up an activity you can do with a friend.
- Set small goals - you don't have to have a three-hour phone conversation to stay in touch. Plan to dedicate just two or three minutes to say hello or make a date to get together, and set a boundary for how long you talk!



Take out **WORKSHEET 10, "How to Maintain my Relationships."** With a pen or pencil, fill in the names of who you would like to keep in touch, and how often. Under "Who will I email?" you may write, "Uncle Bill." Next to, "When?" you may write, "Every Thursday" or "December 8" or maybe even "every day at 3:00" (but check their boundaries first!). Hang it up as a great reminder to stay in touch!



There is a difference between paying good attention to someone and too much contact, however. Calling a friend is wonderful. Calling two, three, ten times a day is often too much!

So how many times is a good number of times? Ask them!

It's a great way to find out someone's boundaries.

You can ask, "Is it ok if I call again next week?" or "When do you want to talk on the phone again?"

The same goes for someone who calls you too much or too little.

You can say, "I love talking to you, so how about if we talk every Saturday afternoon?" or "Hey, I haven't heard from you in a while. How about we talk on the phone one day this week?"

So, what should we do when we make plans with a friend?

We may be comfortable just meeting and deciding what to do then.

But some of us need more of a *plan* to our plan.

In these cases, we may want to have an activity. (We know Temple Grandin would horseback ride!)

Think about what you can and cannot do, depending on weather, transportation, and ability.

Do you want to go to a movie or stream one at home?

Do you want to have a picnic or go to a restaurant or cook something together in your kitchen?

Do you want to play baseball or watch a game on tv?

Whatever you decide, the most important thing is that you enjoy each other's company and have fun!

This is also a great way to get together with people in your other relationships - you can go swimming with a family member, make ice cream sundaes with a romantic partner, or hang out at the school pep rally with an acquaintance (and watch them become a friend!).

When you do see someone or speak to them on the phone (or text... or send letters...), make sure to make them feel special, as they should for you. Be polite, ask questions about their life, listen to what they have to say, and give compliments once in a while. Don't forget to share things about your life, too! The best relationships are the ones where both people feel honored.



Take out **WORKSHEET 11, "Compliments!"**

Fill in the blanks, then practice giving and receiving compliments!

Most important, always be yourself! Because you are GREAT!

## END OF LESSON 1 ★

Be sure to check in with your student about how they feel. Hard topics can bring up emotions like sadness or fear - make sure your student is ok, and talk it through if they are not. Then you can see if they have any questions! Great job!

ACQUAINTANCES are people one knows slightly, but who are not close friends.

APPROPRIATE means "suitable or proper; what is acceptable or ok."

BODY LANGUAGE means communicating without words, but with facial expressions and gestures.

BOUNDARIES are limits, almost like a fence that no one else can see but that you can feel.

FAMILY is any group of people closely related by blood or marriage.

FRIENDSHIP is a state of enduring affection, esteem, intimacy, and trust between people.

HELPERS are the group of people who work for an organization or business.

MOTIVATION is the desire or willingness to do something; what you want to do..

RELATIONSHIPS are connections, usually with other people; it's not just the way you feel and behave toward others, but the way they feel and behave toward you.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS are connections that come with feelings of love and attraction, like a crush.

SELF-ESTEEM is how you value yourself, knowing what is wonderful about yourself.

STRANGERS are people we have never met or spoken to. We may never have even seen them before.

TRUST is the belief in somebody's reliability, truth, strength, and ability.