

# Relationships & Sexuality

A Resource Guide for the Autistic Community



Gender identity and sexuality are more varied among autistic people than in the general population, [A preliminary 2021 study of 2400 people](#) found that adults with autism report a broad range of sexuality—being much more likely to identify as asexual, bisexual or homosexual than people without autism.

Bisexual or homosexual autistic adults may find more potential for sex and/or relationships in the gay community where there is less emphasis on conformity.

Some of those on the autism spectrum are celibate by choice, feeling that they are asexual, or that there are more important things in life. Others have resigned themselves to celibacy since romantic or sexual relationships can be much harder to find due to a misunderstanding of social skills and the difficulty of finding a suitable partner.

It is important that individuals with autism have concrete information on relationships and sexuality. Children, teens and adults may need guidance on everything from how to tell when someone "likes you," to "sexting," to masturbation.

The Autism Society Inland Empire compiled this list of resources to assist adults and family members with resources to have these important conversations. We hope you find it helpful.

This list is not intended to be all inclusive and the Autism Society Inland Empire does not endorse any individual product. All information provided or published by the Autism Society Inland Empire is for information purposes only. References to any treatment or therapy option, program, service or treatment provider are not an endorsement by the Autism Society. Referrals provided are suggestions to organizations that might help, but do not constitute a recommendation. The Autism Society Inland Empire cannot be held responsible for consequences that arise from individual dealings with a professional or organization. The inclusion of any organization does not imply endorsement, and omission does not imply disapproval. The Autism Society Inland Empire may add or remove organizations from this list at its discretion. If you would like to be considered to be in the Resource Guide, please contact us at [info@ieautism.org](mailto:info@ieautism.org).

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## FRIENDS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social connection is a powerful predictor of long-term physical and mental health. Having meaningful friendships — or lacking them — has an impact on our cardiovascular and immune systems, stress responses, sleep and cognitive health. People with strong social connections survive longer, on average than those with poor connections, according to a meta-analysis of more than 300,000 people. Loneliness, defined as a mismatch between desired and actual levels of social connection, is as great a risk factor for mortality as smoking, the analysis suggests. Autistic people may not look lonely, because they often separate themselves from others — but they can feel lonely.

According to a study published in 2000, autistic children tend to be lonelier than their neurotypical peers. And this loneliness may contribute significantly to the high incidence of depression and anxiety among autistic adults.

Autistic people overwhelmingly report that they want friends. They can and do form friendships with both neurotypical and autistic peers, even if their interactions sometimes look different from those among neurotypical people.

Some children or adults may have a focus on developing friendships but don't understand some of the unwritten rules of social interaction. They may not understand that friends sometimes want to be with others and might react quite rudely, become distressed or end the friendship if their friend goes and plays with someone else. Wanting to have a friend, they can misinterpret kindness for friendship and may become attached to someone who does not consider them a friend. The inflexibility of thought and a lack of appreciation of another's feelings may result in rejection by peers.

These skills can be taught by parents, ABA therapists, speech pathologists, and other professionals. Check out the Social Skills section in the Resource Guide for a list of providers who specialize in teaching these skills and our Social Recreation section for a list of fun and accepting activities.

## Articles: Friendship

### **Article-How People with Autism Forge Friendships (Spectrum News):**

<https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/how-people-with-autism-forge-friendships/#~:text=Autistic%20people%20overwhelmingly%20report%20that,from%20those%20among%20neurotypical%20people>

**Autism Toolbox-Friendships:** <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/friendships>

**Helping Kids with Autism Make Friends:** <https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/helping-kids-with-autism-make-friends>

**Making Friends: A Guide for Autistic Adults:** <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/family-life-and-relationships/making-friends/autistic-adults>

**Wrong Planet**-Wrong Planet is the web community designed for individuals (and parents/professionals of those) with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, PDDs, and other neurological differences. We provide a discussion forum, where members communicate with each other, an article section, with exclusive articles and how-to guides, a blogging feature, and more. <https://wrongplanet.net>

**Social Relationships** (Autism Society): <https://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/autism-through-the-lifespan/adulthood/socialrelationships/>

## Apps and Website Programs: Friendship

**Hiki-Friendship & Dating Mobile App** for the Autistic Community: Hiki—meaning “able” in Hawaiian—is a friendship and dating mobile app for the Autistic community. It is a space where neurodiversity is embraced and being atypical is celebrated. Every part of Hiki, from ideation to design to launch, has been built with Autistic adults to make sure that it is representative of Neurodivergent needs. (For iOS and Android) <https://www.hikiapp.com>

**Making Authentic Friendships App** for iOS and Android: Responsive web based app that helps individuals with special needs (13+) find friends at home or on the go , based off of their geolocation, diagnosis, age, and interests- <https://www.makingauthenticfriendships.com>

**Social Cipher** - builds online social-emotional learning (SEL) games for neurodivergent youth ages 10-15 to use with counselors, therapists, and educators. <https://www.socialciphergame.com>

## Social Stories

**Being a Good Friend:** <https://missallisonsclass.blogspot.com/2012/07/social-story-saturday-1-being-good.html>

**How Friendships Can Change:** <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Friendship-Is-Like-That.pdf>

**Making Friends:** <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/A-Story-on-Making-Friends-216940>

**Relationships:** <https://paautism.org/resource/relationships-social-story/>

**Safe and Unsafe Friends:** <https://adayinourshoes.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/safe-and-unsafe-friends.pdf>

## Teaching Resources

**Circle of Friends** (brief explanation): <https://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/what-circle-friends>

**Compliments Worksheet:** <http://autismteachingstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Compliment-Worksheets-PDF-Download.pdf>

**Conversation Box activity:** <http://autismteachingstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Conversation-Box-directions.pdf>

**Making and Keeping Friends-A 5 Step Model for Social Skills Instruction:**  
<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/making-and-keeping-friends.html>

**Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®)** is world-renowned for providing evidence-based social skills treatment to preschoolers, adolescents, and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit /hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, and other socio-emotional problems. Many social skills providers may utilize this curriculum.  
<https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers>

## Videos on Teaching Friendship Skills

**Bullying:**  
<http://teenage-resource.middletownautism.com/resources/videos/#social>

**Circle of Friends:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up-vol6dNc&ab\\_channel=CBSLosAngeles](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up-vol6dNc&ab_channel=CBSLosAngeles)

**How to Join a Social Group and Make New Friends:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az8vpzxZk4&ab\\_channel=WrongPlanet](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az8vpzxZk4&ab_channel=WrongPlanet)

**Making Friends in Middle School:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYLfekgw2l&ab\\_channel=TDSocialSkills](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYLfekgw2l&ab_channel=TDSocialSkills)

**ModelMe Friendship Skills (Teens):**  
<https://www.modelmekids.com/aspergers-friend.html>

**Social Skills Video:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zVElv1fA78&ab\\_channel=belikebuddy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zVElv1fA78&ab_channel=belikebuddy)

# PUBERTY

Mood swings, confusion, and a whole lot of awkwardness. Puberty is just a part of growing up.

Puberty can be a chaotic and confusing time, both for parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and for the children. Even the most knowledgeable, motivated, and devoted parents can find that this period brings feelings of doubt and a sense of being ill-equipped for an entirely new set of challenges. Below, we have compiled some excellent resources to help talk with your child about puberty/sex education.

## Puberty Resources

A Guide to Puberty and Autism –

<https://www.normallifeinc.com/autism-awareness-blog/puberty-autism/>

Healthy Bodies for Boys

<https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/files/HealthyBodies-Boys-web.pdf>

Healthy Bodies for Girls

<https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/files/HealthyBodies-Girls-web.pdf>

Lurie Center for Autism: Puberty

<https://www.massgeneral.org/children/autism/lurie-center/puberty>

Preparing for puberty: autistic children and teenagers

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/development/physical-development/preparing-for-puberty-asd>

Puberty and children on The Autism Spectrum - [https://www.autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/LWA\\_Puberty.pdf](https://www.autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/LWA_Puberty.pdf)

PUBERTY: A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS WITH AN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND THEIR PARENTS - <http://nhfv.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sexualityautism-spectrum-disorder.184122715.pdf>

## ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Romance comes with many exciting moments and navigating the dating game can be challenging for anyone. But there are additional complexities experienced by people with ASD that make dating and relationship building even more overwhelming. We have compiled some tips that may be helpful to you as you navigate romantic relationships.

### Articles and Resources: Romance

Autism & Dating-Practical Tips for Parents:

<https://autismspectrumnews.org/autism-and-dating-practical-tips-for-parents/>

Dating During a Pandemic: <https://paautism.org/resource/dating-pandemic/>

Dating and Relationships (Autism Launchpad):

<http://www.autismlaunchpad.org.au/social/romance-and-dating/>

Dating and Relationships (ARC AutismNow): <https://autismnow.org/at-home/relationships/dating-and-relationships/>

Dating on the Autism Spectrum-Notes for Neurotypical Partners:

<https://opendoortherapy.com/dating-on-the-autism-spectrum-notes-for-neurotypical-partners/#:~:text=Romantic%20relationships%20can%20be%20difficult,autism%20crave%20intimacy%20and%20love>

Hiki: Hiki is a friendship and dating app for the Autistic community. It is a place to feel safe, find friendship or love, and most importantly, to be yourself. (iOS and Android) <https://www.hikiapp.com/>

Printable Guide to Romantic Relationships: <https://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Romantic-Relationships.pdf>

Respectful Romantic Relationships for Autistic Teens:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/communicating-relationships/romantic-relationships/respectful-relationships-for-teens>

Romance 101-Dating for Adults with ASD:

<https://www.carautismroadmap.org/romance-101-dating-for-adults-with-asd/>

Romantic Relationships and Feelings for Autistic Teens:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/development/sexual-development/romantic-relationships-feelings-autistic-teenagers>

## Social Stories: Romance

15 Tips for a Successful Date (ASDNext): <https://asdnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dating-Resources.15TipsForSuccessfulDate-min.pdf>

Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships Social Story:

<https://paautism.org/resource/be-safe-healthy-vs-unhealthy-relationships-social-story/>

How to Ask Someone on a Date (ASDNext): <https://asdnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dating-Resources.HowToAskSomeoneOnADate-min.pdf>

<https://asdnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dating-Resources.HowToAskSomeoneOnADate-min.pdf>

How to Tell if a Girl is Flirting with You:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Tell-if-a-Girl-Is-Flirting-With-You>

Online Dating (ASDNext): <https://asdnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dating-Resources.OnlineDating-min.pdf>

<https://asdnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dating-Resources.OnlineDating-min.pdf>

Romantic Relationships Social Story:

<https://paautism.org/resource/relationships-social-story/>

Verbal and Non-Verbal Conversation Cues:

<https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Verbal-and-nonverbal-cues-draft.pdf>

## SEX EDUCATION

### Articles: Sex Education

All About Sex – <https://www.fpnsw.org.au/factsheets/individuals/disability/all-about-sex>

Elevatus Training- Developmental Disabilities and Sexuality 101 – Developmental Disabilities and Sexuality 101 – Self-Study Course – <https://www.elevatustraining.com/>

Puberty, Sex, and Sexuality – <https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/resources/sexedtoolkit.pdf>

Sex Education – A Guide for Parents – <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/family-life-and-relationships/sex-education/parents-and-carers>

SEX ED FOR SELF-ADVOCATES! – <https://researchautism.org/sex-ed-guide/>

### Books: Sex Education

***Sexuality and Relationship Education for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders*** 1st Edition-By Davida Hartman

***Sexuality and Severe Autism: A Practical Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Health Educators***- By K.E. Reynolds

***The Autism Friendly Guide to Periods-By Robyn Steward What's Happening to Tom? A Book About Puberty for Boys and Young Men with Autism and Related Conditions***-By Kate E. Reynolds

***What's Happening to Ellie? A Book About Puberty for Girls and Young Women with Autism and Related Conditions***-By Kate E. Reynolds

## Local Resources: Sex Education

### **Autism Heroes**

420 Brookside Ave, Redlands CA 92373

(909) 312-3070

[www.myautismheroes.com](http://www.myautismheroes.com)

Autism Heroes focuses on providing ABA services to individuals with disabilities in school settings, in-home settings, and in the community. By not only collaborating with the individual but with their professional team and family we seek to reach a cohesive intervention plan to benefit the individual. Offers a number of services including Parent and Adolescents with special needs Sexuality Training.

If you are a Regional Center client, Supported Living Services may be able to assist with sex education. An ABA company (Behavior Therapy) may also be to assist.

## Social Stories: Sex Education

Be Safe: Explaining Sex and Sexual Behaviors Social Story

- <https://paautism.org/resource/sex-sexual-behaviors-social-story/>

Healthy Bodies Appendix (Girls)

- <https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/files/HealthyBodiesAppendix-Girls.pdf>

Healthy Bodies Appendix (Boys) -

<https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/files/HealthyBodiesAppendix-Boys.pdf>

Social Stories: Appropriate Behaviors

- [http://livingwellwithautism.com/how\\_to\\_use\\_social\\_stories/social\\_stories-behaviors](http://livingwellwithautism.com/how_to_use_social_stories/social_stories-behaviors)

## Videos: Sex Education

Puberty Basics for Parents of Girls with

ASD: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqCMI7Spp-M&t=3s&ab\\_channel=Asperger%2FAutismNetwork-AANE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqCMI7Spp-M&t=3s&ab_channel=Asperger%2FAutismNetwork-AANE)

Sex Ed for People with I/DD:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuEvYNNQ-dHeVhbyeJHx9s8oqsvBk621v>

Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Kennedy Krieger):

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEg2Yxrg9QU&ab\\_channel=KennedyKriegerInstitute](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEg2Yxrg9QU&ab_channel=KennedyKriegerInstitute)

Social-Sexuality Education for Young People with Autism Spectrum (Seattle Children's Hospital):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxAFLsVohVg&list=PLjvfRtcMhn4PB0NTW0RlvsMJGu1Csnn5s&index=41&ab\\_channel=SeattleChildrens](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxAFLsVohVg&list=PLjvfRtcMhn4PB0NTW0RlvsMJGu1Csnn5s&index=41&ab_channel=SeattleChildrens)

## SEXUAL & GENDER IDENTITY AND AUTISM

The acronym LGBTQIA+ is an ever-growing and evolving acronym. It is an inclusive term covering people of all genders and sexualities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies.

Gender identity and sexuality are more varied among autistic people than in the general population, and autism is more common among people who do not identify as their assigned sex than it is in the population at large — three to six times as common, according to a recent study. Researchers are also making gains on how best to support autistic people who identify outside conventional genders. (Spectrum News 9/18/20)

### Articles and Resources: LGBTQ

**Autistic & LGBTQ- The Facts:** <https://www.autisticempire.com/2019/06/09/autistic-and-lgbtq-the-facts/>

**Autistic Women and Non-Binary Network (AWN):** <https://awnnetwork.org/>

**Coming Out** explained: <https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ComingOut.pdf>

**Figuring out your Sexual Orientation:** <https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FiguringOutYourSexualOrientation.pdf>

**Gender and Sexuality in Autism, Explained:**  
<https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/gender-and-sexuality-in-autism-explained>

**LGBTQI Resource Page:** <https://paautism.org/resource/lgbtqi/>

**Neurodiversity and Gender Diverse Youth-** An Affirming Approach to Care 2020:  
[https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Neurodiversity-and-Gender-Diverse-Youth\\_An-Affirming-Approach-to-Care\\_2020.pdf](https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Neurodiversity-and-Gender-Diverse-Youth_An-Affirming-Approach-to-Care_2020.pdf)

**SexEd Guide for Self-Advocates-Sexual Identification and Gender Identity:**  
<https://researchautism.org/sex-ed-guide-sexual-orientation-gender-identity/>

**Sexual Identification, Gender Identity, and Autism:** <https://www.aane.org/sexual-orientation-gender-identity-aspergerautism/>

**Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** Definition: <https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SexualOrientationAndGenderIdentity.pdf>

**Twainbow**— LGBTQI+ people with an Autistic diagnosis have two separate rainbows — and two separate coming out stories. There are times when an autistic will not come out as LGBTQI+, and vice-versa. The challenges for each minority group are great and being a double-social minority can be especially tough. Education and peer support goes a long way in helping to navigate these challenges and make for a smoother trip on the social highway. That's the premise of Twainbow — people living under a double-rainbow. <https://www.twainbow.org/>

## Local and Online Support: LGBTQ+

**Inland Empire LGBTQ+ Resource Guide** – <https://chair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Inland-Empire-LGBTQ-Resource-Guide.pdf>

**Neurodiverse Families (LGBTQ+ Facebook Group)** – [https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/neurodiverse\\_families\\_group](https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/neurodiverse_families_group)

### **PFLAG (Parents of Friends of Lesbians and Gays)**

Provides confidential support to families and allies who are in need, through peer-to-peer meetings, online outreach, and telephone hotlines. PFLAG National also offers a huge variety of resources and programs that provide support for those in need. Are you lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender-expansive, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+)? However you identify in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, PFLAG is here to support you and your family on your journey.

PFLAG Riverside (951) 500-6904

PFLAG Claremont

PFLAG Temecula (951) 878-8052

PFLAG San Gabriel Valley/API

PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities (760) 202-4430

### **Transgender Community Coalition and Transgender Health and Wellness Center**

340 S. Farrell Drive, Suite A208, Palm Springs, CA

6700 Indiana Avenue Suite 252, Riverside, CA

760.202.4308

[www.trans.health](http://www.trans.health)

Transgender Health and Wellness Center offers medical treatment for gender dysphoria such as laser hair removal and electrolysis as well as mental health, while the Transgender Community Coalition offers the wrap-around services such as crisis and case management, pet assistance, navigation to health care and more.