

Building Healthy Attitudes About Relationships for Children with Disabilities



1. **From birth, parents model and teach their children about love, affection, touch and relationships.**
2. **All children begin their lives as sexual people.** Teaching about sexuality should occur throughout life.
3. **For many children with disabilities, there are fewer chances to watch, develop and practice social skills that help build healthy attitudes about sexuality.**
4. **The risk of mistreatment among children with disabilities is greater for many reasons:**
 - ◆ They are more likely to be dependent on others for meeting basic needs.
 - ◆ They may have learned to be compliant or passive, especially with adults.
 - ◆ They may have trouble with reasoning and judgment.
 - ◆ They are exposed to larger numbers of caregivers than their non-disabled peers.
5. **Children with disabilities may need information and assistance addressing issues** beginning at younger ages, to allow the concepts to be reinforced over longer periods of time in a wider variety of real-life situations.
6. Tips for helping your child to understand touch, affection, and boundaries:
 - ◆ **Set rules related to touch as early as possible.**
 - ◆ **Teach rules that are easy to learn.** For example, handshakes, head nods, and saying “hello” as appropriate gestures for greeting people. Choose one to use consistently, so you can give instant feedback to your child.
 - ◆ **Remember, you do not want to eliminate touch and affection completely,** but make them more socially acceptable.
 - ◆ **Teach the difference between public and private places and behaviors,** such as undressing in the bedroom with door closed and knocking before entering. By emphasizing privacy, children are taught modesty.
 - ◆ Discuss your goals and expectations related to touch and affection with key support people important in your child’s life.
7. If you’re interested to find additional resources to help reinforce and teach your child social skills, you may find this article helpful from the Disability Solutions online newsletter, **Sexuality Education: Building a Foundation for Healthy Attitudes**, at:
<http://www.disabilitycompass.org/publications/back-issues-of-disability-solutions/volume-four/4-6.pdf>

We’re here to help. To learn more about UIC-Specialized Care for Children’s programs and services, check out our website at:

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