

DATING AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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Disability Advocates and Special Olympics
Ambassador**
- **Mike Beers, Transition Coordinator, Summit ILC**
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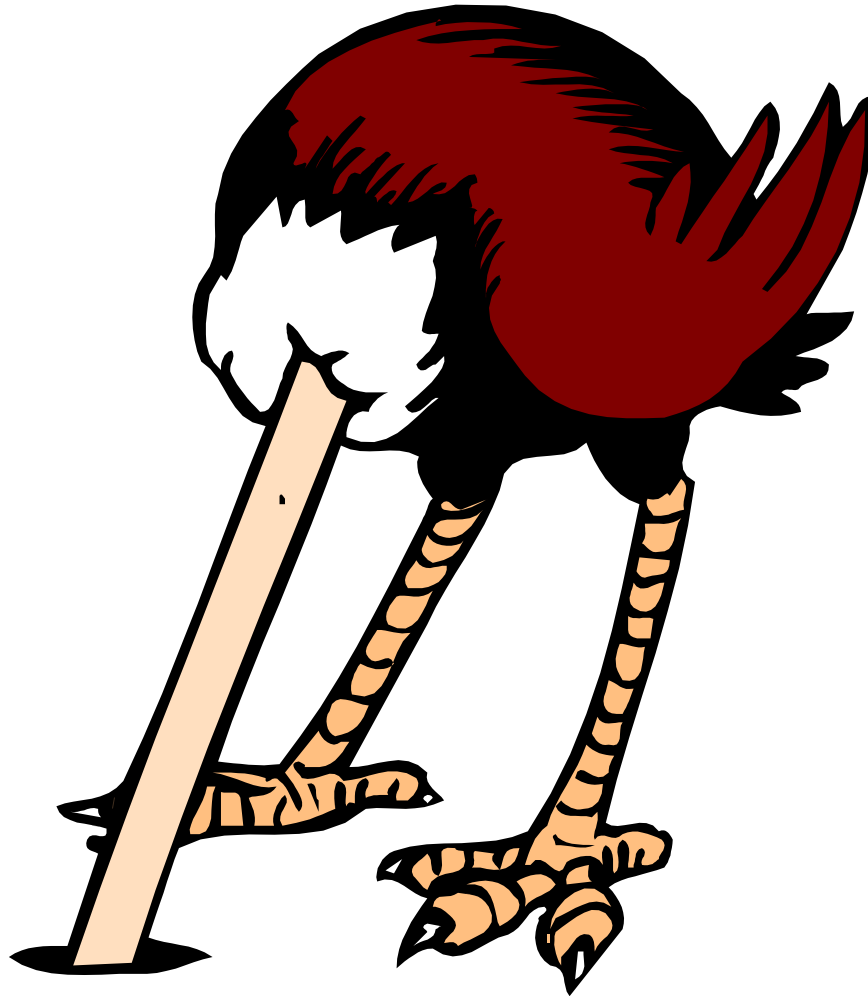
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WHY TALK ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

- Healthy relationships are important for physical, mental and emotional well-being
- We aren't protecting young people with disabilities by thinking they won't ever date, live with someone, marry, etc.
- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (1996), physical maturity and the onset of puberty will arrive at similar times for children with and without intellectual disabilities, sooooo.....

WE DO YOUNG PEOPLE A GREAT
DISSERVICE BY IGNORING THE TOPIC.



REALITIES

- Most people, with and without disabilities, want and need relationships with other people
- Many people will want those relationships to include close partnerships and sexual expression
- People with disabilities have a right to relationships
- Social isolation increases risk of manipulation, exploitation, depression
- The media is already teaching about relationships through music, music videos, computer games, television programs, magazine articles, etc.

SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Adult self-care
- Anatomy and physiology
- Empowerment
- Relationship skills
- Social skills
- Social/sexual rights and opportunities

(The Facts of Life...and More by Leslie Walker-Hirsch)

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRANSITION

- Teach what is healthy, how to make healthy choices
- Teach that it is okay to say no (counter the “culture of compliance”)
- Teach the words (body parts, slang, making friends...)
- Teach ways to connect that are considered socially acceptable (when, how, with whom)
- Promote self-advocacy and self-determination
- Teach self-reliance with personal care tasks

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRANSITION

- Offer opportunities for making connections
- Teach about boundaries
- Use role plays to practice (asking for and planning a date, stating boundaries, etc.)
- Think about behaviors that might be required in new situations (like on a date) and teach and practice them
- Teach skills that help maintain relationships (negotiation, conflict resolution, communication, etc.)

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRANSITION

- Social etiquette, conversational skills, friendship skills, dating skills (Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries, and Sexuality by Terri Couwenhoven)
- Teach people how to be respectful in interpersonal relations
- Help to develop a safety plan
- Explore the person's ability to give consent for different levels of intimacy
- Allow for mistakes
- Practice, practice, practice

WHO SHOULD TEACH THESE THINGS?

Make it a team effort

- Parents and other family members
- Schools
- Related services (e.g., Speech)
- Case managers
- Faith-based organizations
- Community organizations
- Other



RESOURCES

- Just Say Know! by Dave Hingsburger
- The Facts of Life...and More by Leslie Walker-Hirsch
- Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries, and Sexuality by Terri Couwenhoven
- www.wid.org - curriculum for people with disabilities
- <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/232/> - University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration Impact, Volume 23, Number 2 (Spring/Summer 2010)
- <http://www.siecus.org/> - Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States
- <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/192/over11.html> - Sex, Dating and Disability: How to Help Youth Make Healthy Choices by Rebecca Hare

THE PEOPLE FIRST WAY!

- Disability does not change your desires or what you want, it just changes your perspective, or the way you look at what you want and how you are going to get it!!
- So, it is important to remember that you are people first and your disability is just a part of who you are. Just because you have disabilities doesn't mean that you shouldn't or can't have a relationship!!

WHAT CAN MAKE A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?

- Make sure you love yourself before you can love someone else
 - www.beautyability.com (promotes positive self image for person with disability)
- Looking for someone who shares your interest
 - you could meet someone who goes to the same church....is in the same clubs....same job....same advocacy group....same sports....
- Make sure you know the facts
 - Get to know the other person- ask them questions about themselves!
 - Learn more about being safe in a relationship
 - http://www.hsri.org/files/NCRI/Impact_newsletter.pdf
(Impact- newsletter on sexuality and DD)
 - http://trynoviolence.org/safe_dating_tips.asp
Three Rivers Youth- dating safety tips
 - <http://www.nyln.org/resources-3/information-clearinghouse/orc-sexuality/>
NYLN Resource Page all about sexuality and relationships

QUESTIONS?



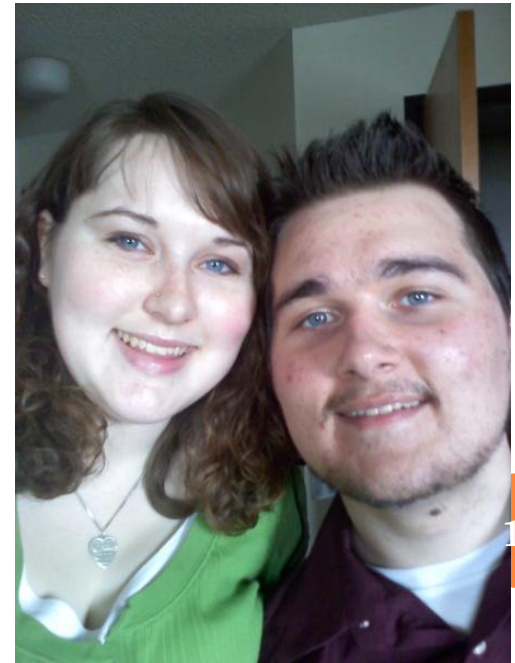
LET'S HEAR FROM SOME OTHERS!

- Every Relationship is Different- what works for you, may not work for others!
- Its okay to listen to lots of peoples point of view, and pick what is best for yourself!

ADVICE FROM ASHLEE AND MIKE

○ About us!

- we've been dating since February of 2009
- We met at Montana Youth Leadership Forum in 2008 and then we found out we both would be going to MSU Billings eventually, and so we became friends over email.
- We both have disabilities, Mike is a quadriparetic, and Ashlee is partially deaf

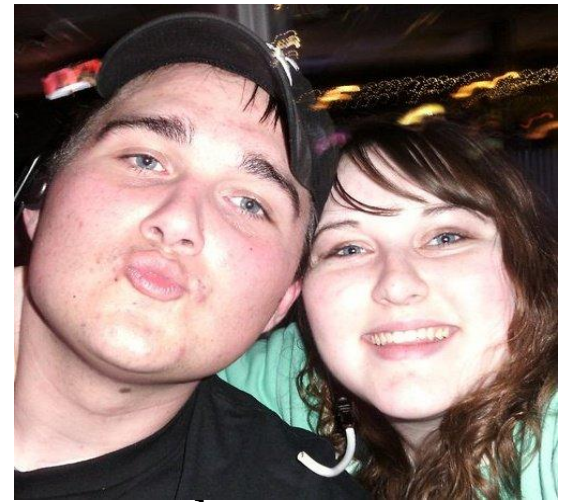


ADVICE FROM ASHLEE AND MIKE!

- What Works For Us!
 - Boundaries between partner and personal care attendant
 - Know the difference!
 - Don't be afraid to help each other out if needed
 - Have a sense of humor!
 - Take time to spend quality time together!
 - Develop routine activities to look forward to each week/month
 - Dinner Dates at our favorite restaurants
 - Watch our favorite tv shows together
 - Road trips to see family and friends



ADVICE FROM ASHLEE AND MIKE!



- Engagement!
 - Compromising!!
 - One of our BIGGEST advantages to keeping a good relationship
 - Ashlee wanted to Elope, but Michael wanted a big fancy wedding!
 - COMPROMISE! We are having a closed ceremony for just close family and then big reception for friends and family
 - Communication! Talk it Out!
 - Let each other know what the other meant and wants while listening without getting upset right away
 - We promised each other not to get married until we are both done with school and have careers started

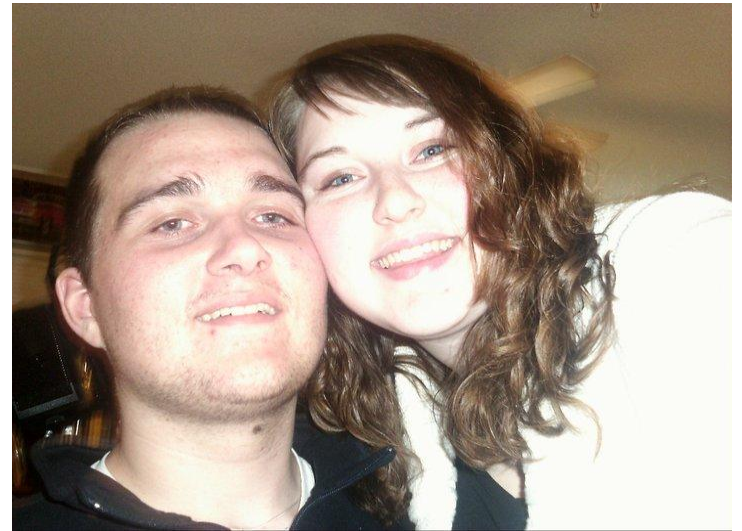
ADVICE FROM ASHLEE AND MIKE!



○ Living Together

- Drawing boundaries between partner and caregiver
- Share of household chores between Ashlee and caregivers
 - Ashlee does shopping and laundry, cleans bathroom and bedroom
 - Caregivers clean living room and kitchen
 - Both take turns cooking and doing dishes
- Give time to adjust to patient with one another
 - Sleeping/sharing the bed
 - Michael snores! Ashlee talks in her sleep!
 - Giving one another their space when needed! It's a small apartment!

LET'S HEAR FROM ASHLEE AND MIKE



- We come from very different Families
- We have to make sure to stand up to our families and defend one another
- We don't allow others' opinions to drive us apart, instead we have a sit down talk to clarify what each other's point of view of the situation is
- As long as you love each other! That's what counts!

LET'S HEAR FROM MOLLY AND BARCLAY

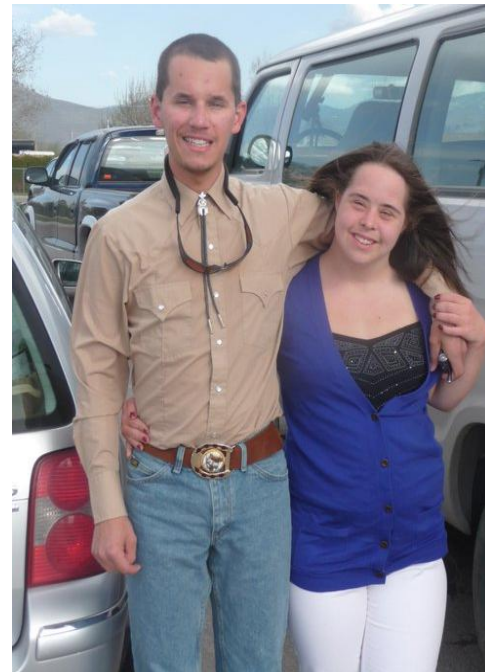
○ About Us!

- We've been dating for 7years! Since High School
- **How did you meet?**

We met at a ski resort after meeting in high school. Then we started flirting in history class and then we had our first date together at Dairy Queen!! We had our first kiss in math class.

- Barclay has Intellectual disabilities and is a “black and white” thinker and Molly has Down Syndrome & she likes to tell stories.

“It's nice to experience each other!!”



LET'S HEAR FROM MOLLY AND BARCLAY!

- **How do you keep it real after so long?**
 - We flirt with each other a lot!
 - Barclay “ I call Molly my Cutie Pie” and I’m Molly’s cutie guy!
 - I make her blush by saying different things to her like “You’re a hotty and toot sweet!”
 - I keep Molly laughing!
 - Molly “ I’m Barclay’s Missy” and I bat my eyelashes at him!
 - I sit on his lap or we hold hands! We also share butterfly kisses
 - We tease each other and have fun! Like I steal Molly’s books to be funny
 - Play Hard to Get or DODGEBALL! Sometimes a girl has to be mysterious

I think the key to any relationship is: Flirting and Compromising! Even if you have ups and down days!

LET'S HEAR FROM MOLLY AND BARCLAY!

- What do you do when you have down days?
 - We talk about it. (Barclay) I try to get her to talk to me about things even if she doesn't want to.
 - We try to open our hearts up and talk about it we don't keep things inside.
 - We make each other laugh!
 - Sometimes the Flirting just “creeps up” and makes the down day brighter!
 - I tease Barclay if he has a bad day and make him laugh



LET'S HEAR FROM MOLLY AND BARCLAY!

- What are your Plans for each other in Future?
 - We want to live together
 - We want to have a “committed relationship”
 - Which means like we are married but we won't sign the legal documents
 - We are cautious about losing are benefits, and will have to do some search before
- How do you get ready for that Commitment?
 - We started meeting each others family
 - We started spending holidays together like Thanksgiving!
 - We tried living together one time- it didn't work out then, but we haven't tried again since
 - This time to make it work we are going to have more privacy about our relationship- while still keeping it real!
 - It's okay to ask others for advice, but some things we want to keep to ourselves!
 - We also are trying to get our parents approval of each other

Let's hear from Molly and Barclay!

○ You've been together so long... Do you ever disagree? What about?

- Drama with ex's,
- Different opinions on who each other hang out with,
- Jealousy! Like when Barclay hangs out with other girls,
- We fight about little things sometimes
- Sometimes our disabilities 'get in the way'.

○ You guys have been together so long... what do you do if you disagree?

- I stand up for myself with Barclay,
- I also go to Panama sometimes to unwind and its okay to have a little space sometimes.
- I go to Special Olympics and places sometimes to get some space! But, I never have too much Molly time though!
- Even though we keep changing- we have been changing together
- Trust each other! It's the biggest thing.
- Sometimes we forget the little fights!

LET'S HEAR FROM MOLLY AND BARCLAY!

- **Cont'd what do you do if you disagree?**
- **We Compromise!!**
 - We compromise EVERY Day to get through our differences
 - Related to our disability and
 - Every day things!
 - Sometimes if we can't compromise we get help from a friend we share
- **We have Fun!!**
- **Do whatever you can with your Partner!**
- **Try to be with just the one person and keep the other ladies and boys at Bay!**
- **Have another adult you trust to ask questions and talk to about your relationship**
 - My friend Christina helps set limits on our relationship that's been helpful to take it slow (Molly), but for me, (Barclay) I work better without talking to someone else about relationships.
 - We try to talk things out! We also have been keeping it PG

LET'S HEAR FROM MIKE AND MARY

○ About Us!

- We have been dating for 2 ½ years
- We met at work
- Mike has VATERLS association (physical disability) Mary has a mental health disability



LET'S HEAR FROM MIKE AND MARY

- What works for us
 - Laugh it off—
 - We don't make fun of our disabilities, but the situations they get us in so it isn't so serious!
 - Planning ahead
 - With your disability and your relationship to alleviate some stress
 - Try to make each other better
 - Push each other to do new things and to not use disabilities as an excuse
 - Celebrate when you can- romance doesn't have to fit in a calendar...
 - Use your friends and others you respect and trust for advice- but don't forget to communicate with each other too.



LET'S HEAR FROM MIKE AND MARY

- Keep some things for yourselves
 - You don't have to answer questions or share personal parts of your relationship if you don't want to. The bottom line is that a disability just means you have to do some things in a different way, it doesn't change anything else. Your relationship can be just as real, important, as private or open as you want it to be, than someone's who doesn't have a disability
 - Take it at your own pace!
 - You aren't in a competition with anyone- you can take your relationship as slow or as fast as is comfortable for you

RESOURCES

- Kids as Self Advocates
 - www.fvkasa.org (click on resources tab)
- Your Local Planned Parenthood
- National Youth Leadership Network
 - www.nyln.org
- The Riot
 - <http://www.hsri.org>
 - Click on the riot link
- Your Local Independent Living Center
 - Peer Mentoring, and more! www.ncil.org
 - Click on About us and find your cil
- Your local people first chapter and SABE
 - www.sabeusa.org self advocates becoming empowered

QUESTIONS?

