Relationships are a part of life. Healthy relationships can make the difference between a friendship, workplace, or partnership being successful or ending. People with disabilities are no different than people without disabilities in their need and desire for healthy relationship.

Healthy Relationships
Important for Everyone
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Consent involves letting a person know what you would like to do (shower them, watch a movie together, etc.), and confirming that the person consents, or approves. (Kischkel, 2019)

Some people with disabilities receive personal care services that require a paid direct care worker to assist with hygiene tasks. The person receiving the assistance should give consent, or say OK, for the care to be given. People who seek counseling services need to give consent to speak with their counselor about private feelings, thoughts, and experiences. If family is going to provide personal care, financial management, or other assistance to an adult sibling or child, the person receiving the help should give consent for the family to do it. In romantic relationships there should always be consent for the relationship and any physical touch that occurs within the relationship. A healthy relationship must include consent if the person is able to give it.

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The family of a person with a disability can provide personal care, financial management as a representative payee, transportation, and much more. It is important that the family relationship is enjoyed aside from the assistance that is being given.

Tension can develop, especially over finances, if the person sees their family member as controlling their lives and money. Sometimes, it is beneficial for the person to have a representative payee agency or a person they can trust, other than the immediate family member to do this so that the family relationship can be healthy. It can even be temporary if a respite time is needed.

Friendship is important. People with disabilities, especially those that live in group homes or settings with paid staff, often struggle to find and maintain friendships. Often, their direct care staff are considered their friends. Professional relationships are important in making the world run. Boundaries and consent are extremely important in professional relationships. This includes employers, social workers, doctors, advocates, lawyers, and anyone that is paid to be in a person’s life. A person with a disability may have a social worker, advocate, doctor, or lawyer that they speak and work with often. Those relationships can be extremely successful and productive if there is communication, professional boundaries, and respect from both sides of the relationship.

Staff may overlook the importance of taking a person to see a friend or go to a social event. There can also be an assumption that a person with a disability wants to do activities with other people that also have disabilities. It is important that people get to choose their friends and recreation, and that attention is paid to helping them maintain those friendships.

People with disabilities are often interested in romantic relationships, as are people without disabilities. Some people may need assistance with transportation to dates, dialing a telephone, and communicating about romantic relationship ups and downs.

It is important for education on sex and romantic relationships to be given to support a person’s desire for relationships and to help them be less vulnerable to abuse or exploitation. Communication, consent, and respect are vital to healthy romantic relationships. People with disabilities can have romantic relationships and marriages if they want. (Relationships are very important, n.d.)
People with disabilities, as with everyone else, need to have a healthy relationship with themselves. Self-care is something that can be done in whatever way that the person can. Having a good relationship with one’s self can be just taking the time to rest and to do things that are fun. People with disabilities are often put into a category of needing to be cared for and kept busy all the time. People with disabilities enjoy resting and relaxation and fun activities, as do people without disabilities. They need to learn about themselves, gender and sexual identity, sex education, relationship education and support, financial education, and their interests. (The Arc, 2013).

Below are websites with information on relationships, self-advocacy, and community services:

- **West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council**

- **The Arc of West Virginia, with links to People First of West Virginia**
  [https://thearcofwv.org/](https://thearcofwv.org/)

- **National Alliance of Mental Illness**
  [https://www.nami.org/](https://www.nami.org/)

- **Job Accommodation Network**
  [https://askjan.org/](https://askjan.org/)

- **Rooted in Rights**
  [https://rootedinrights.org/](https://rootedinrights.org/)

- **West Virginia 211**
  [http://www.wv211.org/](http://www.wv211.org/)

- **Social Security, Representative Payee Program**
  [https://www.ssa.gov/payee/](https://www.ssa.gov/payee/)