

Supporting our brother/sister's friendships and romantic relationships

1. **Many of us worry about whether our brothers and sisters have rich enough social lives.**
Some of them would like more friends or a romantic partner. Others seem content spending time on their own, but we worry that their lives could be more fulfilling with support to reach outside that comfort zone.
2. We reflected that **it can be particularly challenging for our sisters and brothers to socialise with other people who share their communication impairments.** They may gravitate towards friendships with staff and other neurotypical people, who can smooth over the bumps in a conversation.
3. **Weekly or monthly activities**, like a self-advocacy group or an art/dance/music class, are a great way to meet people! They **take some of the pressure out of socialising**, since there is a structured activity, and everyone knows what to expect.
 - a) Our brothers and sisters may struggle to continue those friendships between sessions. Rejection sensitivity can make it feel really daunting to reach out!
 - b) We also discussed **befriending programmes** like [Gig Buddies](#) (which has local groups across the UK) and church groups like SPRED or Eagles. Your local voluntary centre may also know of befriending programmes.
4. **Our sisters and brothers may struggle with setting and recognising appropriate boundaries.**
 - a) They may not recognise when they have said or written something inappropriate to a friend or partner – it can help to keep an eye out!
 - b) We may need to set boundaries about our own privacy, like when it's inappropriate to have someone on speakerphone (not during private conversations) and what is too much information to share with a friend.
5. **Online friendships and relationships can be great, because they are lower pressure, but they also raise concerns about online safety.**
 - a) Choice Support's [Online Relationships](#) resource has advice about staying safe in online relationships of all kinds. (Also check out ARC Northern Ireland's easier read guides to [Online Safety](#) and [Mate Crime](#).) SibS has advice on [Taking Action on Safeguarding Concerns](#).
 - b) We also worry about AI chatbots, which can exacerbate real-life arguments or mental health problems by reinforcing whatever the user wants them to say.
6. **We worry about the relationship norms our brothers and sisters have been exposed to**, whether from online forums or watching old movies. Unrealistic expectations can hamstring real-life relationships, and they may also make our sisters and brothers **more vulnerable to love-bombing and other abuse.**
 - a) [Supported Loving](#) has really useful toolkits for starting these conversations.
 - b) Also check out [Mencap's Easy Read Guides](#) to friendships and relationships.
7. **We can make a big difference in helping to guide our brothers and sisters** through their relationships, especially when it comes to matters of safety. However, it can be tricky to do so while preserving their trust/our own relationships.
 - a) We talked about the [PANDA method](#) for Pathological Demand Avoidance.
 - b) It helps to validate their feelings and plant seeds / offer suggestions, so that the choices ultimately still feel like their own.