



Discussion Guide: Relationships After Sexual Assault



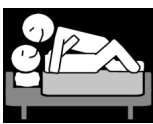


Why It's Important

After someone hurts you sexually, it can make you scared to start a new relationship. That's to be expected. One survivor told us that they worried people would think they were "damaged." They worried others might reject them because of what happened.

Talking honestly about hopes and fears can help people feel less scared. It can teach others that survivors are strong people. They can have successful relationships. They might need to go slow. They might need more patience.

Vocabulary

Share these words, pictures, and definitions before your discussion. Make sure everyone understands what they mean.

Friendly Relationship		Very caring friends who support each other. It may include hugging or hand holding. It does not include kissing, touching each other sexually, or having sex.
Romantic Relationship		Beyond friendship. It may include long hugs and kissing. It does not include touching each other sexually or having sexual intercourse.
Sexual Relationship		Beyond a romantic relationship. It includes touching each other sexually or having sexual intercourse.
Taking a Relationship Break		One or both partners want to stop the relationship. It can be for a short time or forever. It can be painful. Partners must respect each other's choices.
Consent		Agreeing to a friendly, romantic, or sexual relationship. Both people must agree. Having a sexual relationship with someone who does not consent is against the law.

Symbols used/adapted from: www.sclera.be

Discussion Questions

- What kinds of relationships have you had, if any?



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- What kinds of relationships do you want to have?



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- Have you ever wanted a relationship with someone who didn't want one with you?
 - How did that make you feel? Why?
- Has someone ever wanted a relationship with you that you didn't want?
 - How did that make you feel? Why?
- Have you ever taken a relationship break?
 - Who wanted it? Why?
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What would you do if someone wanted to move to the next kind of relationship, but you weren't ready?
- Why do you think it might be hard for a sexual assault survivor to start a new relationship?
- How could you support someone who is a sexual assault survivor to find a healthy new relationship?



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Caution

Many people with IDD are sexual assault survivors. Some people don't want others to know. Some do. Some don't realize they are survivors until they start talking about it. Some survivors are triggered when they talk about sexuality and sexual assault. They relive their trauma. This can be very painful. It can happen unexpectedly.

Talking honestly about sexuality and sexual assault is important. It's also important to keep everyone safe and supported. Use these guidelines when you talk about sexuality and sexual assault.

Plan Ahead

- Read these guidelines. Share them with people who will join the roleplay.
- Have a safe space ready. That could be a Zoom breakout room. It could be a room or outside space where you are talking. Let people know where it is. Tell them they can use it whenever they need. They do not need to ask for permission.

Watch for Triggers

- Watch faces and bodies. You might see signs of anger, fear, or sadness.
- A person might start fidgeting. They might get up and try to leave. They might rock or hug their arms to themselves.
- Sometimes, you can't tell at all from the outside.

Give Support

- You might see someone struggling. Ask if they need a break.
- Someone might share something personal or upsetting. Use words of comfort and support:
"I believe you." "You are brave to share this." "It is not your fault."
"I care about you." "I'm sorry this happened to you." "I am here to help."

Follow Up

- Check in after the roleplay. Check in more than once.
- Share good resources like:
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800.656.HOPE (4673), hotline.rainn.org, hotline.rainn.org/es (Spanish)
 - Your local rape crisis center (find it at centers.rainn.org)
 - Some self-care activities (find some at rainn.org/articles/self-care-after-trauma)



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