



## Supporting autistic people – best practice surrounding sexuality and intimate relationships

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### Public Summary:

There has been no UK research to date on the social care support needs of autistic adults without learning disabilities surrounding relationships and sexuality. This study aimed to examine the social care support needs of autistic adults without learning disabilities surrounding relationships and sexuality.

Interviews were used to speak to 15 autistic people who access social care support (e.g. such as a PA or living in supported living accommodation). Questions were asked about their support needs around sex and relationships, what support they receive in this area and what support they want and how they would like it to be delivered. The interviews were written up and we analysed them looking for common themes.

Four themes were found: Help at hand, but not too close for comfort, No “cookie-cutter rules”: personalised, inclusive approaches, Playing it safe, not leaving it too late, and Autism-informed education and support

The research found that many autistic people see social care staff having a role in supporting their sex and relationship needs. For most people this was signposting to helpful resources or organisations and being available to discuss any concerns or issues if needed. Virtually all relationship and sex education that is available to adults is aimed at people with learning disabilities not autistic people.

There is a lack of resources and organisations available to support autistic people or to provide guidance and/or information to social care staff who wish to support them with this. More autistic led or autism informed resources need to be developed for people so they can get the information they need and social care staff have information to guide their support



### Public and Community Involvement:

An advisory group of autistic people who access social care worked alongside us throughout the project. They assisted with the development of materials, such as interview prompts. They were also involved in analysing the findings and what they believed was most important in their experience to be included in the analysis/final written article. A complete set of themes and sub themes was discussed with the advisory group to ensure language and concepts were appropriate and respectful.

The advisory group were directly involved in co-producing our training pack for social care staff. We discussed materials, resources and the exercises we included. They were instrumental to the design. One member provided a voice over for the key learning points in the presentation. We ran two on-line pilot training sessions with 40 social care staff, who gave feedback on the design and amendments were made based on their feedback.

### Impact and Implementation:

The research highlights the importance of meeting the social care needs of autistic people surrounding sex and intimate relationships and that this is important to autistic people. The correct support could improve their quality of life and proactive

support could increase sexual safety and prevent abusive situations developing.

The training pack has been shared with 2000 Supported Loving members and is freely available. The research sits within Supported Loving Network a long-term project, the website and resources will remain part of our ever-expanding toolkit and will be used as part of our suite of training courses and thus ensuring its long-term sustainability.

### Publications

[No “cookie cutter rules”: best practice for social care staff in supporting autistic adults with relationships and sexuality | Emerald Insight](#)

- Online event- <https://vimeo.com/choicesupport/autisticloving?share=copy>
- Autistic Loving toolkit page including the downloadable training pack Supporting Autistic People with Sexuality and relationships- An awareness raising workshop for social care staff <https://www.choicesupport.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/supported-loving/supported-loving-toolkit/autistic-loving>

### What next?

We have already used the findings from this study to develop a follow up funding bid to explore what support social workers need to feel confident raising the topic of sex and relationships in social care reviews as our participants felt this should be included.