

**DATING  
AND  
RELATIONSHIPS**

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# Agenda

1. Poll
2. Purpose
3. Where do we go to find a romantic relationship?
4. Signs to look for in a person, or situation
5. How to build connection
6. Online dating safety
7. Consent & Boundaries
8. Case Study: Love on the Spectrum

# Slido

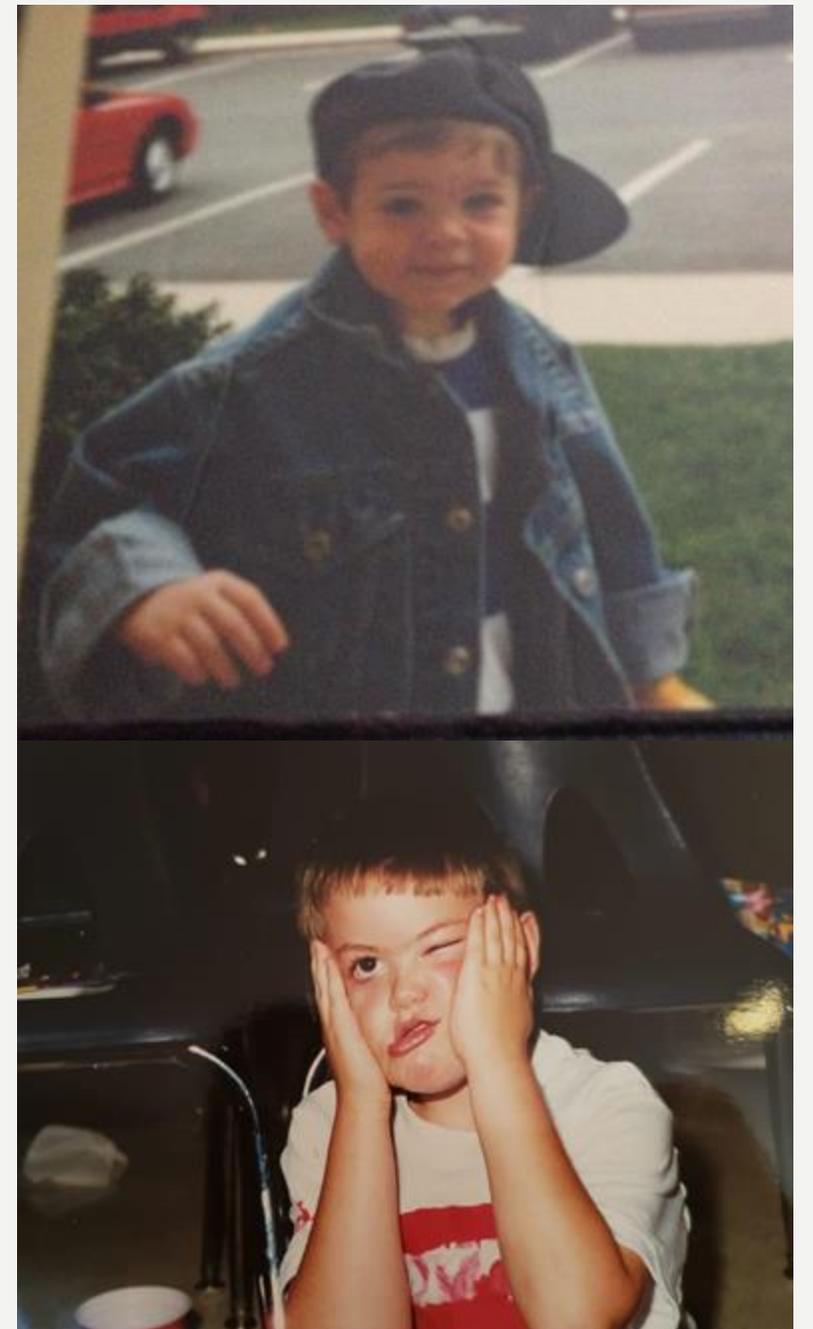
- What is your biggest barrier to dating?

# Purpose

- My goal is not for you to be an expert
- I want to help decrease stigma and shame around dating
- I hope to share some tools/tips to get you on the right path

# HI, I'M STEVEN. AND I'M AUTISTIC.

- Diagnosed at age 2 with PDD-NOS
- Received OT, Speech, Social skills therapy
- Went through school with an IEP
- Currently interested in autism policy, Autism at Work, and facilitating group spaces to enhance skills



# The media and relationships

- The media portrays a certain narrative around dating, and if we don't meet that standard, then we feel unsuccessful.
- **The truth is:** most people struggle with dating. But they're out there for a reason.
- We are naturally social. But experiences and expectations may vary from what society views as normal.



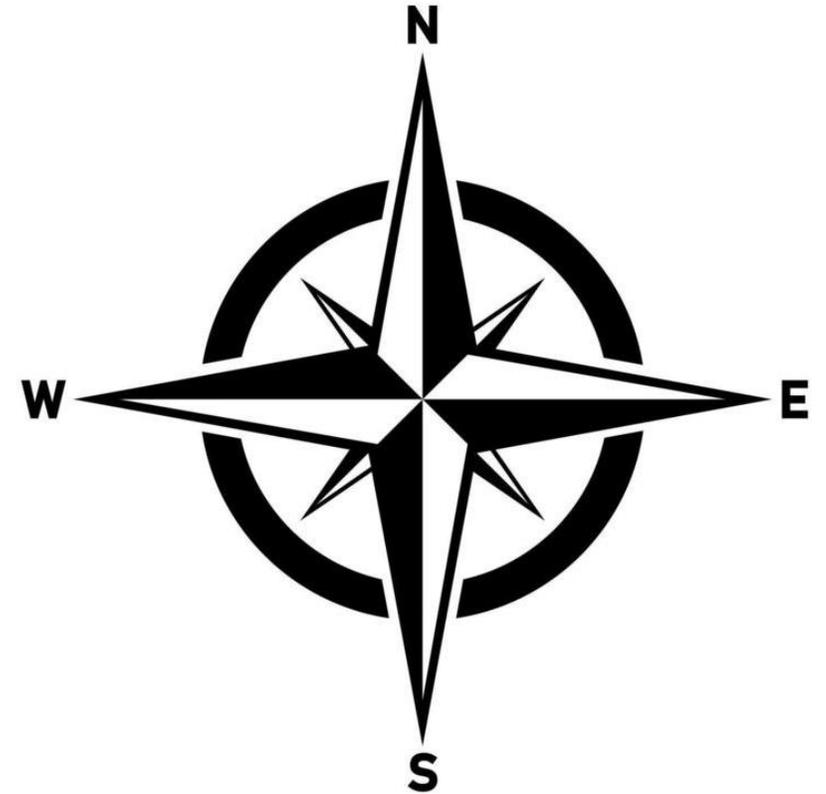
# There's a time and place

- Where do you find someone to date?
  - Social spaces
  - Concerts
  - Sporting events
- Is this space appropriate for dating?
  - The gym?
  - Someone's workplace?
  - A support group?
- When in doubt, just start with your basic conversation skills



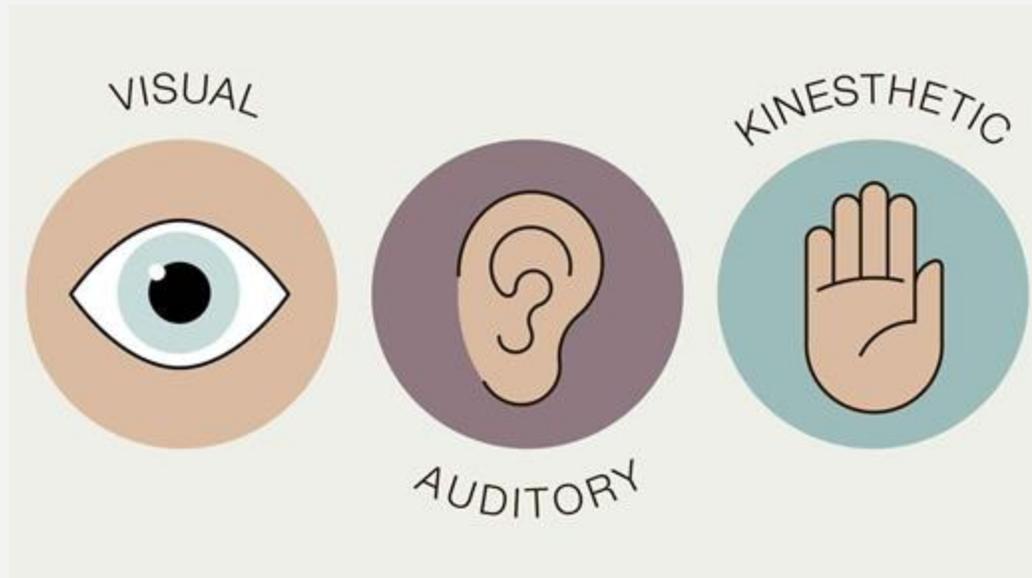
# What are you looking for in a partner?

- What are your goals: long-term/short-term?
- Do you prefer someone who is: adventurous or cautious?
- Where are **you** in your journey?
- What are **you** bringing to this space?
- Are you ready to date? Self-awareness is key.
- We all bring our past, present, and future to every experience





# AUTISTIC PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES. WHAT'S YOURS?



- Visual, seeing
- Verbal/Auditory, listening
- Pattern, repetition
- Kinesthetic, by doing

# Finding someone with common interests

- Like it or not, small talk is how we figure out if someone is a threat or not
- But if you find the right person, it really doesn't feel like a chore
- Even if someone has an interest that you don't share, it's still important to show in that thing, because they care.



*we go together like..*

# Building connection

- Asking questions about what someone likes/what they think
  - “Do you prefer mountains or beaches?”
- Asking follow-up questions – “How does that make you feel?”
- Giving compliments – “I like how passionate you are about your interests.”
- Share your experience/thoughts
  - Maybe answer your own question first to get the conversation started
  - Keep the conversation going, but silence is ok



# Boundaries

- Not just related to dating – **where else do we have boundaries?**
- Leaving time for yourself and things outside of your relationship is important.
- Think about what boundaries you have for yourself.
- It's important to find someone who respects your boundaries.



# Examples of Boundaries:

"I will have to get back to you about that."

"I will let you know when I have time."

"I am not qualified for that job."

"I appreciate the invite, but I won't be able to make it."

"I will have to get back to you on that."

"I respect your opinion, but I have my own opinion as well."

"I have the right and am entitled to my own feelings."

"I will do my best with what resources I do have."

"I need to focus on myself."

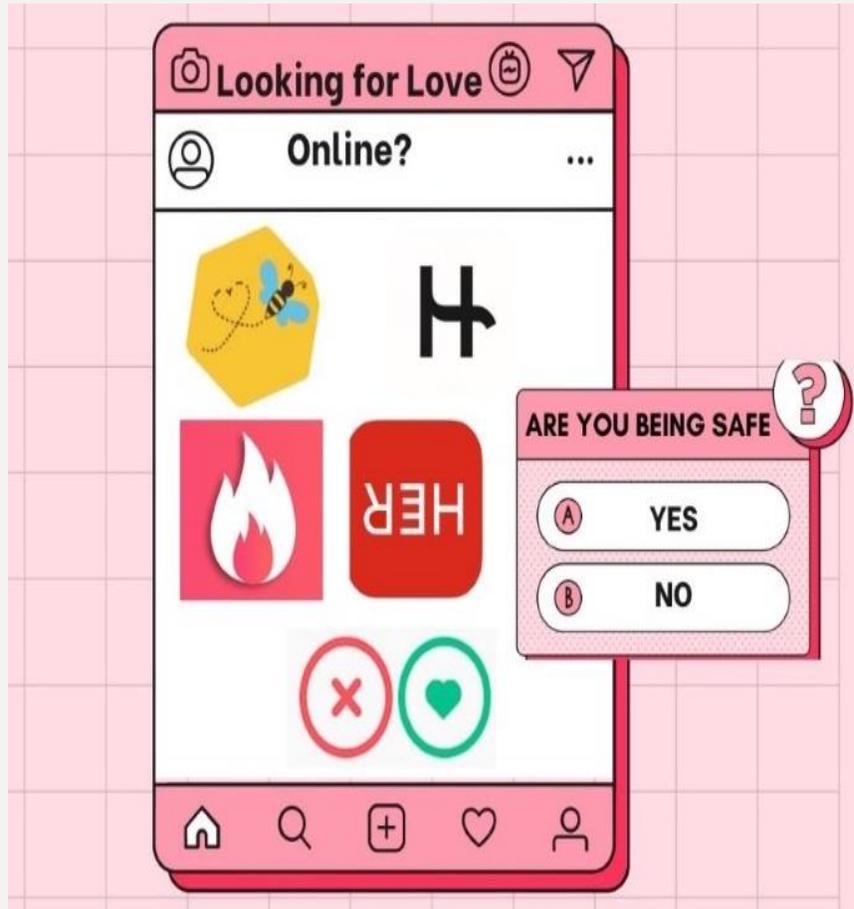
"Please do not speak to me that way,"

"I am not comfortable discussing that."





# Online Dating Safety



- Not every profile you see online is real.
- If it's too good to be true, it probably is. Building connection takes real effort.
- Be careful about giving personal information online. Never send money.
- It is possible to build connection online. Just be yourself.
- If you do meet someone from an app, make sure it's a public place.
- Don't spend your whole day on dating apps.
- Be picky! Find the one for you.

# Slido

- [What does consent mean to you?](#)

# Consent is...



## VOCAL

Is not an absence of a no



## CONTINUAL

Can be revoked at any time



## FUN

Oh ya!



## SOBER

Cannot be given if the person is incapacitated by alcohol or drugs



## CONSCIOUS

Cannot be given if the person is unconscious



## BETWEEN PEERS

Cannot be obtained if a person abuses a position of trust, power or authority



## CLEAR

Cannot be assumed or implied



## PRESENT IN A RELATIONSHIP

Dating someone does not mean consent is automatically present



## GIVEN FREELY

Can never be obtained through threats or coercion

When in doubt, ask!

- “Do you mind if we kiss??”

- “I had a great time. Can I give you a hug goodbye?”

We don't often see consent depicted - so how do we learn?

- Talk about it.

- Practice in low-stakes situations.

# STEPS/RULES FOR CONSENT

1. Consider: Is this the time or place?
2. Ask.
3. If yes, proceed.
4. If no, say “I hear you. I respect your choice.”
5. If they say **anything less than a full yes**, treat it as a no.
6. Remember, consent can be revoked at any time.

## CONSENT



**Freely Given**  
**Reversible**  
**Informed**  
**Enthusiastic**  
**Specific**

# Is this a date?

- *Should* this be a date?
- *Should* we be official?
- Autistic people thrive on patterns and rule-making
  - Consider making mental rules (if/then)
- Communication can help with learning shared aims
  - This is both verbal and non-verbal



# (Body) Language Central

- Are you the only one keeping the conversation going? How often are you reaching out to them?
  - More is not the merrier here
- Does their body language seem closed?
- Does their spoken language make up for any gaps in body language?
  - Often people can be mistaken for being uninterested, even though they are communicating verbally.



# What really matters?

- The day-to-day stuff that helps you get through the week
- Being yourself – don't try to be someone you're not.
- Spending quality time
- Doing stuff for your partner and having it be reciprocated
- Do you build each other up when you're down?



# LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM

- **Goal:**
  - This show attempted to show the autistic experience of dating, through discovering shared interests.
  - The audience was neurotypicals.
- **Lessons:**
  - Not everyone is a good match for each other. If someone doesn't understand you, find someone who will!
  - Pretty much everyone is awkward at the beginning when you first meet them.
  - You're never too old to find love.



# Is it love, or are we just friends?

- Take the pressure off, just try friends first.
- You can never have enough friends
- In order to have a healthy dating life, it's important to have friends first.



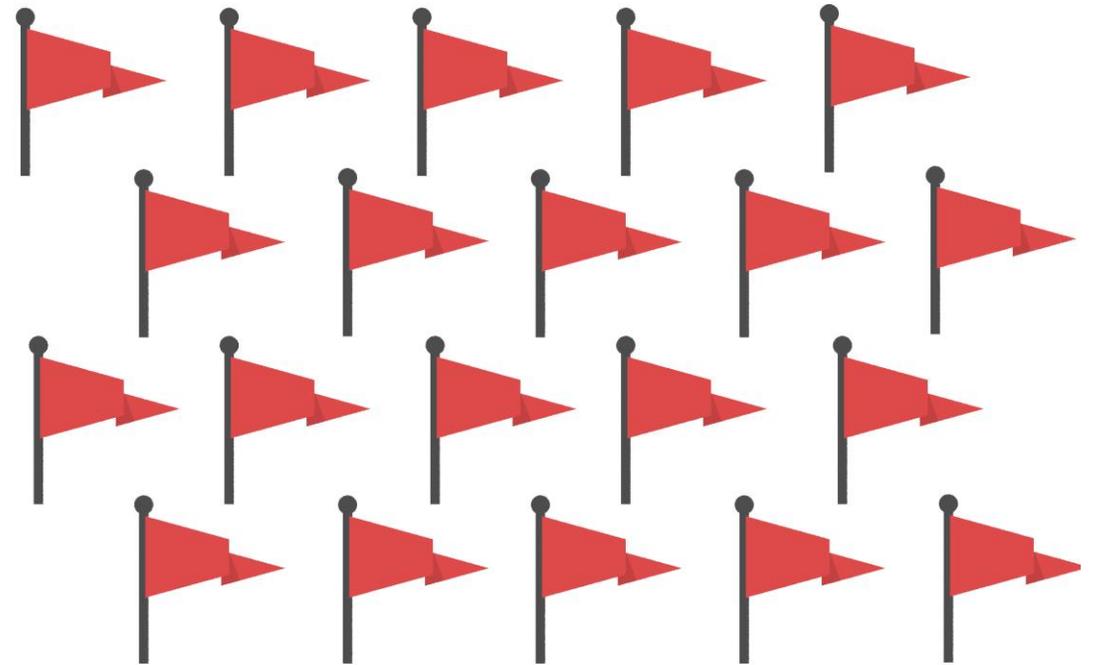
# Green Flags

- They respect your boundaries
- They care about the stuff you do
- Your skills are complimentary
- The person has friends and can maintain relationships
- Responsible for their own emotions



# Red Flags

- They don't allow personal space or time for you to see your other friends
- They keep you from completing your routine (school, work, etc.)
- “You complete me”
- They pressure you into activities or belittle your interests



# QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ANSWERS?

## **Contact:**

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