



A Credo for Meaningful Relationships

Written by citizens with disabilities across North Carolina

People with disabilities are people just like YOU, but we are often disregarded in terms of our choices to live lives that are full and meaningful. Too many other people make our choices for us out of a desire to protect us, make their lives easier, keep us segregated, etc. Life without choices, love and friendship is not much of a life at all. We are lonely, sometimes on the outside looking in at your full lives. Treat us with dignity and respect and we will respond the same. Support us, care about us, even if on a professional level, the way you would want to be. As self-advocates who matter as people first, we want to have meaningful connections with other people with and without disabilities, who share our beliefs, genders and orientations, or even have different ones because being different is what makes us all the same. In terms of love, friendship and a full social way of life in the community:

1. We want to learn about safe and healthy relationships – including friendships and romantic relationships with people of all abilities, genders, values, preferences and orientations that we choose.
2. We want support and education about our bodies, how things work in a healthy way, how to stay healthy; how to choose intimate partners right for us, and how to protect ourselves against abuse, cancer, sexually-transmitted diseases and other health risks.
3. We want to learn valuable safety tips for safer dating, connecting with new friends and maintaining contact with family – whether in person or online.
4. We want the federal marriage penalty to be adjusted. The marriage penalty cuts our benefits if we choose to get married.
5. We want parents and loved ones to talk openly with us when we ask about making friends, dating, sexual health and safety. If they can't talk to us, help us find someone who can talk in terms we understand.
6. We want to be recognized as adults, regardless of the challenges we face or others presume we deal with.
7. We want privacy to be alone with our thoughts in our homes and rooms, and with friends and dates. Teach us how to ask staff and family to give us our space once we've learned safe and healthy habits.
8. We want to choose our own friends instead of paid staff becoming the only friends we have. We want to choose who we don't want to be with anymore too.
9. We want to become "regulars" at places like the local coffee shop, church, the laundromat, school, the library and other places in the community, so that we can learn how to meet people. Maybe, people will begin to miss us and ask about our well-being if we don't show up on our regular day or time.

10. We want the community to notice us by who we are first. We aren't solely defined by our disability labels. The staff supporting us doesn't define us either.
11. We want you to befriend us and be sensitive to us, so we have more people to share our likes and dislikes with. That way, we'll have more people to tell if something is wrong or we need help.
12. We want better, accessible transportation to see our friends and go out in the community.
13. We want to go to funerals, weddings, family and community functions that are important to us, regardless of inconvenience to staff that seem to have time to take us to the doctor, the store and other service provider appointments. We are part of important family and social circles, too.
14. We want to be able to make our own choices, as well as mistakes, and learn from them without being judged or having our mistakes thrown back at us every time we try to move forward.
15. We want to be heard and know our feelings and opinions matter.
16. We want you to share your good or bad news with us. Don't assume we won't understand or it will be too upsetting. We are allowed to have our feelings and express them the best we know how. We can handle it!
17. We want safe, affordable, accessible places to live where both we and our friends can have fun without worries of danger.

We are people first – adults – with wants and needs just like you. Remember that as you care for, support, advocate with, live among and work with us. We have feelings, desires, dreams and wishes for a life with love, friendship and respect. Put yourself in our place before you make decisions about our social and emotional experiences. Think about how you would feel if opportunities to connect with others on a deeper level were taken from you, or your need for companionship was denied. That wouldn't be all right with you, would it? It's not all right with us. We know what we are missing. We know we deserve these experiences in our lives like others do. Support us, teach us, guide us and help us to be a bigger part of yours and other people's lives and encourage others to be part of our lives. We have more to offer than you assume.

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