

# Healthy Relationships ECHO Begins September 23

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*IDRPP Executive Director Matthew Wappett is also one of the training's coordinators.*

A new [ECHO training](#) at the Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice will focus on healthy relationships for adults with disabilities. Sessions begin Monday, September 23 at noon, and they will continue monthly through June 2025. They are free and designed especially for people with disabilities, their families and the practitioners who serve them.

The information is needed in Utah.

“When you look at resilience and mental health, the number one factor in whether someone is able to rebound and manage the stresses in their lives is whether they have healthy relationships,” said Matthew Wappett, IDRPP Executive Director and one of the training’s coordinators.

Sadly, he said, people with disabilities are often left out of important conversations about relationships. “We do not teach people with disabilities the basics of consent, good touch/bad touch, all of these things are just not addressed within schools, within social programs, and that’s part of the reason why abuse is so high among the population.”

Nationwide, people with disabilities are more than [twice as likely](#) to be victims of rape and sexual abuse as their peers.

The benefits of good relationships are huge, said Courtney Edgington, a person with a disability and a citizen member of the Utah Developmental Disabilities Council. “For people with disabilities it is as important as for people

without disabilities that want to be in relationships, because we all have them. We all want to feel like we’re valued and that we’re important, that we’re seen and we’re heard, and that we’re not just doing it on our own, but we have people to help us along the way, to support us. “It’s not easy to talk about these kinds of things,” she said, “Especially if you don’t even know what you get yourself into. ... [But] it’s important to have the conversation, because otherwise, who else are you going to learn about it from?”

The training could also benefit the families of people with disabilities, Wappett said. “It’s helping educate family members to know that people with disabilities can and should have relationships, and that they should have opportunities to go on dates and to develop a relationship that the rest of us would take for granted. And so it’s just equipping them with the knowledge, and their families with the knowledge, on how to do that safely.”

Topics in the Healthy Relationships For Adults With Disabilities ECHO series begin with results from a Utah Developmental Disabilities Council survey. It was conducted to better understand the needs for training and resources on relationships. Other sessions will focus on an understanding of consent; healthy communications; mandatory reporting; lived experience; safety planning; internet safety; dating apps; and sexuality and gender identity.

While the first session is on September 23, people can still sign up for subsequent sessions later, and they can pick and choose which ones they attend.

[Project ECHO®](#) is a lifelong learning and guided practice model that offers best practices. IDRPP currently has seven ECHO projects that provide training and professional development in Utah, on topics including early intervention, mental health, substance abuse, healthy relationships and autism. More than a third of IDRPP’s ECHO participants are from rural areas.

The Healthy Relationships training is funded by the Utah Developmental Disabilities Council.