



Healthy Relationships

Discussion Guides for Adults with Disabilities, Family Members & Guardians

Bodily Autonomy for People with Disabilities

The Importance of Bodily Autonomy

Everyone has the right to make choices about their own body. This is called bodily autonomy. It is very important, especially for people with disabilities. Knowing about bodily autonomy helps you understand your personal boundaries. It also helps you speak up for yourself and make safe choices. When you know your rights, you can tell if someone is not respecting your boundaries. If that happens, you can talk to them, ask for help, or tell someone in charge.

What is Bodily Autonomy?

Bodily autonomy means you have the right to make decisions about your own body. It's about knowing your personal boundaries. It's also about understanding what others need and respecting their differences. Everyone has different comfort levels and choices. These choices help people feel safe and valued.



Discussion Questions:

1. What does bodily autonomy mean to you?
2. Can you think of a time when someone respected your boundaries? How did that make you feel?
3. Why is it important to respect others' preferences and needs, even if they are different from your own?

Celebrate Multiple Perspectives

People show their independence in many different ways. Here are some examples of unique preferences and boundaries:



Some members of the Latter-Day Saint faith wear special clothing for religious reasons.

Some people of other religions wear a hijab or special clothing to show their beliefs.



Some people like hugs, while others prefer a simple wave.



People eat different foods because of their culture, health, or personal choices.

When we understand these differences, we become kinder and more open-minded. Respecting people's choices helps make our community welcoming for everyone.



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Understanding Identity

Identity is how people see themselves and what makes them feel comfortable.

Everyone should be able to express who they are in a way that feels right to them. This can include how they dress, the name they use, and the things they like to do.

Identity and Bodily Autonomy

Bodily autonomy means people can make choices about their own bodies. This is an important part of identity. When people can decide how they look and express themselves, they feel more in control of who they are.

Privacy and Personal Information

People do not have to explain their choices to others. For example, if someone wears certain clothes or wants to be called a different name, they don't have to give a reason. Respecting people's privacy is a way to support their independence.

Case Study

In this section, we'll practice applying the idea of bodily autonomy to a real-life situation. The goal is to think about how to use what you've learned about consent in a practical scenario.

Background

Megan is 14 years old and lives with her grandmother, who takes care of her. Megan has cerebral palsy, which makes dressing difficult, so she often needs help. Her grandmother likes her to wear light colors and floral patterns. But Megan prefers dark, neutral colors. Even when Megan tells her, her grandmother still buys her feminine clothes.

Scenario

One Sunday, Megan's grandmother picks out a pastel floral skirt and blouse for family pictures. Megan wants to wear dress pants instead. When she says this, her grandmother tells her she should match the other women in the family photo.

Megan feels upset. She needs help getting dressed, but she also wants to choose her own clothes. She wonders if she should talk to her grandmother again or ask another trusted adult for support.



Discussion Questions:

1. How do your choices about your body help you express your identity?
2. Can you think of a time when someone didn't respect your identity or bodily autonomy? How did that make you feel?
3. What can you do if someone doesn't respect your identity or your right to make choices about your body?



Discussion Questions:



1. Why is it important for Megan to choose what she wears?
2. How does Megan needing help from her grandmother make it harder to speak up for herself?
3. What are some ways Megan could share her feelings about this situation?
4. How could a trusted adult help Megan stand up for her right to make choices?



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Example Dialogue

Understanding how to use someone's preferred name shows respect and inclusion. Here are examples of respectful and disrespectful ways to talk about name choices.

Healthy Example	Unhealthy Example
<p> Person A: "Hey, I want to make sure I'm addressing you correctly. Do you have a name you prefer to go by?"</p> <p>Person B: "Yeah, I actually go by Jay instead of my full name, Jordan. It feels more like me."</p> <p>Person A: "Thanks for letting me know, Jay! I'll make sure to use that from now on. Let me know if I ever slip up."</p>	<p> Person A: "Your name is Jordan, right? I don't get why you go by Jay instead."</p> <p>Person B: "I just feel more comfortable with Jay. It fits me better."</p> <p>Person A: "Well, I'm just going to call you Jordan because that's your real name."</p>

Practice! Setting Boundaries When Someone Speaks for You

Sometimes, others may talk for you without asking first. This can happen at the doctor's office, with friends, or when making choices about your life. It's important to set boundaries in these moments.

Scenario: You are at the doctor's office, and a family member or caregiver answers a question for you without asking. How can you set a boundary and remind them to check with you first?

Take turns playing each role:

Examples:	Person setting a boundary:	Person responding:
Practice using clear, respectful language.	"I'd like to answer for myself." "Thanks for helping, but I want to explain it myself."	"Oh, I'm sorry! I'll let you speak." "Thanks for letting me know. I'll check with you first next time."
Use body language or gestures to support your message.	You can raise your hand slightly or look at the doctor to show you want to speak.	Look at the other person and nod to show you are listening.



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Discussion Questions:

1. How did it feel to set a boundary? Was it easy or difficult? Why?
2. Why is it important to be able to speak for yourself and make your own choices?
3. What are some other ways to clearly communicate personal boundaries?
4. What can you do if someone doesn't immediately respect your boundary?
5. How does setting boundaries help you feel more in control of your body and your choices?



Wrapping Up the Conversation

Bodily autonomy means knowing yourself and setting boundaries. It means making choices that feel right for you. It also means respecting other people's choices and boundaries. When we are kind, curious, and respectful, we help make our community safer and more welcoming for everyone.

Organization	Contact	How They Help
National Adult Protective Services (APS) Association	(202) 370-6292 or visit www.napsa-now.org/help-in-your-area/ and ask for your state APS office	Helps professionals and individuals report and respond to the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities who are the victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and to prevent abuse whenever possible. There is an APS office for each of the 50 states.
National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or text "START" to 88788	Offers confidential support and guidance for anyone in an unsafe or abusive relationship.
National Sexual Assault Hotline or RAINN mobile app	1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or download the RAINN app	Provides free, confidential support for survivors of sexual assault.
Love is Respect	1-866-331-9474 or text "LOVEIS" to 22522	Specializes in supporting young people experiencing relationship abuse or those unsure if their relationship is healthy.

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