



Dating and Relationships

A review of tips and resources for a need that affects us all.

It's difficult to escape the idea of love and romance in February. This month is known for the holiday that is Valentine's Day, and we're made to see that almost everywhere we go. Stores being filled with candy and decorations, holiday specials in restaurants, a push on romantic themed movies in our streaming services...the list could go on.

Seeing the idea of dating and relationships in our world more often, doesn't always help us in understanding some of the skills needed in getting to that point. Meeting new people, going on dates...these are tough things to practice, unless you're actually doing it. For many of us, we need the opportunity to not only know and review the steps needed in connecting with others, but also how to improve at them (and it's not ideal to use someone we genuinely like as our practice).

The items below review some of the common steps we encounter as we move towards connecting with others. We hope this will act as an additional resource for our adult population, as well as families with adolescents, as this becomes a much more relevant need.

cont.



Where to meet people

In your typical routine. Think about the places you visit on a regular basis (coffee shop, taking the bus, restaurant, stores, etc.). Are there opportunities in these places for you to connect with someone? Is there a person in those places you feel interested in?

Online/Dating apps. This will allow you to get to know a person through messaging and potentially phone calls before meeting them in person. This can be an appropriate option if you don't feel you encounter those you're interested in regularly.

- Remember to always meet in a public place when meeting someone in person for the first time.
- Never agree to send anyone money or allow them to send you money or gift cards.
- Don't share personal information such as your address, social security number, credit card and bank account details, or any other private information. If someone is asking you for any of that, they may be planning to take advantage of you.
- Before meeting in person, ask the person to do a video call with you. If they are not willing to be on video, this could be a warning sign that they are not who they claim to be.

Social groups and clubs. This can take the pressure off because you are with a group of people, and you can get to know someone in the group before asking them out on a date. Check out the [Community Calendar](#) on the AAoM website to find opportunities for this resource in your area!

Asking someone on a date

Assess if there's an interest. Although you can't always know someone's interest from body language, you can get clues. If someone makes every effort to be around you, that is a good sign. On the other hand, if they are passing on opportunities to spend time with you, they may not be interested.

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Preparing for the Date

Practicing with someone you trust. Watching romantic movies to learn about how to act on a date is an option, but keep in mind that movies are fiction and not always a good depiction of reality. Have a trusted friend or family member with you so you can talk about things that don't make sense and build your understanding of different responses.

Be sure to practice good hygiene and grooming. Remember to shower, put on clean clothes, use deodorant, brush your teeth, and groom your hair. Even someone who likes you will not want to spend time with you if you smell or look bad.

Sensory issues. Think about the environment you will be in during the date and plan ahead for how you will cope with sensory overwhelm.

Small talk. Practice your conversational skills with a trusted person. Learn how to express interest in what the other person is saying, even if you aren't that interested. You should also know how to tell if someone is getting bored with the conversation.

Potential topics. Plan ahead for conversation topics that are "safe" and not controversial. Avoid politics and religion until you get to know someone better.

Be yourself! Autistic people tend to mask. While you don't need to tell someone everything about you right in the beginning, don't deliberately hide things or lie about things you like or dislike. You want to date someone who likes you for who you are, not who you are pretending to be.

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Intimacy. Remember that both people have to consent to physical intimacy like hugging, kissing, and sexual activity. Consent means that an individual says “yes” and the “yes” is given freely. If a person is pressured, persuaded, or manipulated to get them to say yes, it is not consent.

Consider these items to ensure neither person is pressuring or being pressured to say yes when they don't want to:

- If someone says “No”, accept that “No” without question and do not ask again.
- If someone says something that is not “Yes” or “No”, such as “Maybe,” “I’m not sure,” or “I don’t know about that,” you should accept that they are not ready for that next step. Your response might be something like, “That’s okay, we can wait.”
- Remember that consent can be withdrawn at any time.

Additional Resources:

- **Elevatus Training** – Sexuality Education for People with I/DD has content on navigating healthy relationships and is offered free in many regions of Michigan through an initiative from Michigan Developmental Disability Council.
 - Livingston County team: <http://www.arclivingston.org/navigating>
 - For info about other regions, contact Mary Shehan-Boogaard, Community Inclusion Coordinator, DD Council, 517-284-7288, shehanboogaardm@michigan.gov.
- [Relationships and Dating | Autism Speaks](#)
- [Dating advice from adults with autism we can all use - ABC Everyday](#)
- **Netflix’s “Love on the Spectrum”** also offers a candid view of what these needs look like and how they’re navigated.



Employee Spotlight: Black History Month

Contributed by AAoM's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

Kristi | Marketing & Communications Manager

Kristi has been the Marketing & Communications Manager for AAoM since August of 2022. She is responsible for building brand strategy and alignment around all marketing & communication at AAoM. She has previously served as the Senior Property Marketing Specialist at Novi Town Center and as the Marketing and Investor Relations Manager at Cedar Realty Trust. Kristi graduated from Wayne State University earning a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration specializing in Advertising/Marketing and has been working in Marketing for 14+ years.

Kristi lives in Farmington Hills, Michigan, is the oldest of 11 siblings (yes there is a story there) and enjoys spending time with family, watching college and professional football and basketball, trying new restaurants, road trips and is currently teaching herself to play the acoustic guitar.



Kimatha | Navigation Specialist

Working with individuals with disabilities, mental illness, and the disadvantaged has always been Kim's passion. She is determined to break past cultural barriers and obtain the knowledge needed to serve others with different cultural backgrounds. Her aim is to work with underserved communities who do not have access to many resources.

In 2019 she graduated with her Masters in Social Work. The following year in 2020 she volunteered with the Peace Corps where she was stationed in Ecuador. During her service she catered to children in underserved communities teaching English but also highlighting the importance of mental health.

In her spare time she powerlifts, which has become her favorite sport. Kim says, "Typically I am one of two black women in the entire meet, or I am the only one." While she continues to grow in her career and self-develop, her goal will always be to serve those in need no matter where they are from or what language they speak.





You're Invited!

2023 Navigating Autism Today Conference

Friday, March 10th, 2023
Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi, Michigan



Register at aaomconference.org



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FIGHTING FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
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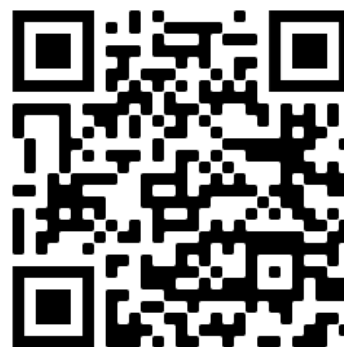


Upcoming Community Events



Date	Event	Location
February 20	Hip-Hop Dance Routine	Traverse City
February 21	Iyengar Yoga	Traverse City
February 21	Building Connections & Community	Ann Arbor
February 22	Bad Axe Inclusive Art Class	Bad Axe
February 23	Art Auction Gala	Grand Rapids
February 25	Adaptive Skiing and Snowboarding	Grand Rapids
March 2	Special Education State Complaints	Virtual
March 4	Sensory Friendly Open Gym	Lansing
March 10	Disability Awareness Day	Grand Rapids
March 15	Literacy Fest	Detroit

Looking for more to do?
Scan the QR Code for
more events!





POWERED BY AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN

Upbound Staffing, a fully integrated program within the Autism Alliance of Michigan, leads and supports disability-employment initiatives throughout the State of Michigan.

Contact Upbound Staffing:

Website: <https://upboundstaffing.com/>

Email: upbound@aaomi.org

Phone: [1-\(248\) 508-8693](tel:1-248-508-8693)



MiPAAC

MICHIGAN PARENT, ADVOCATE
& ATTORNEY COALITION

Powered by  Autism Alliance
of Michigan

Michigan Parent, Advocate & Attorney Coalition (MiPAAC) is a newly formed statewide group focused on student centered advocacy.

Contact MiPAAC:

[MiPAAC membership Form](#)

<https://mipaac.org/>



MiNavigator

The MiNavigator team is a group of professionals ready to serve and connect those touched by autism with the most up to date services and resources available in our state.

Contact MiNavigator:

Website: <https://aaomi.org/contact-minavigator/>

Email: navigator@aaomi.org

Phone: [877-463-2266](tel:877-463-2266)

Navigators are available Monday through Friday,
from 9 am to 5pm

