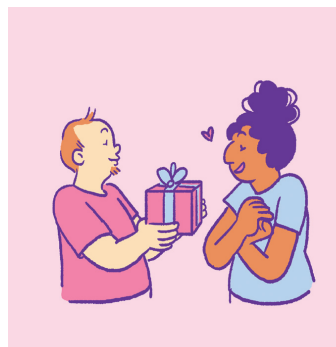
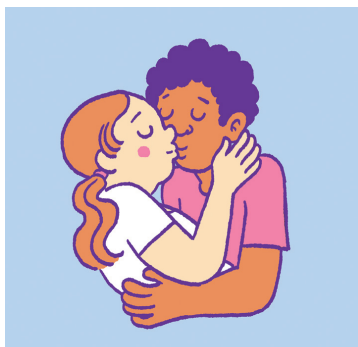


HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEX

A practical guide to sexual education,
for parents of teens and young adults
with trisomy 21



Introduction

The sexuality of people with trisomy 21 is often overlooked. It is still common to believe that they are not interested in sex, and therefore it is useless to talk to them about it. Yet these people have sexual and emotional needs and desires, and they often have the urge to be in a relationship.

An appropriate education can enable your child to **develop their sexuality in a healthy and satisfying manner**. It is also a **way to prevent sexual abuse**. It is important to provide them with information and guidance to enable them to understand their desires and needs, and to help them adopt socially acceptable, safe and respectful behaviors.

This guide aims to introduce you to the sexual education needs of your teenager or young adult, to answer your questions, and to **equip you as an educator**.

Sexuality can be a daunting subject, but remember that you are the expert on your child. Trust yourself! If necessary, there are people who can help you:

- Several professionals and organizations (specialized educators, social workers, etc.) are involved in your kid's life and can help you.
- RT21 is available to accompany you and provide you with educational tools adapted to your needs.



What does the sexuality of people with trisomy 21 look like?

They have sexual experiences and needs similar to those who do not have trisomy 21. In adolescence and adulthood, they may want to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, to have physical contact with their lover, kiss them, etc. Keep in mind that their needs will vary from one person to another.

If I talk to them about sexuality, is there a risk that they develop inappropriate sexual behavior?

On the contrary, adapted sex education can help your child behave properly in society, and maintain egalitarian and reciprocal relationships. It is essential to teach them to respect laws and social norms, to assert themselves (to learn to say no) and to take into account the consent of others. Sexual education also helps to prevent STBBI (sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections) and unwanted pregnancies, helps them to recognize potential abuse situations, and gives them the tools to seek help if needed.

How do I approach sexuality with my children?

Our tips and suggestions:

- Use **simple sentences**.
- Give **concrete examples**.
- Use **real words** to describe genitals and sexual behaviors, not metaphors that might be confusing.
- Use visual aids, such as **pictures or film excerpts**, to facilitate understanding.
- **Repeat** the information often.
- Show that you are **open** to questions and to discussions about sexuality.

Depending on your child's needs, here are some ideas of topics to discuss with him or her:

- Personal hygiene (shower, deodorant, shaving, etc.)
- Romantic relationships
- Sexual practices (making love, kissing on the mouth, masturbation, etc.)
- Prevention of STBBI and contraception (condom, hormonal contraception, etc.)
- Sexual consent
- Social norms (what is appropriate or inappropriate)
- Body image
- Sexual orientation
- Having children
- Cohabiting as a couple

It can be intimidating to discuss sexuality with your child. However, it is possible to integrate sex education into everyday life.

Our tips and suggestions:

- After watching a show or a movie, talk to your child about the scenes related to sexuality. Ask for their opinion, make connections with their own experiences, and differentiate reality from fiction.

Topics to talk about: falling in love, jealousy, homosexuality, respect, heartbreak...

What did you think of the relationship between the two characters?

Do you think that character was right to react like that because he/she was jealous?

- If your child is talking about their sexuality or emotions, ask what he/she means by that. Check their understanding of the subject, and correct if necessary:

What do you think it means to make love?

What does it mean for you, to have a lover?

How does puberty happen in people with trisomy 21?

Their sexual development is generally the same as the rest of the population, but puberty sometimes starts late.

In women, periods can be irregular and particularly long. If that is the case, a medical follow up may be needed to rule out hormonal disorders.

Puberty can be a frightening or embarrassing time. When uninformed about puberty and sexuality, people with trisomy 21 may be more worried about all these changes. It is important to accompany your child, talk to them about the development of their body and make them understand that everyone goes through this stage!



Our tips and suggestions:

- Leave illustrated books about puberty and/or the human body in your child's room or in your home. This will allow them to become familiar with this topic at their own pace.
- Review their personal hygiene routine with them, because the hormonal changes brought on by puberty often lead to more intense body odor. Make your child aware of the importance of regular washing and using deodorant.
- Take the time, with your child, to choose their new personal hygiene products. Depending on their sensory sensitivity, they may need to test several odors or textures before finding what suits them.
- When hair appears, get your child to use a razor and incorporate this habit into their personal hygiene routine. Explain that keeping or shaving body hair is a personal choice.

RT21 can provide you with tools to discuss puberty with your child (visuals, website, videos). Contact us for more information.

DID YOU KNOW?

The onset of puberty may coincide with changes in mood and behavior.

My child is masturbating, is that normal?

Masturbation is a perfectly normal and healthy behavior. However, your child may be masturbating in public places or in front of people. It is therefore important to make them understand that it is a behavior that must remain intimate, and that they can only masturbate when they are **alone in their room** with the **door and the curtains closed**:

It's ok to touch yourself to experience pleasure but I want you to do it when you're alone in your room.

You may also catch your child masturbating when entering their room. This can be an opportunity to discuss the need for intimacy with them :

From now on, I'll knock on your door before entering. Is that okay with you?

If your teen gets injured while masturbating, for example by using hard objects to rub themselves, you can talk to them about how to avoid getting hurt. Images or objects can be used to mimic proper masturbation method.

There are also people who do not masturbate, which is also normal.

How can I help them flourish in their intimate relationships and sexuality?

Like everyone else, your child has the right to their private life. It is therefore necessary to **think of ways to respect their intimacy**:

- Does your child prefer that you knock on their bedroom door before entering?
- Are they allowed to invite a close friend into their room?

Check their understanding of what is private and what is public, while allowing them to access a **safe place** where they can **live their intimacy at their own pace**.

Our tips and suggestions:

- Offer to organize some romantic time with their girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Give your child the opportunity to put a «Do not disturb» sign on their bedroom door when they feel the need.
- If it is not possible for them to have their own room, provide them with room-dividers to give them privacy.
- Offer them a double bed as an adult to allow their lover to sleep over.
- Create meeting opportunities with young people of their age: classes, group outings, etc.



Can I teach my child to use a contraceptive and/or condom?

You can teach them that having sex is a fun activity, but it can also have consequences like pregnancy or a STBBI. If you feel they are receptive, show them that there are ways to avoid these consequences and teach them how to use a condom.

Our tips and suggestions:

- Use real words.
- Demonstrate with real condoms.
- Make sure they are able to handle the condom correctly.
- Use the poster of how to put a condom on, located in the annex of this guide.

If your daughter is in a relationship, take the time to discuss her sexual desires and needs with her. If necessary, you can make an appointment with a doctor to see possible contraceptive options.

How can I protect my child from sexual abuse?

It is important to provide information to your child so they can recognize abusive behavior and seek help if needed.

Our tips and suggestions:

- Work with them to learn how to be assertive in everyday life.
- Teach them that their body belongs to them and that they have the right to refuse to be touched.
- Make them understand that they have the right to say "no" if something makes them uncomfortable.
- Tell them what their private parts are and that no one can touch them or look at them without their permission. You can use the poster provided in the annex.
- Explain that you should not touch other people's private parts without their permission or strip naked in public.
- Help your child identify trusted people they can talk to in case of problems.



DID YOU KNOW?

Hormonal contraception can help reduce menstrual bleeding and regulate the menstrual cycle.



What is consent?

Consent is the permission someone gives to another person to do something. For example: accepting a hug, agreeing to kiss, agreeing to a romantic date, etc. Consent must be given only because you want to, not because you feel compelled, because you are afraid of hurting, or because you do not want the person to get angry at you. Consent is mandatory for anything related to sexual activity.

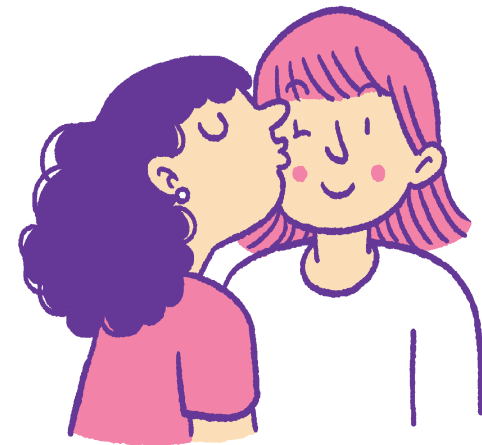
For more information:

- <https://educaloi.qc.ca/en/capsules/consent-sexual-activities>

RT21 can provide you with tools to discuss consent with your child. An illustrated poster is also available in the annex of this guide.

How can I help my child be comfortable in their friendly, romantic or sexual experiences?

- Work with them on **social skills**. This can be done with scenarios, role play and social scenarios explaining the steps to follow.
- Check their **beliefs about the stages of life**. Does your child think it is abnormal to still be single at their age? **Normalize their experience** by explaining that everyone goes at their own pace!
- If your child is in a romantic relationship, help them identify the behaviors that interest them (holding hands, kissing, caressing, etc.). Discuss the steps involved in having these behaviors and that it is possible to take your time. You can use the activities sheet in the annex.



Educational Resources

- **Mind and body - answers to your questions:** a sex education guide for young adults and teens with trisomy 21, designed by the Canadian Down Syndrome Society. Available at RT21 in English and French, and downloadable online: cdss.ca.
- **Programme PÉSSADI:** sexual health education program for parents. Available by request at RT21 (French only).
- **ibelong.ca:** information and testimonials about friendship, love and sexuality for people with intellectual disabilities.
- **zanzu.de/en:** information and illustrations about sexuality. The illustrations can be used to do activities with your child.
- **sexandu.ca:** information on sexuality (contraception, STBBI, consent, etc.).



For any questions regarding the sexual education of your child, RT21 is here to help you!

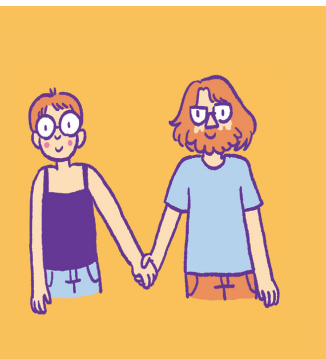
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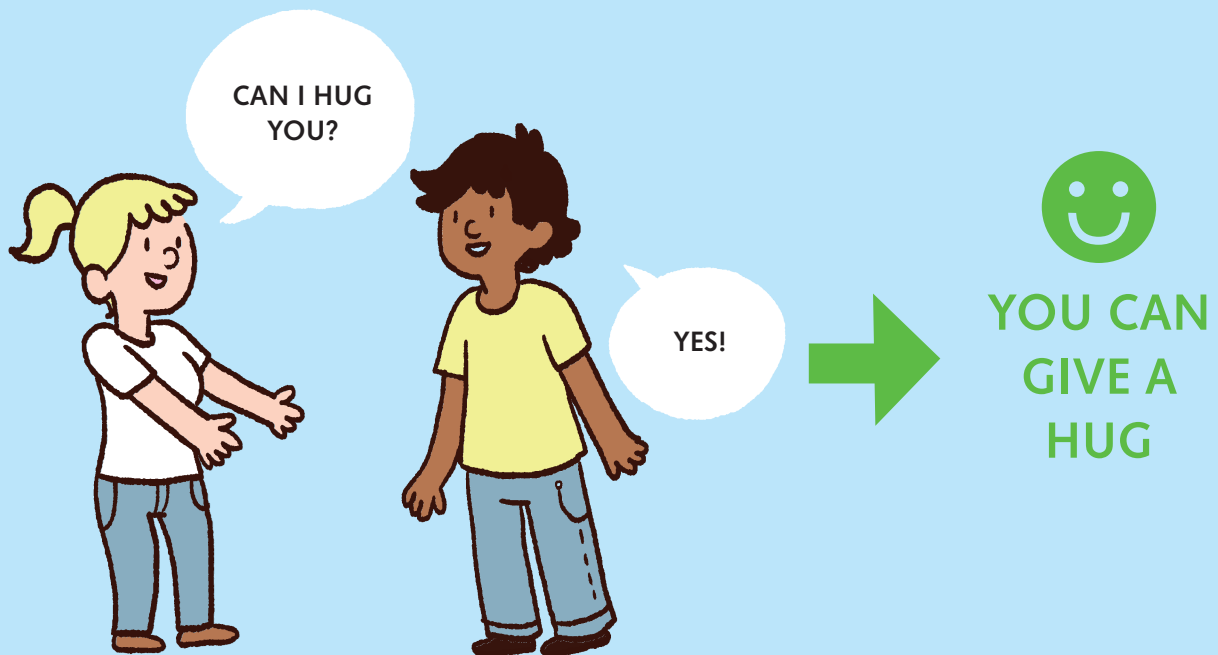
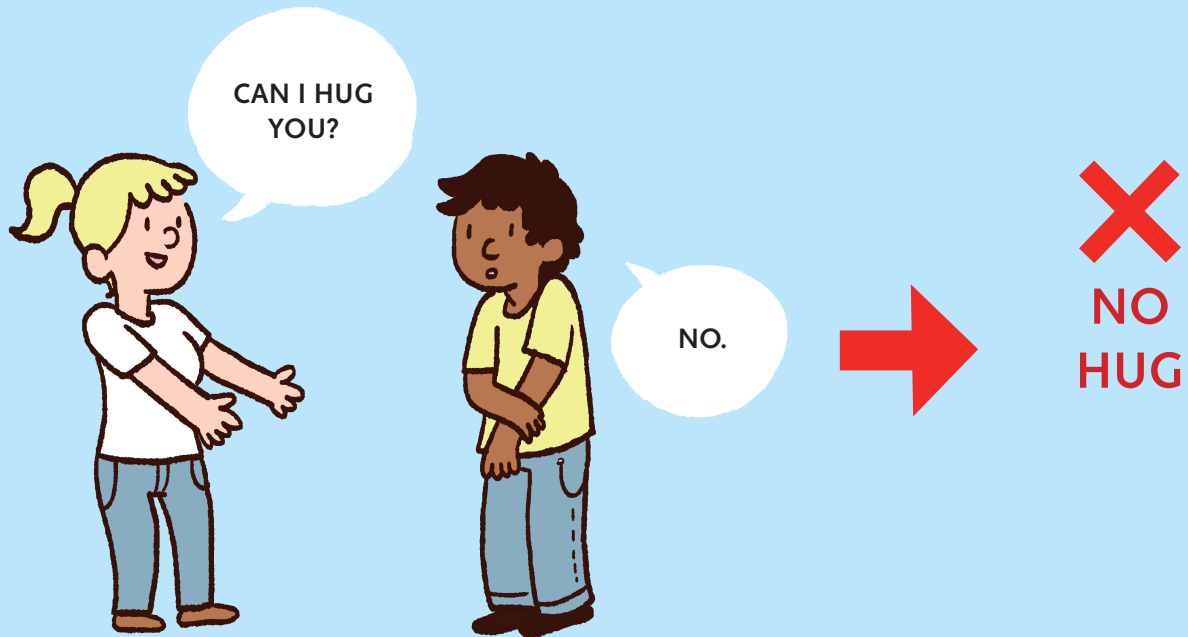
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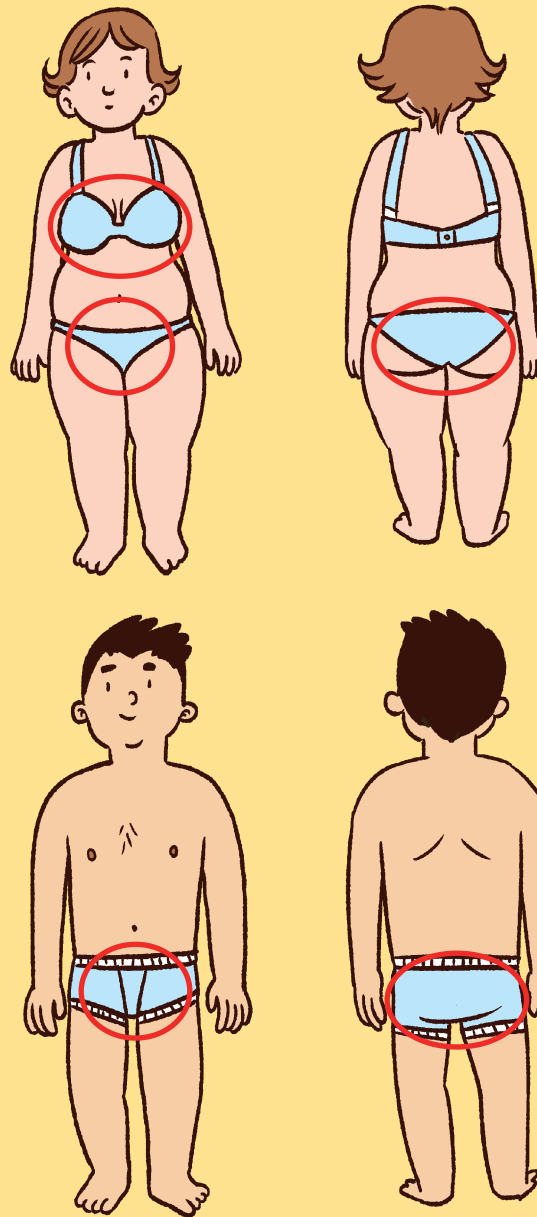


Consent is when both partners agree to do something.



Ask permission before touching someone and respect their limits.

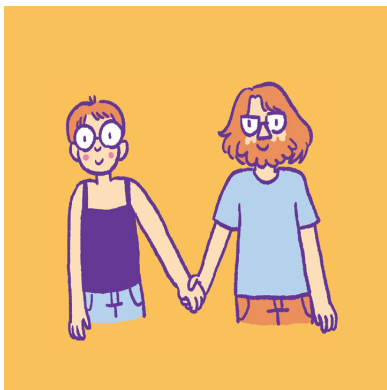
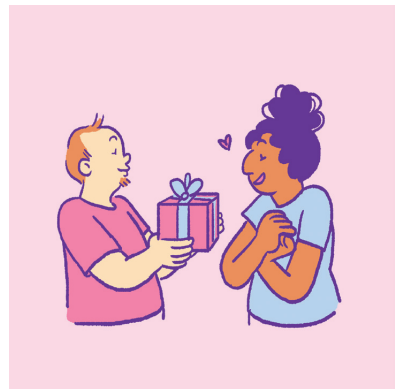
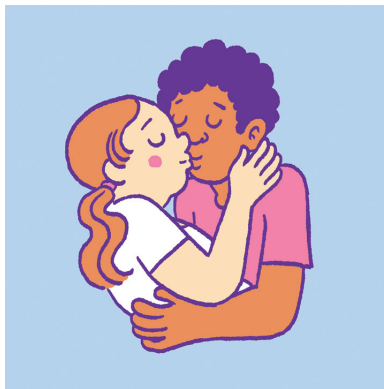
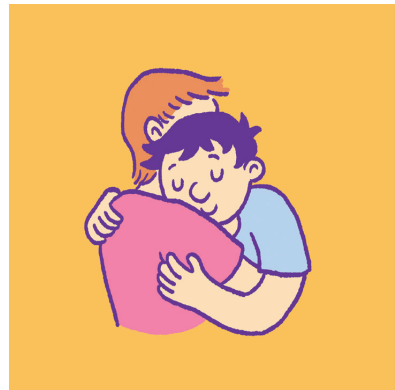
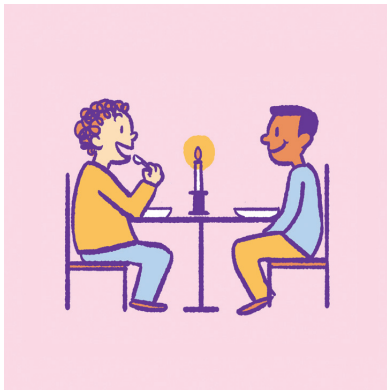
**Your private parts are those covered by
your underwear or swimsuit.**



**No one can touch or look at your
private parts without YOUR
permission!**

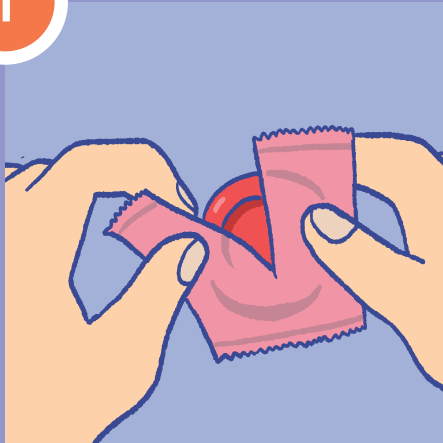
Sexual activities

- What are the things I would like to do?
- What are the things I don't want to do?



How to put a condom on

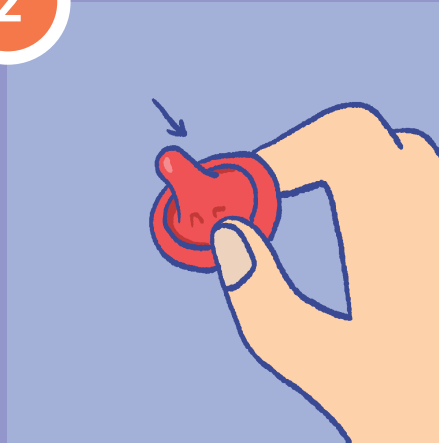
1



**OPEN THE PACKET WITH
YOUR FINGERS**

Do not use your nails or scissors because
it could damage the condom

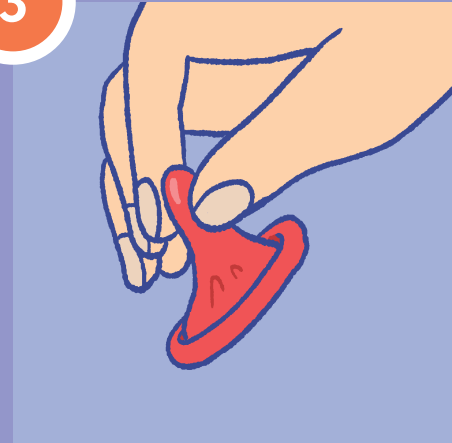
2



**IDENTIFY WHICH WAY THE
CONDOM ROLLS**

The condom should roll on easily

3



PINCH THE TIP

4



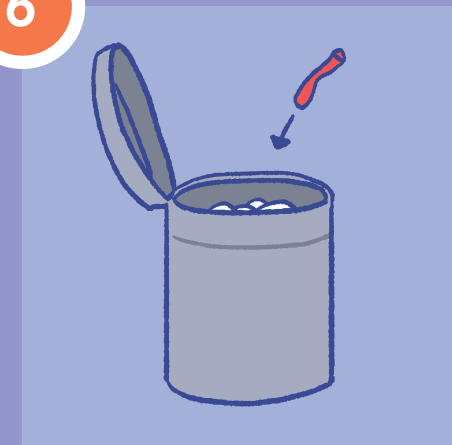
**ROLL THE CONDOM DOWN TO
THE BASE OF THE PENIS**

5



**AFTER EJACULATION, REMOVE
THE CONDOM**

6



**THROW THE CONDOM
IN THE GARBAGE**