Welcome to Relationships Decoded. If you are visiting this site, you might be a teacher, counselor, parent, or advocate who is interested in teaching social-sexual education to adults with developmental disabilities. You have come to the right place! Before you get started, please read through this brief introduction to learn about Relationships Decoded and how to use the program material.

Relationships Decoded was created in response to the phenomenon of sexual abuse as it effects people with disabilities. Research has shown that people with developmental disabilities are grossly over-represented as targets of sexual abuse. They are less likely to participate in sexual education classes. This leaves them particularly vulnerable to be targets of exploitation/abuse. Research also has shown that some people with developmental disabilities demonstrate sexual behavior that is unexpected, offensive to others, or illegal. Anyone who has not been given information about appropriate social-sexual behaviors is at risk of demonstrating this type of behavior. Programs that aim to minimize sexual abuse among people with developmental disabilities need to address these phenomena. Relationships Decoded does this by preparing participants to recognize signs of abuse and coercion, use assertiveness, and report abuse, while also training people how to obtain consent and recognize social-sexual laws and norms. We want all participants to have the knowledge and skills to enter into consensual, safe, and meaningful relationships of their choosing.

Luckily, research has demonstrated that education is a significant protective factor against sexual abuse, leading to the practice of self-protection skills in real life situations. Additionally, education leads to the reduction of inappropriate/offensive sexual behaviors in people with intellectual disabilities who have committed sexual offenses, particularly when programs include cognitive behavioral interventions.

Relationships Decoded makes use of the most current evidence-based teaching practices in all of its lesson plans. These practices were adopted based on the National Professional Development Center ASD 2014 Report on Evidence Based Practices. The program supports the use of all of the following evidence-based teaching practices: technology-based instruction, video modeling, cognitive-behavioral interventions, social narratives, social-skills training, and scripting. It is important that facilitators have some familiarity with the evidence-based teaching practices that are used in the curriculum. Facilitators can review AFIRM (autism focused intervention and modules), a free online resource to learn about proper implementation of evidence based practices before starting the curriculum.

Relationships Decoded is divided into two programs, an Introductory Program and an Advanced Program. The Introductory Program focuses on foundational concepts such as

differentiating between public and private places, identifying wanted/unwanted touches, and practicing the use of assertive communication. It also provides foundational information on attraction, dating, expected behaviors on public dates, and sexual abuse.

The Advanced Program explores signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships, explores their own values and boundaries, and discusses dating safety (including online safety). It also addresses consent, coercion, sexual abuse, contraception, and sexual health.

Every lesson includes two parts: lesson plans for facilitators and visual supports for participants. Lesson plans are only viewed by facilitators, whereas, the visual supports are presented to the participants.

Lesson plans can be viewed on a computer, mobile device, or can be printed out. The first page of every lesson plan includes goals, teaching tips, learning objectives, and any necessary materials. The content pages guide the facilitator by providing icons on the left margin that correlate with the visual supports (i.e., videos and photos). The right hand column provides verbal prompts for facilitators. Bolded sentences are recommended to be spoken verbatim by the facilitator. All other language includes suggested prompts and discussion starters.

Visual supports are the photos and videos that correspond with the lesson plans and must be viewable to participants. They can be viewed on any device that has an internet connection. If teaching a small group, they can be viewed on a tablet or computer. For larger groups, they should be viewed on a larger screen. It is necessary to have audio capacity to listen to the videos.

In order to be prepared, it is highly recommended that facilitators review the entire lesson plan along with the visual supports before using it with participants.

For more information, please review the individual lesson plans and visual supports, the frequently asked questions section on the website, or reach out to us directly at relationshipsdecodedproject@gmail.com