

DOWN SYNDROME AND DATING

The Role of Occupational Therapy Intervention

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SIGNIFICANCE

Intimate relationships are a form of social participation and are strongly associated with quality of life.



Individuals with Down syndrome often experience difficulties establishing and maintaining such relationships.

Common Struggles

- Understanding social cues
- Communicating effectively
- Interpreting emotions
- Maintaining self-care



CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS



As a practitioner, it is crucial to promote

- Self-esteem
- Social interaction skills
- Self-assertion
- Sexual health

The Importance of Context

Dating is an occupation which will require unique intervention depending on personal factors such as age and sexual orientation of the patient.



HOW CAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY HELP?



1 "Practicing" dating

Teaching about the complex nuances, behaviors, and emotions associated with dating.



2 Establishing boundaries

Helping to preserve the safety of the patient by educating about sexual exploitation and abuse.



3 Promoting self-care

Reinforcing bathing, dressing, and hygiene skills which play a role in intimate relationships.



4 Safe sex education

Educating the patient and caregivers about fertility, consent, STI prevention, and the proper use of contraceptives.

5 Resources for caregivers

Addressing attitudes, unconscious biases, and parental anxiety which serve as a barrier against sex and intimacy.

