Reading the Signals

Flirting, friendship and staying safe: a guide for girls

new leaves CLINIC

Flirting is when someone shows they like another person in a crush kind of way. It is mostly done with hints instead of clear words, which makes it confusing for a lot of people, and especially for autistic girls.

Your brain likes clear, honest information, and flirting is not very clear or honest. This handout explains the hidden rules so you can understand what is happening and stay safe.

1 Why flirting is hard to read

People don't say what they mean

Someone might say "Cool shoes" when they really mean "I like you."

Nice and "liking" look the same

It can be hard to tell if a person is just friendly or has a crush.

Teasing can be a hint

Sometimes people tease someone they like. Sometimes teasing is just mean. It's hard to tell the difference.

Copying can send a message

If you copy how someone acts around their crush, people may think you have a crush too.

2 When I might seem flirty

NOT BAD, BUT PEOPLE MAY READ IT AS A CRUSH

- Long eye contact while smiling
- Often saying someone looks nice or cute
- Touching their arm or shoulder, or lots of hugs
- Texting one person much more than others
- Wanting to be with one person all the time

Just want to be friends? Spread your attention around, and say it clearly: "I really like hanging out with you as a friend."

3 Signs someone may be flirting

THINGS TO NOTICE

- Playful teasing while smiling or laughing
- Finding reasons to be near you or talk alone
- Saying nice things about how you look
- Treating you differently than other people
- Texting or messaging you a lot

None of these is a sure thing. If you're not sure, ask a trusted person. You don't have to figure it out alone.

4 Staying safe

This is the most important part

Autistic girls often miss flirting, and they can also miss the warning signs that a person is not safe. That is not your fault. Some people pretend to be kind on purpose so you will trust them. These rules help you notice.

Why it can be harder for me

You might believe what people say, even when they are not being honest.

You might think someone is your friend just because they are nice to you.

You might go along with things to be polite or fit in, even when you feel uncomfortable.

You might not notice that a bad feeling in your body is a warning.

Warning signs a person may not be safe

- **They ask you to keep a secret** from your parents or other adults.
- **They ask for photos** of you, especially private ones.
- **They want to meet you alone** or somewhere adults won't know about.
- **They give gifts or lots of attention,** then act like you owe them something.
- **They say only they understand you,** or say bad things about your family or friends.
- **They don't stop** when you say no, or make you feel bad for saying no.
- **They are an adult or much older** and act like they have a crush on you. This is never okay, even if they seem nice.
- **You met them online** and they want to talk in private apps or move the chat somewhere else.

Rules to remember

- ✓ You never owe anyone a hug, a touch, a photo, or a reply.
- ✓ "No" is a full answer. You don't have to explain.
- ✓ If something feels weird, confusing, or uncomfortable, that feeling matters. Tell a trusted adult.
- ✓ You will not get in trouble for telling. Even if you already did what they asked, tell someone.

5 What I can do

Pick a "decoder" person

Someone you trust, like a parent, older sister, aunt, or school counselor. Ask them, "What do you think this person meant?"

Ask directly

It's okay to say, "Do you mean that as a friend?"

Take a pause

If you feel confused, say "Let me think about it," and check with your decoder person first.

Practice

Role-playing real situations with someone you trust makes it easier to know what to say.

My trusted people

	NAME	PHONE
1		
2		
3		

Books for me

The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide

Siena Castellon

Written by an autistic teen for girls like you, about friendships, crushes, and staying safe.

The Asperkid's (Secret) Book of Social Rules

Jennifer Cook O'Toole

Explains the unwritten social rules in a clear, funny way.

M Is for Autism & M in the Middle

Students of Limpsfield Grange School

Stories written by autistic girls about a girl who finds social stuff confusing.

A Kind of Spark

Elle McNicoll

A novel about an autistic girl who stands up for herself.

Confused is okay. Asking is smart. Telling keeps you safe.