

# Making Decisions - Your Relationships



**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY BODIES**

*Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability*

**CENTRE for DISABILITY  
LAW & POLICY**





You can have lots of different relationships with people; your family, your friends, the people you live with and the people you work with, and other people we meet everyday. In this section we will talk about different kinds of relationships.

Making decisions about these relationships is very important.

Making these decisions everyday will help you when you have to make more important decisions – about your friendships and relationships.



## 1. Friendships



## 2. Romantic Relationships



## 3. Sexual Relationships



## 4. Living together as a couple



## 5. Marriage and Civil Partnerships

## 1. MAKING DECISIONS - Your Friendships



Friendship describes the relationship we have with our friends.

Friends are people we like and we enjoy doing things with them.

Friends like each other, do things they enjoy together and support one another.

You can have many different friends - men and women, old and young.

You can meet new people through family, friends, clubs, by visiting the shops, maybe a Personal Assistant can help introduce you to new people.

## MAKING DECISIONS : It's your friendships

### Stepping Stones to making decisions with and about friends:



### What you can do with your friends...



## 2. MAKING DECISIONS - Your Romantic Relationships



Sometimes friendships can change. Your friendship can become a romantic relationship.

A romantic relationship means you have strong feelings for this person.

In a romantic relationship you want to be with your boyfriend/girlfriend. You may want to hold hands, kiss them and hold them.

Some relationships are good and you feel happy, loved and safe.

Some relationships are bad and you may feel sad or someone may be hurting you.

It's important to ask yourself if you think is this a good relationship for you?

You may like to talk to people you trust when making decisions about your relationships.

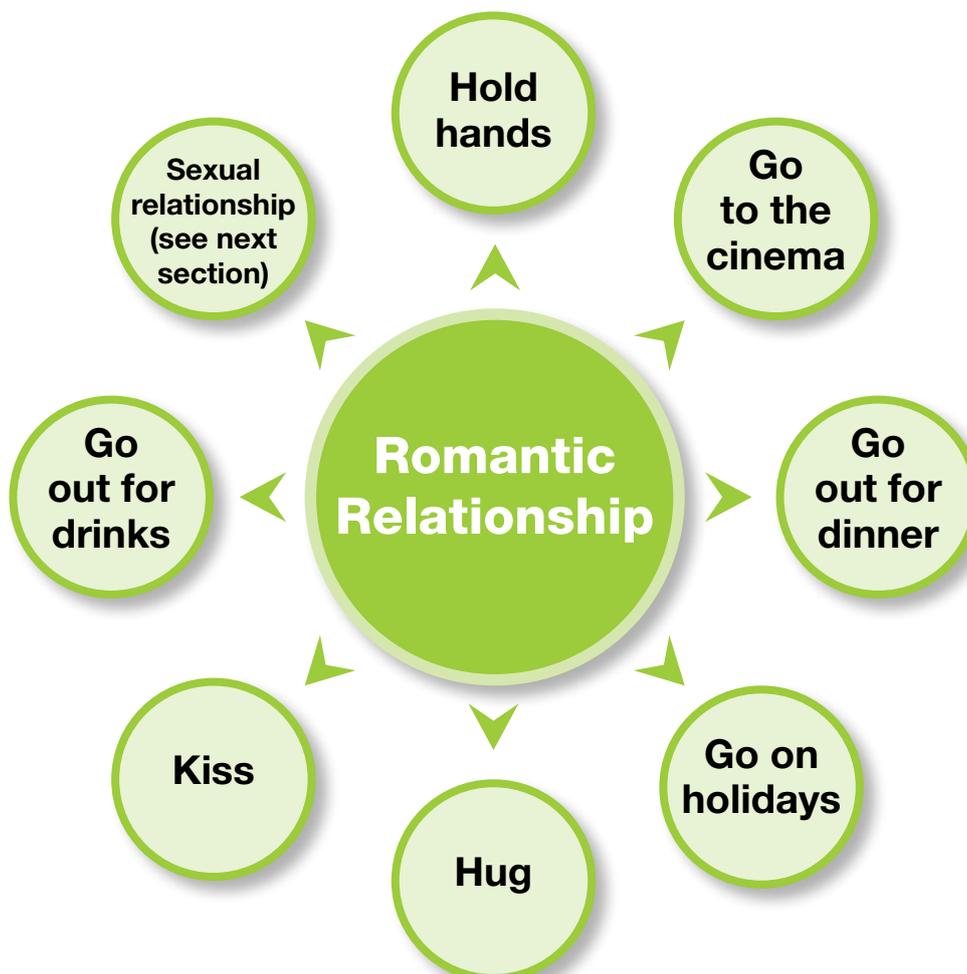
Someone you trust can include a friend, an advocate, a family member, or a person who knows you very well.

## MAKING DECISIONS : It's your Romantic Relationships

### Stepping Stones to making decisions about romantic relationships:



### What you can do in your romantic relationship...



### 3. MAKING DECISIONS - Sexual Relationships



The law says that adults have capacity. This means being able to make your own decision about something.

The law says having capacity means that:

- you are able to understand the information about the decision so that you can decide
  - If you do not understand the information you are being given, you should ask for a clearer explanation
  - You should continue to ask until you understand
  - You should ask as many questions as you need to
- you remember the information
- you are able to understand the different choices you have so that you can make a decision
- you are able to understand what will happen when you make your decision
- you can tell or show someone what you want.

You can tell or show someone by:

- Using words
- Using pictures
- Using signs like Lámh or Irish Sign Language
- Using your communication device
- Using gestures
- Using any of these together

You should be given the chance to make choices and decisions for yourself.

The people around you, people you trust or family, should support and help you to make whatever decisions you want about your sexual relationships.

A sexual relationship often involves sexual intercourse or making love. It can also include holding, kissing and touching each other on private parts of the body.

Other words people use are “sex” or “making love”.

A sexual relationships should be a pleasurable thing but it is also quite private.

If you want advice or help, you may like to talk to people you trust when making decisions about a sexual relationship.

Someone you trust can include a friend, an advocate, a family member, or someone who knows you very well.

It is a good idea to seek information from someone you trust or a doctor or a nurse about safe sex. Safe sex means you are protected against diseases or unwanted pregnancy, like using a condom.

It is very important that you agree to have “sex” with the person and that you are happy having sex.

## MAKING DECISIONS - It is your sexual relationship

**Stepping Stones to making a decision about a sexual relationship:**



# VICKIE AND DAVID ...



Vickie has a boyfriend called David. They have been going out for a long time.

They go to the cinema every week and out for walks in the park by Vickie's house.

They really like each other and want to spend all their time together.

Lately, Vickie and David have been considering having sex. She talks to her friend Clare about her decision.

She also talks to her trusted support worker Joanne.

Both Clare and Joanne tell Vickie how serious her decision is. They give her information about having sex. They talk about getting pregnant.

She wants to understand everything about her choice

Vickie understands all the advice Joanne and Clare give her.

She decides to speak to David.

It is important for David to understand all that is involved.

Vickie and David must now discuss this and decide what they wish to do.

*Vicky and David had a happy romantic relationship and wanted to have a sex. Vicky looked for support from trusted friends and support workers. She got important information on having sex. She discussed this with David and they made their decision.*

## Exploitation:

Exploitation means one person takes unfair advantage of another person.

If you said “no’ to sex and a person forces you to have sex, this is exploitation.

The law says this is wrong.

Exploitation can make you feel sad hurt, guilty, or ashamed.

Sometimes a person may not be able to make a decision about a sexual relationship.

A court may be asked to decide if you have been exploited. To decide this the judge will look at how well you are able to look after yourself.

**The law says:** It is against the law to have sexual intercourse if you are incapable of living an independent life or you cannot protect yourself from exploitation.



## 4 MAKING DECISIONS - Couples who live together



Couples who live together in a romantic/sexual relationship and have agreed to stay together can qualify for rights under a new law if the relationship ends.

These couples are called cohabitants and can be same sex couple relationships or man and woman relationships.

### The Law says

- You must be over 18 years
- You cannot be married to each other or in a civil partnership.
- You cannot be closely related to each other
- You must be living together for 5 years
- If you have a child together you must be living together for two years

## 5. MAKING DECISIONS - Getting Married



Having capacity means being able to make your own decision about something.

Sometimes relationships can develop further. You could get married.

This means that when you marry somebody, you plan to be together forever.

You make this promise when you marry.

It's good to talk to people you trust when making decisions about getting married.

Someone you trust can include a friend, an advocate, a family member, a support worker, a supporter or a house parent.

## The Law says

Marriage is a legal contract. You must be able to understand what marriage involves: –

- You must be a man and a woman
- You must promise to stay together and think about your husband's or wife's needs as well as your own
- You must be over 18 years
- You must be free to marry
- You cannot be married to someone else
- You cannot marry a close family relation like a brother/sister, father/mother, aunt/uncle, granny/grandad.
- You must have capacity to marry
- You must freely consent to marry
- You must give 3 months notice to the person in charge of marriages

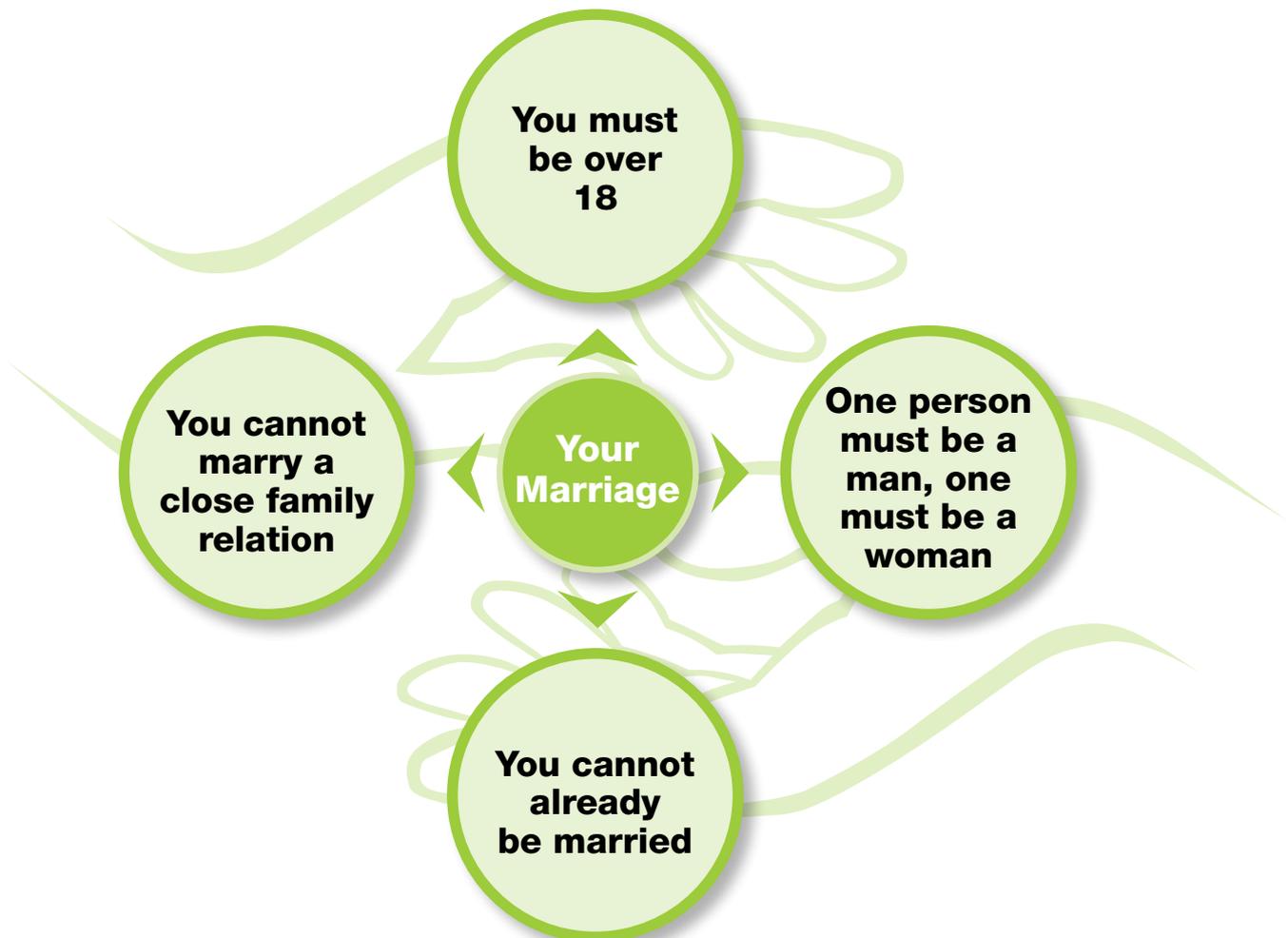


## MAKING DECISIONS : Getting Married

Stepping Stones to making decisions about marriage:



Necessary steps to get married:



# VICKIE AND DAVID ...



Vicky and David have been in a relationship for a few years.

They want to be together forever and they want to discuss getting married.

David talks to his brother and to his trusted friend Mike.

Vicky talks to her mother and her sister and her trusted friend Kate.

They understand what marriage is about.

They go to a pre-marriage course.

They have lots of support from family and trusted friends.

They decide to get married.

## 5. MAKING DECISIONS - Civil Partnerships



Now couples who are the same sex can register their relationship as a Civil Partnership. This means two men or two women can have a Civil Partnership.

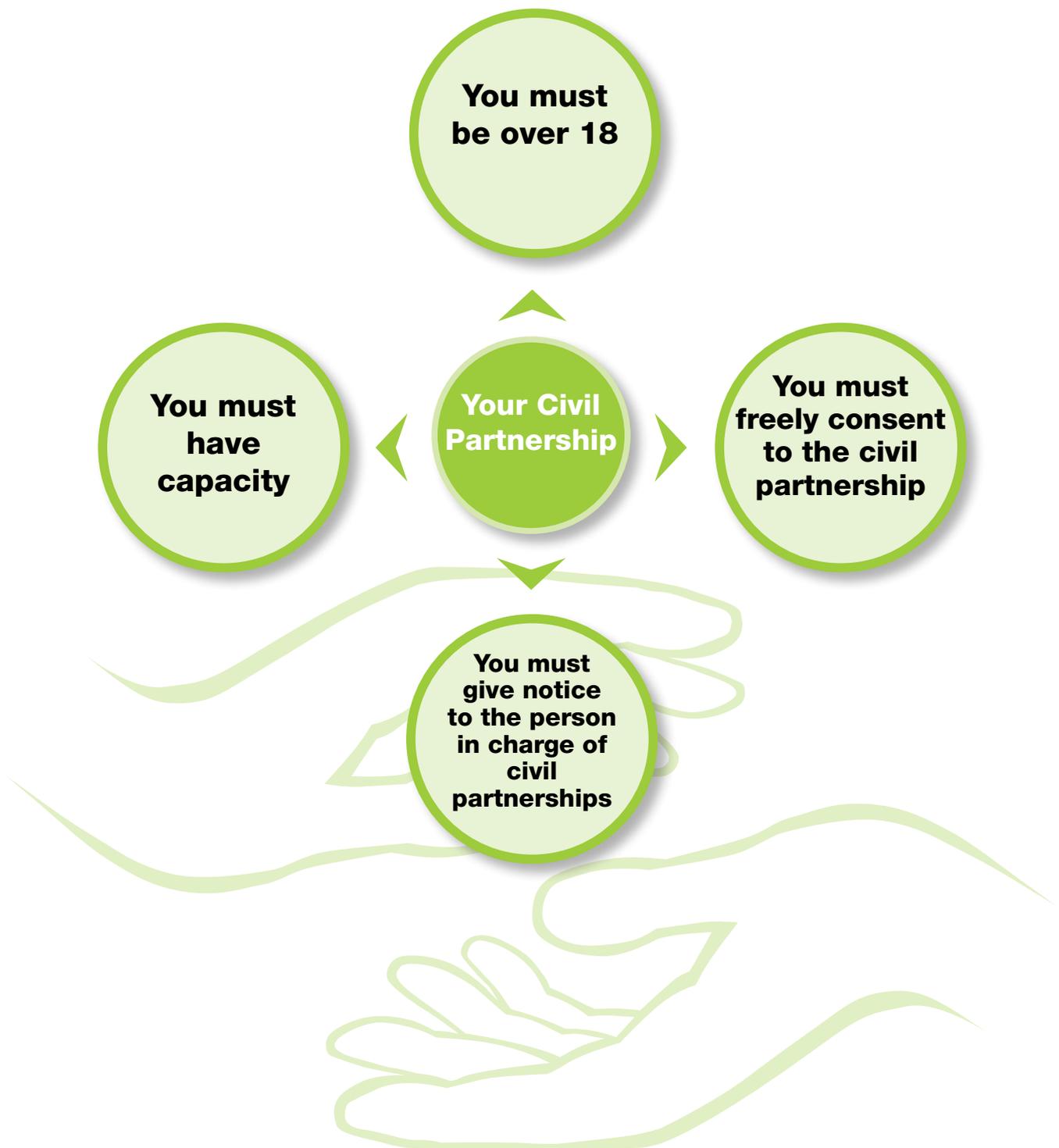
This means that couples who are the same sex have nearly the same rights and obligations as married couples except for some laws about children.

Same sex partners are not allowed to marry each other.

### The Law says

- You must be over 18 years
- You must have capacity
- You must freely consent to the civil partnership
- You must give notice to the person in charge of civil partnerships

## Necessary steps to register a Civil Partnership:





## PETER & JOE ...

## DEIRDRE & TERESA ...

Peter and Joe, have been in a relationship for 3 years and would like to stay together forever. They would like to get married.

Deirdre and Teresa have been in a relationship for 4 years. They would like to stay together forever too and get married.

They cannot get married in Ireland.

They can have a Civil Partnership. They can register their relationship which is a bit like marriage.

They talk to their families and trusted friends.

They understand what a Civil Partnership is about.

They have a lot of support from family and trusted friends.

They decide on having a civil partnership.