The North Carolina Relationships Initiative (NCRI)
Social and Emotional Relationships Position Statement

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) want to have healthy social and emotional relationships with others – including romantic relationships. Yet many people with IDD regularly feel lonely and isolated – more than people without disabilities. These conditions increase the risk of experiencing disease, abuse, and neglect.

Results from the 2008 North Carolina National Core Indicators Survey show that about half of people with IDD are lonely at least some of the time. Additionally, about 1 in 4 said they have no one to talk to about personal matters.

Further, in interviews and focus groups across North Carolina, people with IDD, family members, provider agency staff, and others report many barriers that prevent people from having the healthy relationships they want. For example:

- Individuals with IDD do not have control over their own lives,

- Many people do not believe people with disabilities are capable of handling relationships, and

- There is an overwhelming lack of education and support for individuals, families, and staff that would address a variety of individual, community, and system-level barriers that prevent people with IDD from experiencing healthy relationships.

People with disabilities should be supported to develop a wide range of healthy relationships with others based on individual interests, preferences, and desires to participate in community life.

Individuals with disabilities, families, provider agencies, and paid staff should have access to education and support that includes but is not limited to:

- Self-determination, social skills, relationships, personal and financial safety, and sexuality and disability.

- Future planning, guardianship, alternatives to guardianship, and how these supports can prevent or increase access to a rich community life.

- Person-centered approaches to supporting individuals to live independent lives with the supports they need to be successful.

- Policies and practices that increase opportunities for people to experience healthy social and emotional relationships.