

## Sexuality Education for People with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

“We take the position that by developing positive attitudes in staff, parents, and people with disabilities regarding both sexuality and disability, a new era of acceptance and healthy sexual development can begin.”<sup>1</sup>

**Myth:** Sexuality education is not important for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

**Fact:** Comprehensive, life-long and individualized sexuality education is important for all people to develop healthy self-esteem and relationships. If people with I/DD choose to be sexual, sexuality education can offer some protection from sexual violence and abuse, unplanned pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>2 3</sup>

**Myth:** Providing sexuality education will encourage to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have sex.

**Fact:** People have sex with or without sexuality education. Having sexuality education can actually lead to making better decisions about when to have sex or not<sup>4</sup>.

**Myth:** People with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not understand sexuality.

**Fact:** Most people are sexual beings, and many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have communicated that they want to express their sexualities.<sup>5</sup> If sexuality education begins early and is life long, people with and without disabilities will be able to learn about sexuality at their own pace.

**Myth:** There are no sexuality education curricula for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Fact:** There are quite a few sexuality education curricula for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities<sup>6</sup>. However, most of these curricula have not been evaluated enough to be called “evidence-based”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hingsburger, D., & Tough, S. (2002). Healthy sexuality: Attitudes, systems, and policies. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 27(1), 8-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, K. M., Bosek, R. L., & Trimble, E. L. (2010). Romantic relationships and interpersonal violence among adults with developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(2), 89-98.

<sup>3</sup> American Association on I/DD (2012) [http://www.aaid.org/content\\_198.cfm](http://www.aaid.org/content_198.cfm)

<sup>4</sup> Card, J., & Benner, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Model programs for adolescent sexual health: Evidence-based HIV, STI, and pregnancy prevention interventions*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

<sup>5</sup> Löfgren-Mårtenson, L. (2004). “May I?” about sexuality and love in the new generation with intellectual disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability*, 22(3), 197-207.

<sup>6</sup> Champagne & Walker Hirsch. (n.d.). *Circles*; Kempton (1988). *Life Horizons*; McLaughlin, Topper, Lindert, & Green Mountain Self-Advocates (2009) *Sexuality education for adults with developmental disabilities*; Reis, et al. (2006). *Family life and sexual health for middle and high school students with special needs*.

<sup>7</sup> National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center. (2012). *Evidence based practices*. Retrieved September 24, 2012, from <http://www.nsttac.org/content/evidence-based-practices>