

## Modifying Sexuality Topics for Students with Disabilities

### Break the Topic into Smaller Pieces

- Take a larger topic and consider the skills and knowledge which need to be taught; for example, young people need to cover the following topics when learning about puberty:
  - ☆ anatomy
  - ☆ feelings (need for privacy, importance of peers, sexual arousal)
  - ☆ body changes
  - ☆ personal hygiene routines (menstruation & ejaculation)
  - ☆ appropriate social behaviour (public vs. private, greetings, public affection)

### Start with the Basics

- Start with the facts and skills people need to live day to day.
- Ask students what they already know; for example, the list of skills and knowledge for puberty starts with identification of body parts and an awareness of the changes that are experienced during puberty.
- All individuals should receive information about the new feelings they are experiencing, but the depth of information will vary depending on the young person's ability to understand abstract concepts.
- The presentation of this information is especially important for young people with limited communication skills who may not have a way of expressing questions or concerns about the changes associated with puberty except through seemingly inappropriate behaviour.

### Be Concrete

- Use visual cues and descriptive body language.
- Ground examples in real life experience; for example, use pictures that demonstrate the changes that occur in human bodies over time.
- Have the young person identify the changes that have already happened as she or he has been growing up. This may help to normalize the changes associated with puberty.

### Be Repetitive and Cumulative

- Review from lesson to lesson.
- Build on the concepts taught in the previous lesson; for example, individuals can learn about public and private during a discussion on anatomy. In a future lesson, individuals could review the concept of public and private body parts and move to a discussion of appropriate social behaviour based on keeping certain parts of the body private; i.e. people don't touch their own or other's private body parts in public.

### Modifying for Specific Disabilities

- Focus on the individual, not the disability.
- Find out how other subjects are taught successfully.
- Work with other caregivers who understand how the individual communicates and learns.
- Contact a specialist (e.g. CNIB, audiologist, speech-language pathologist) for help in modifying information for young people who use alternative or augmented communication.
- Make judgement calls about decision-making and safety skills on a case-by-case basis.
- Try not to make generalizations about ability to make decisions and instruct about personal safety based upon the particular disability of each person.
- Avoid rationalizations such as, "This child has Down Syndrome and all children with Down Syndrome are overly trusting; therefore, we shouldn't waste our time teaching abuse prevention. Our goal should be to restrict this individual's freedom to keep him safe".