

Creating Policy and Guidelines Within Service Organizations on Sexual Health Issues for Children and Young People with Disabilities

The following is information to help you create guidelines on sexual health issues. Most of the suggestions are quite general and are meant to apply to a variety of settings in which services are provided to young people with disabilities. Consider the development and implementation of "best practice" strategies a part of any prevention program. (Samples of guidelines are taken from The Association of Community Living.)

What Topics Should Be Covered?

- **Providing Sexuality Education**
 - Do individuals have a means of communicating about their physical needs and sexuality?
 - Who will provide/coordinate the education?
- **Privacy**
 - Do individuals have space and time for privacy?
- **Personal Care**
 - Do individuals do as much of their own personal care as is possible?
 - Is there a way for individuals to distinguish between therapeutic and abusive touch?
 - Do caregivers ask permission before touching an individual?
 - Do caregivers explain the tasks involved in personal care?
- **Sexual Expression**
 - Do individuals have opportunities to develop friendships and romantic relationships?
- **Responding to Disclosures of Abuse**
 - Is there a procedure for reporting disclosures and suspicions?
 - Is there appropriate staff training on how to respond to concerns and disclosures?

Who Should be Involved?

- **Individuals with Disabilities**
 - Take time to consider how individuals communicate and obtain their input in a way that is appropriate for them.
- **Family and Caregivers**
 - Parents and others in the person's life may also have suggestions.

- **Staff**
Ask staff what kind of support they need to carry out the actions suggested by sexual health guidelines.
- **Funders**
Funders may also be a source of ideas and models for guidelines.
- **Disability Advocacy Groups**
Disability advocates may make valuable advisors when you draft your guidelines.

How will the Guidelines be Implemented?

Take time to think about how the proposed guidelines will work in real life. Consider:

- **Staff Training**
If a sexual health strategy challenges staff attitudes, then provide opportunities for discussion and clarification.
- **Accessibility**
Use diagrams, symbols, large-print and other alternative formats to ensure the guidelines can be understood by the people you serve.
- **Promotion**
Make guidelines available when an individual first joins your program.
- **Evaluation**
Set regular dates to review and revise your guidelines.