

Relationships, Sexuality, and Disability Resources

In the next year, SAFE will finalize a comprehensive manual on teaching healthy relationship and safer sexuality classes to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Until this manual is available, the resources below may help.

Creating a culture of consent

One of the biggest things you can do to support people with disabilities' understanding of healthy relationships and safer sexuality is to help create a culture of consent. We most often talk about sexual consent in our society, which is important, but consent should also be practiced every day in situations that are not sexual. Discuss with people with disabilities that consent means getting someone's permission or asking for their OK, and that there are many times every day that we must ask for and receive consent. Help people think through examples of when they need to get consent: to borrow something from someone, to share what someone else told them, to take a picture of someone or share it online, to touch someone in any way, etc. This everyday practice creates a culture of consent that can help prepare individuals to practice sexual consent.

In order for consent to happen, four things need to be true:

1. Both people need to be **thinking clearly**. This means that everyone is awake, and free from the influence of alcohol or drugs.
2. Both people give an **excited yes!** If a person doesn't say anything, or if they seem unsure, this is not an excited yes. For people who use nonverbal communication, an excited yes can be shown through body language, facial expression, communication devices, a thumbs up, nodding the head, etc.
3. There is **no pressure**. Nobody should be forced or threatened into giving consent.
4. There are **ongoing check-ins** to make sure that both people are still saying yes.

Set the expectation with the individuals in your life that all people will ask for consent before touching others, borrowing something, or sharing stories that are not theirs. It is important that people with disabilities see examples of authority figures such as parents, teachers, and support staff practicing consent by asking them before touching them or before providing assistance. "Can I help you get your jacket on? How would you like me to help? Would you like a hug?" Emphasize to people with disabilities that they can always say no to anyone who does something that they are not comfortable with or that does not feel right. This can help them learn about their boundaries, and how to communicate their boundaries to others. It is also important to learn how to accept no for an answer. While it is normal to feel disappointed when someone says no to something we want, we all need to understand that we have to respect the other person's right to tell us no. You can role play with people with disabilities different scenarios when someone asks for consent, and the appropriate ways to respond when someone says no.

Healthy relationship resources

The SAFEline is available 24/7 for survivors of abuse, as well as for friends and allies. Crisis intervention specialists can be reached by phone at 512.267.7233, by text at 737.888.7233, or by chat at safeaustin.org/chat.

amaze.org has animated videos on a variety of healthy relationship/safer sexuality topics. Their website has a section for educators with toolkits and lesson plans, all available for free.

ConnectSafely is a nonprofit dedicated to educating technology users about safety, privacy, and security online. They have information written for young adults and for parents. Their "Tips and Advice" section includes a lot of fact sheets about today's Internet safety issues. connectsafely.org

The Arc of Spokane developed a "Healthy Relationships Workbook" that can be downloaded for free at: <http://arcwhatcom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Healthy-Relationship-Workbook.pdf>

King County in Washington has a 28-week special education curriculum available to download on healthy relationships and safer sexuality. <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/family-planning/education/FLASH/special-education.aspx>

Sexuality resources

National Council on Independent Living produced a series of 10 videos created by and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities on sex education. There is also a corresponding discussion guide. Find both resources here: <https://www.ncil.org/sex-ed-for-individuals-with-i-dd/>

Katherine McLaughlin has developed a curriculum on sexuality of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The curriculum is available for sale on her website www.elevatustraining.com/. There are also several webinars available on this site.

Planned Parenthood has locations throughout Texas and provides affordable healthcare to individuals with and without insurance. They also have a wealth of educational information on their website: www.plannedparenthood.org

A report from **Multnomah County** on supporting the sexual health of individuals with IDD may be found here: <https://multco.us/school/sexual-health-youth-developmental-disabilities>

The Birds and the Bees provides information about teaching sexuality to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. <https://asdsexed.org/>

Need more?

Contact SAFE Disability Services at disabilityservices@safeaustin.org for technical assistance.