

A Connection Day to Discuss Sexuality and Young People with Disabilities

**Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
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Let's Talk Disability & Sex



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Today's Presentation

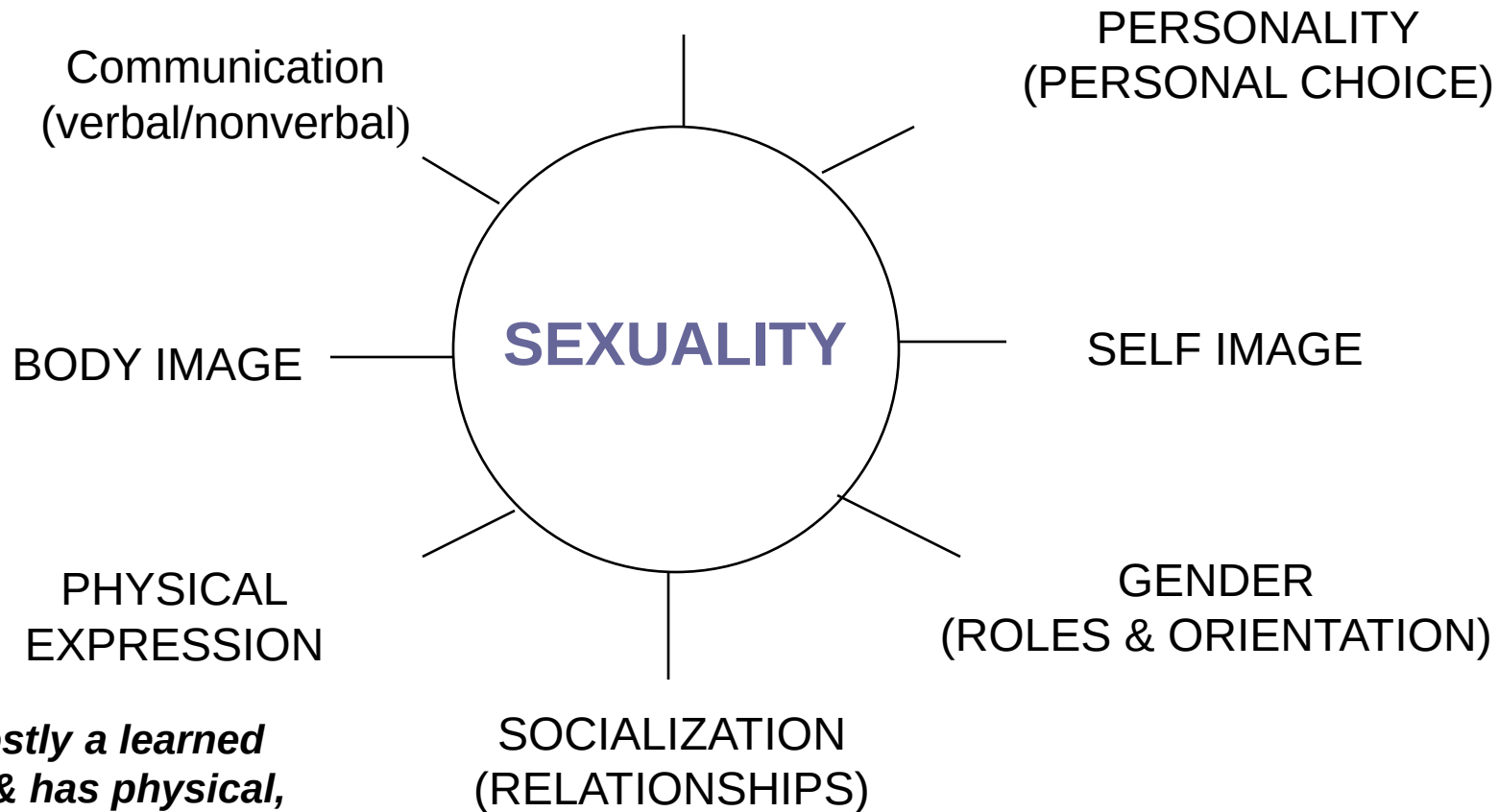
- ❖ Definitions
- ❖ Asexuality and Stigmatization
- ❖ Research - Sexuality & Disability
- ❖ Healthy sexual expression
- ❖ Promoting healthy sexual expression
- ❖ Q & A



Sexuality:

The whole person including sexual thoughts, experiences, learnings, ideas, values and imaginings

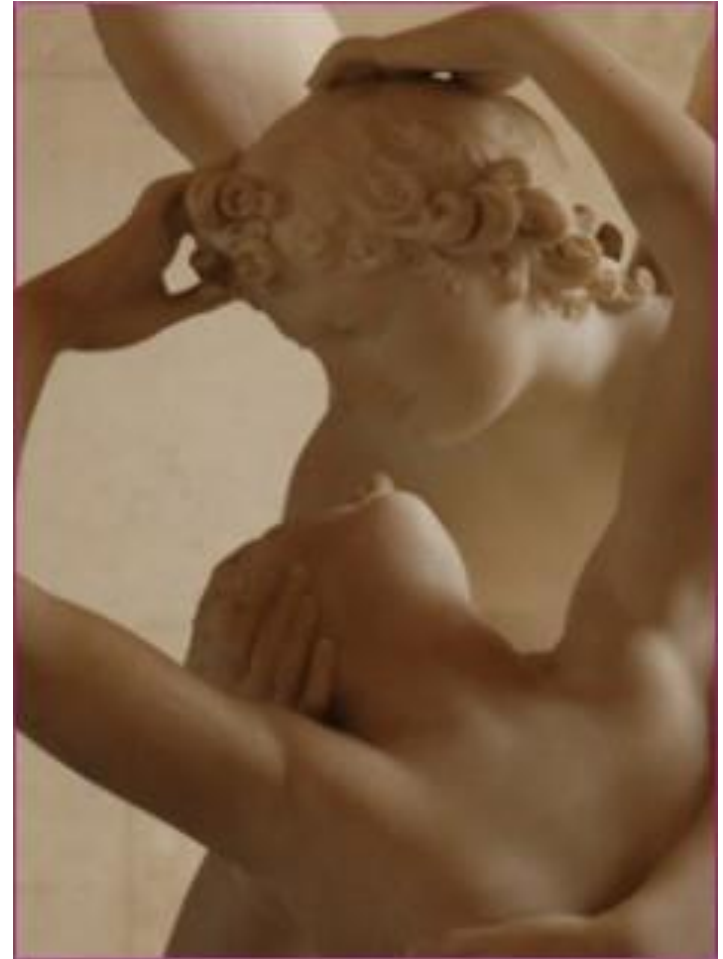
Beliefs and Values



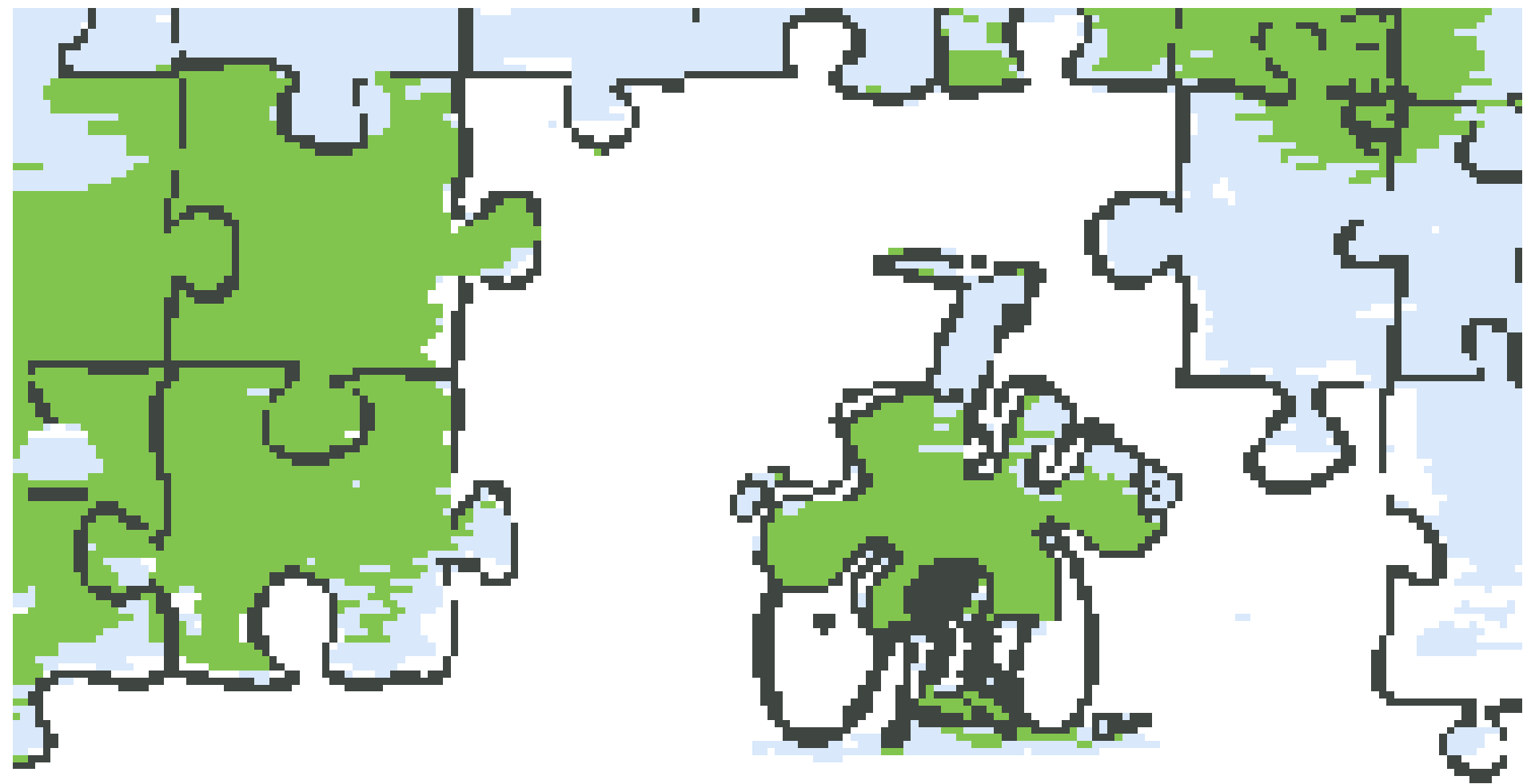
Sexuality-mostly a learned phenomena & has physical, emotional and spiritual aspects

Sexual Health

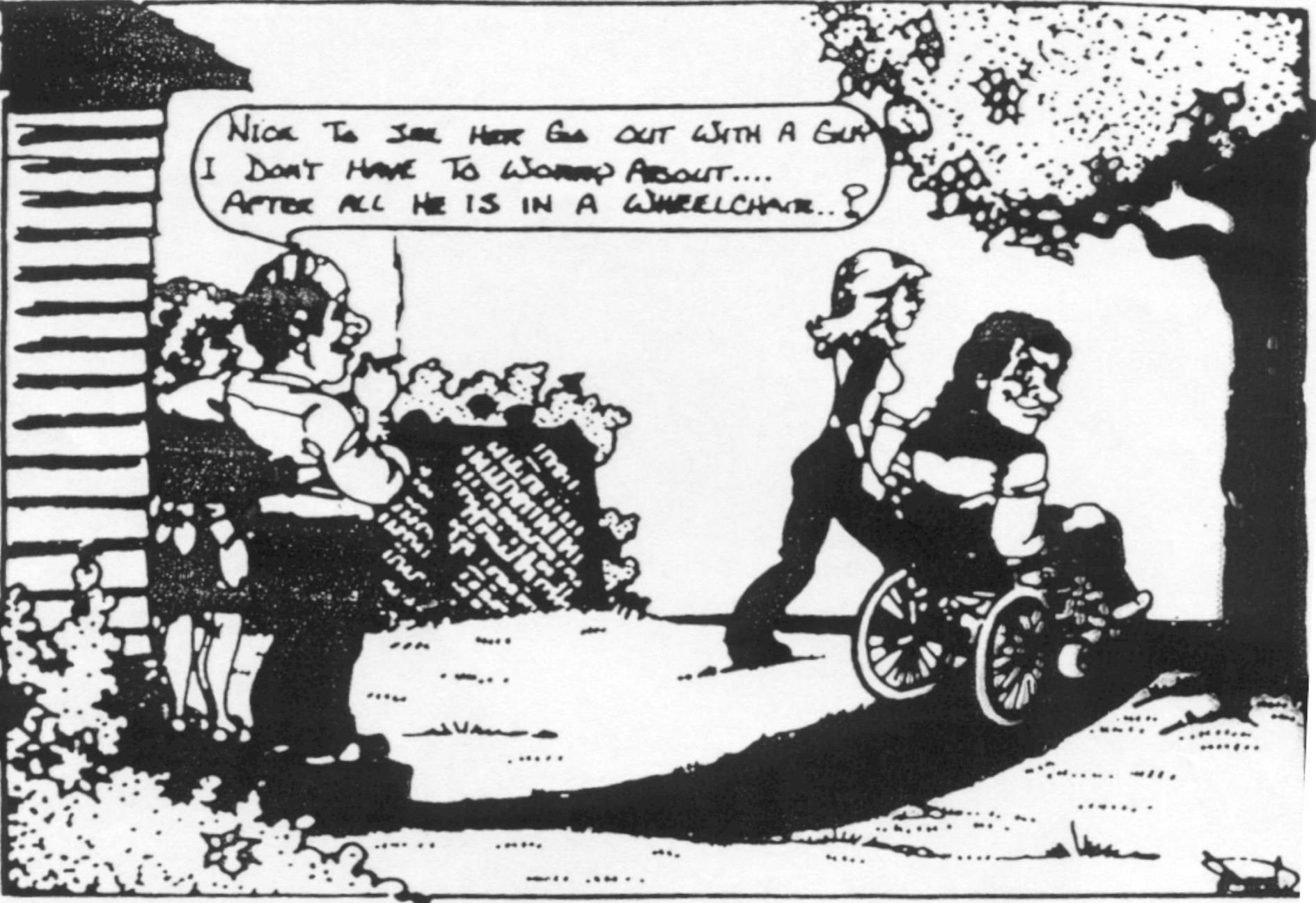
- a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality
(WHO, 2002)



Impairment – Disability - Handicap



NICE TO SEE HER GO OUT WITH A GUY
I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT....
AFTER ALL HE IS IN A WHEELCHAIR..?



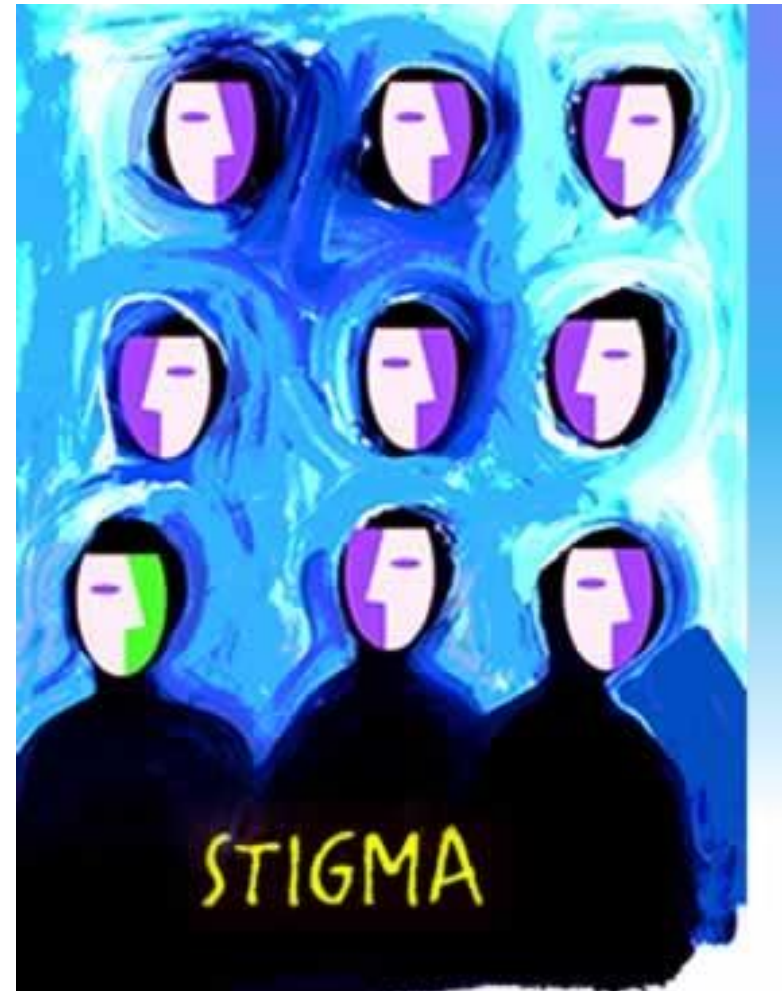
We live under an Attitudinal Umbrella



of Reproductive bias regarding sexuality

Asexuality and Stigmatization

- Socio-cultural barriers may be **more disabling** than the impairment itself.
- Sexuality as an expression of love and pleasure is **not recognized** for individuals with disabilities (Tepper, 2000)
- Evidence suggests that people with disabilities **internalize** the notions of asexuality (Thornton, 1981)



Historical Research Perspectives on Sexuality & Disability

- Focused from a medical perspective - sexuality reduced to physical function only (Skellariou, 2006)
- Medical Model has focused on harm reduction, prevention and control of sexuality; not a sex-positive view
- Social resistance (re: disability) to the development of relationships and sexuality (Hahn, 1981)



Social Model of Disability - a change in approach

- Developed by the **Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation** 1976
- 'disability' = the result of a social structure which functions to exclude certain people from accessing employment, social resources and positive identities (Galvin, 2005)
- Focus: public's response to individuals with disabilities and the inability of society to remove environmental and social barriers (Siminski, 2003).

Research - Sexuality & Disability

- **Very limited literature on Disability and Sexuality:**
Separation of cognitive and physical disability.

Reality of what is available

Physical

- Focus on function/response
- Anatomy, physiology
- Fix the problem
- Very little promoting healthy expression in relation to disability

Intellectual/Cognitive

- Programs focused on harm reduction
- +++ programs on dealing with ISB
- Very little promoting healthy expression in relation to disability

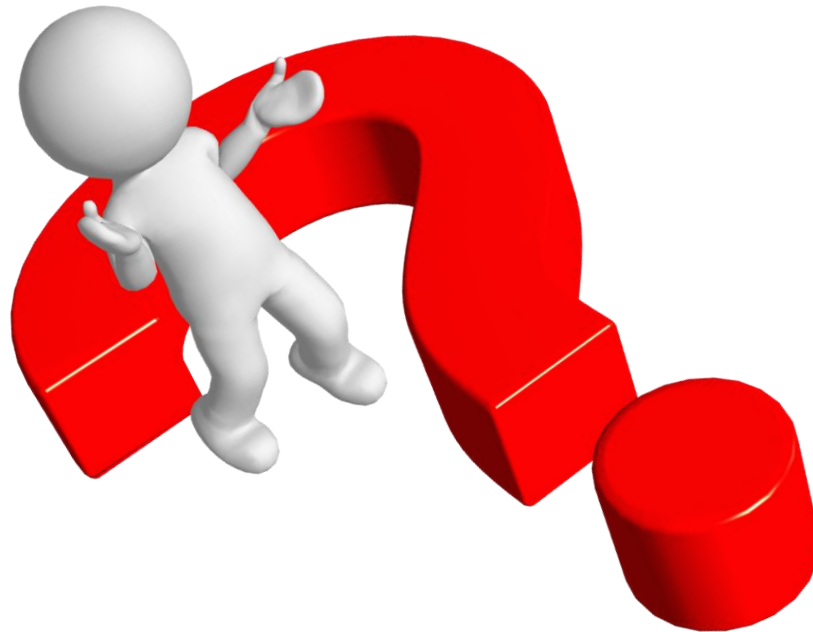


Basic Assumptions About Sexuality and Persons with a Disability:

1. All persons, regardless of disability, are sexual persons
2. The person with a disability has the right to all information about sexuality that they can understand; including the right to full range of sexual expression
3. The person with a disability has the right to develop relationships with others and to express affection and sexuality in the same ways that are acceptable to others

What is Healthy Sexual Expression?

- What are some elements you feel should be included in the description of healthy sexual expression ?



Healthy Sex Vs Harmful Sex

Healthy Sex

Sex is a choice

Sex is a natural drive

Sex is nurturing, healing

Sex is an expression of love

Sex is sharing with someone, part of who I am

Sex requires communication

Sex is private

Sex is respectful

Sex is honest

Sex is mutual

Sex is intimate

Sex is responsible

Sex is safe

Sex has boundaries

Sex is empowering

Sex enhances who you really are

Sex reflects your values

Sex enhances self esteem

Sexual Abuse and Addiction

Sex is an obligation

Sex is addictive

Sex is hurtful

Sex is a condition of love or devoid of love

Sex is “doing to” someone

Sex is void of communication

Sex is secretive

Sex is exploitative

Sex is deceitful

Sex benefits one person

Sex is emotionally distant

Sex is irresponsible

Sex is unsafe

Sex has no limits

Sex is power over someone

Sex requires a double life

Sex compromises your values

Sex feels shameful

(McKinley Health Center, 2009)

What is Healthy Sexual Expression?

- Involves recognizing and celebrating that everyone is sexual
- Emotional and social communication/connection – not just physical
- CERTS Model (developed by Wendy Maltz)
 - Consent – freely chose to engage in sexual activity
 - Equality – sense of power is equal with your partner
 - Respect – positive regard for self and partner
 - Trust – trust partner on both physical and emotional levels
 - Safety – you feel secure and safe within the sexual setting

(McKinley Health Center, 2009)

Importance of Promoting Healthy Sexuality

- Family members and service providers often view sexuality as a source of risk
 - Do not acknowledge that sexuality is a healthy and normal part of adult development
 - Caregivers were found to be against providing sex education, believing it would create desire for sexual relationships

(Heyman & Huckle, 1995)

- **Sex education resulted in:**

- Positive changes in sexual expression and identity
- Appropriate expression of needs
- Improved social behaviours
- **No adverse effects**, e.g. promiscuous sexual behaviour or unwanted pregnancy

(Kempton, 1978)

Importance of Promoting Healthy Sexuality

- Otherwise unhealthy and abusive forms of sexuality may prevail.
- The inability to develop healthy sexuality can lead to or worsen mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, and adjustment disorders, as well as impaired self-esteem.
- Restricting sexual expression can lead to other forms of “acting out”
- Can put individuals at risk for sexual abuse and exploitation, HIV and other STIs, and unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

(Evans & Conine, 1985)



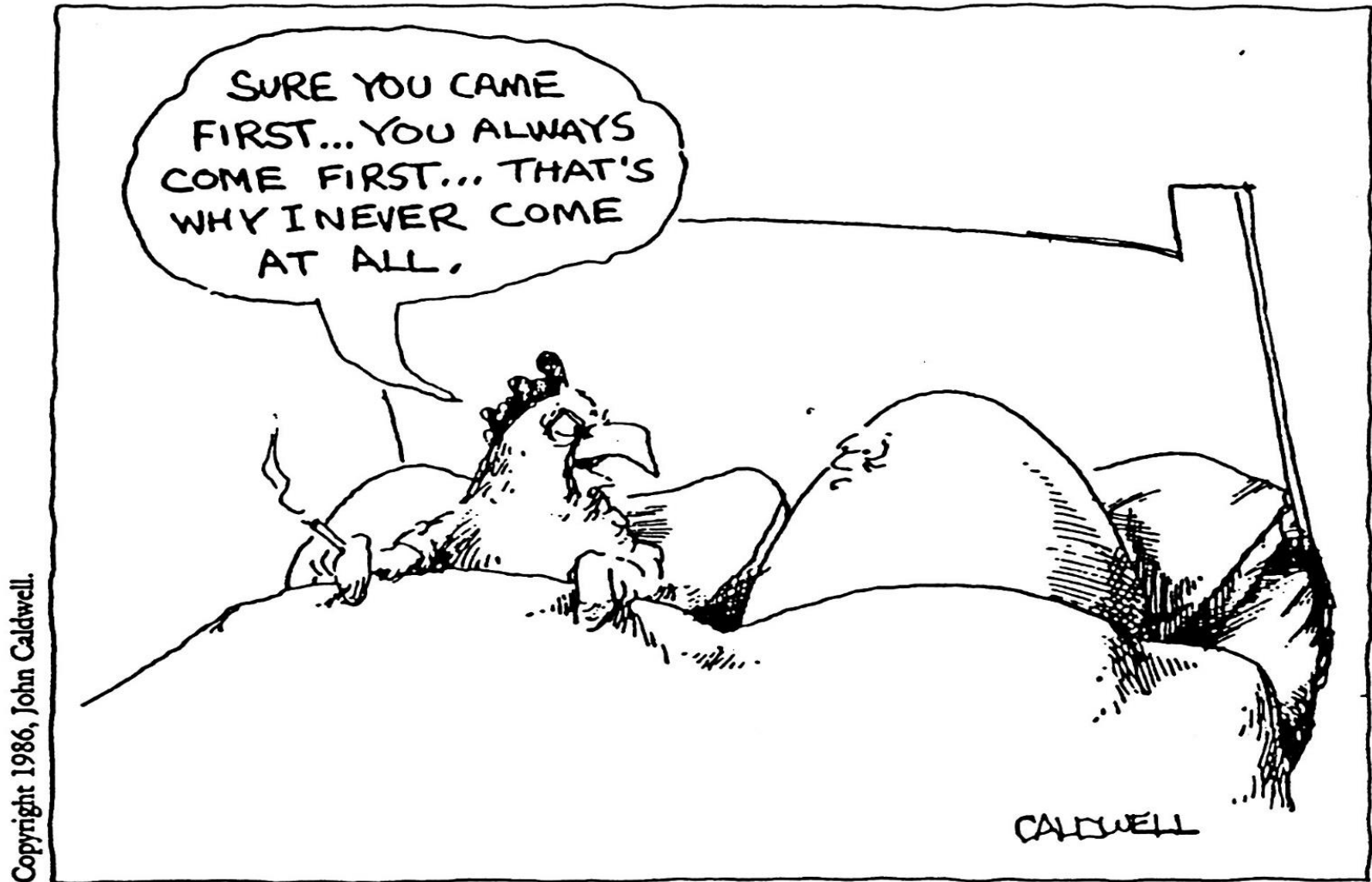
We Are All Sexual – Facilitating Healthy Sexual Expression

- Strength-based approach rather than a deficit-based approach
- Tailor specifically to each individual
- Acceptance and honesty – don't sugar coat
- Sexuality is more than physical expression
 - Coping with urges
 - Coping with loneliness
 - Clubs, exercise, healthy occupations and activities
 - Model healthy sexual expression

Summary

- Sexuality is a human right that is important to all individuals regardless of age, gender, orientation, or developmental level.
- To broadly address the development of healthy sexuality for individuals with Disability, the issue needs to be normalized, not ignored or avoided; which means involving parents, staff, researchers and professionals.
- Research must focus on positive aspects not just function and harm reduction.

Discussion: Strategies for practice & research..



Thank you

Sexual Identity

