

POSITION STATEMENTS

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SEXUALITY

People with intellectual disability and/or developmental disabilities¹, like all people, have inherent sexual rights. These rights and needs must be affirmed, defended, and respected.

ISSUE

For decades, people with intellectual disability and/or developmental disabilities have been thought to be asexual, having no need for loving and fulfilling relationships with others. Individual rights to sexuality, which is essential to human health and well-being, have been denied. This loss has negatively affected people with intellectual disability in gender identity, friendships, self-esteem, body image and awareness, emotional growth, and social behavior. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities frequently lack access to appropriate sex education in schools and other settings. At the same time, some individuals may engage in sexual activity as a result of poor options, manipulation, loneliness or physical force rather than as an expression of their sexuality.

POSITION

Every person has the right to exercise choices regarding sexual expression and social relationships. The presence of an intellectual or developmental disability, regardless of severity, does not, in itself, justify loss of rights related to sexuality.

All people have the right within interpersonal relationships to:

- Develop friendships and emotional and sexual relationships where they can love and be loved, and begin and end a relationship as they choose;
- Dignity and respect; and
- Privacy, confidentiality, and freedom of association.

¹ Intellectual Disability (ID) is a lifelong condition where significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior emerge during the developmental period (before adulthood).

Developmental Disabilities (DD), first defined in 1975 federal legislation now known as “The DD Act”, are a group of lifelong conditions that emerge during the developmental period and result in some level of functional limitation in learning, language, communication, cognition, behavior, socialization, or mobility. The most common DD conditions are intellectual disability, Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, fetal alcohol syndrome, and fragile X syndrome.

The acronym “IDD” is used to describe a group that includes either people with both ID and another DD or a group that includes people with ID or another DD. The supports that people with IDD need to meet their goals vary in intensity from intermittent to pervasive.

With respect to sexuality, individuals have a right to:

- Sexual expression and education, reflective of their own cultural, religious and moral values and of social responsibility;
- Individualized education and information to encourage informed decision-making, including education about such issues as reproduction, marriage and family life, abstinence, safe sexual practices, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases; and
- Protection from sexual harassment and from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

With respect to sexuality, individuals have a responsibility to consider the values, rights, and feelings of others.

With respect to the potential for having and raising children, individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities have the right to:

- Education and information about having and raising children that is individualized to reflect each person's unique ability to understand;
- Make their own decisions related to having and raising children with supports as necessary;
- Make their own decisions related to using birth control methods within the context of their personal or religious beliefs;
- Have control over their own bodies; and
- Be protected from sterilization solely because of their disability.

Rev'd 2019

Joint statement with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD).