

# 12-Part Sexuality Series for Parents with Children with an Intellectual Disability

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## *Part 1 of 12: **Getting Comfortable***

Parent's hearts are typically filled with fear when they decide it is time to have the talk about sexuality with their children. For parents with children with disability these common fears are coupled with concerns such as, what information will my child understand, do they really need to know this, is this information only going to cause problems? The mind races. Before becoming too overwhelmed there are a couple of things to consider. Sexuality is a central aspect of being human. It is a part of all people young and old, with and without disability. So whether or not it is addressed by parents it is not something that will disappear but it does not have to be something to panic about.

It is important to think of sexuality in broad terms. Sexuality involves a sense of being biologically male or female, gender identity, sexual orientation, biological changes, and reproductive health but perhaps most importantly it involves our values, beliefs, social skills and relationships. Sexuality involves so much more than a provision of facts on anatomy and bodily functions. Instead of thinking of having a one-time birds and bees talk it is necessary to think of talking to children about sexuality as involving a series of talks and of looking for teachable moments to illustrate and expand upon the talks.

Long before your child makes decisions about sexual activities; it is time to start working on building a foundation of

skills to help them make choices based on factually correct information and an understanding of what is important to them. Beyond talking about changes associated with puberty it is important to have ongoing discussions about topics such as:

- The concepts of public and private places, behaviours and conversation.
- Different types of relationships and what behaviours and level of trust are appropriate with each type
- Issues of consent including both the right to say no or yes and the need to respect other's people's consent rights as well.
- The right to make personal decisions and the assertiveness skills to ensure that these decisions are respected.
- Talk often about healthy relationships, feelings and your personal values.

Foster an environment where your children feel comfortable to ask questions about the topic of sexuality. Relax and keep talking!

All parents want their children to lead happy, fulfilled lives and sexuality is a healthy part of living. By giving children the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality they are better able to achieve this goal.

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*Part 2: Stages of Sexual Development (February 2015)*