

SEXUALITY

POLICY STATEMENT

People with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities¹, like all people, have inherent sexual rights and basic human needs. These rights and needs must be affirmed, defended, and respected.

ISSUE

For decades, people with intellectual disabilities and 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 disabilities 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, and as adults. 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.

- Privacy, confidentiality, and freedom of association.

With respect to sexuality, individuals have a right to:

- Sexual expression, reflective of cultural, religious and moral values, and social responsibility.

- 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.

- 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:

Make decisions related to having and raising children (with supports as necessary);
and using birth control within the context of their personal or religious beliefs;

Have control over their own bodies;

Protection from being sterilized solely because of their disability, and to not have such decisions made for them, regardless of the severity of their intellectual disabilities.

Adopted: Board of Directors, AAIDD

October 2007

Congress of Delegates, The Arc of the United States

October 13, 2007

¹*“People with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities” refers to our constituency, i.e., those defined by the AAIDD classification and the DSM IV. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by DSM IV.*