



# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME... FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

## Sexuality Throughout the Lifespan: Sexuality and Disability

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A quarterly publication for fami-  
lies on sexuality education.

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**Planned Parenthood**  
strives to ensure that  
sexuality is understood as  
an essential lifelong aspect  
of being human, and that it  
is celebrated with respect,  
openness, and mutuality.

*This edition of **There's No Place Like Home...** returns to the topic of Sexuality Throughout the Lifespan and focuses on Sexuality and Disability. The final subtopic of Sexuality Throughout the Lifespan will be Sexuality and Aging in the fall issue of **There's No Place Like Home...***

Today a large percentage of the population consists of people with physical and mental disabilities. According to the *Chartbook on Disability*, almost one in five people has a disability.

When discussing sexuality and disability with your child it is important to help your child understand that every individual is born a sexual being, including individuals that are born with disabilities and those that become disabled later.

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the needs and rights of people with disabilities is rising. This allows for a greater understanding and acceptance of sexuality as a basic and natural aspect of life for all people.

Children need to know that having a disability does not mean that a person is asexual (nonsexual) or too impaired to have sexual feelings and responses. However, physical and mental disabilities can influence a person's sexuality in many ways depending on their disability. One's level of ability can also affect a person's self-perception and

*cont. on page 2*

**Sexuality is an  
important part of life.**

**Help your kids  
understand it.**

*Sexuality and Disabilities, cont.*

his/her social relationships, as well as the level of independence one can achieve.

One of the ways that we can help our children better understand sexuality and disability is by becoming comfortable ourselves around people with disabilities.

Some common fears that a parent might have about individuals with disabilities is how the individual might behave or that the individual may not be able to communicate with them or their child. This can lead to a negative stereotype of individuals with disabilities.

Below is a list of tips you can use to help you or your child communicate with individuals who are disabled:

- Speak directly to them, as the individual that they are.
- If they are an adult, treat them like one.
- If they are in a wheelchair, it is not necessary to bend over to speak to them or to speak louder.
- Touch may be needed and pleasurable, but it may also be painful. Ask first.
- Ask, "May I assist you?" not "May I help you?"
- Know that the majority of disabilities are not inherited.
- It is important to allow someone to speak for him or herself.
- Put the person first. Instead of saying, "disabled person," say "person with a disability."

The more children become aware that individuals with disabilities have the same basic rights and needs that the rest of society has, the fewer issues and problems there will be around the topic.

If you would like more information on sexuality, contact our resource center located at 3219 North Meridian, Indianapolis, by phone at **317-927-3644 ext. 142**, by e-mail [betsy@ppcsi.org](mailto:betsy@ppcsi.org), or visit us on the web at [www.ppin.org](http://www.ppin.org).

## Want Information About Preventing Sexual Harassment in Your Child's School?

Attend Planned Parenthood of Greater Indiana's Training on

**Preventing Sexual Harassment in Schools**

August 1, 2002

9:00 am-4:00 pm

Fee: \$75\* per person

Located at the

Planned Parenthood Conference Center

3219 North Meridian Street

Indianapolis, IN 46208

***Encourage your child's school to send a representative.***

\*some partial scholarship available

Contact Summer Wood at 317-927-3644 ext. 148 for more information

## From a Professional's Perspective

"Parents always have lots of questions on how to discuss sexuality and disability; but not as many as the person with the disability, especially a teenager.

I am a person with a disability who has been married for almost 18 years. People with disabilities (PWD) are sexual beings, just like you. This is true even if the PWD has very significant disabilities; because we are human beings. My parents, way back when, did not talk to me about my sexuality or sex. But that was a long time ago. If your teenager is showing interest in sex, then it is past time to talk to him or her.

There are books and brochures at Planned Parenthood as well as at the Indianapolis Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc. Make sure that either your child or you are aware of sexual infections and situations that could be harmful.

Many PWD are sexually abused by their families or so-called friends. The only way to protect anyone is with as much information and knowledge as possible."

*~Sharon Byrnett, LSW, works at WorkOne as a Disability Resource Specialist. She assists her co-workers in making the WorkOne's in Marion County accessible for ALL people with disabilities.*

## **Information Helps Break Down Barriers When Communicating With Individuals With Disabilities**

**Providing information is especially valuable to:**

- **Bolster Self-Esteem and Confidence**

The more people understand their own bodies and feelings, the more comfortable they become about expressing these feelings and more secure about expressing themselves.

Feeling good about oneself gives a person the confidence needed to consider having a relationship with another person.

- **Broaden Understanding of Sexuality**

Information gives people the understanding they need to:

- respect and recognize every individual's sexual identity;
- alter notions or ideals of what kind of "performance" is expected in a sexual encounter; and
- realize that sharing one's sexuality really means expressing feelings for another person. The expression can be a kiss, a look, a kind loving word, or an embrace. The feeling behind the action is the gift one person gives the other.

- **Encourage Healthy Sexual Behavior**

Providing accurate information to individuals with disabilities is the best way to protect them from exploitation and the potential problems of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Avoiding the subject or ignoring the person's sexuality won't make it go away -- and it won't eliminate curiosity or prevent experimentation or exploitation.

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Just Say Know

Be An Askable Parent

### Did You Know?

- Planned Parenthood of Greater Indiana now has a discussion forum for families on our website. The forum is designed to answer questions that individuals might have about sex and sexuality. Visit [www.ppin.org](http://www.ppin.org), and click on our **message board** to access the sexual health forum.
- PPGI offers an anonymous, web-based Q&A service for people looking for answers to the hardest questions. Want to know what to do if a condom breaks, where to go for HIV testing, or confused about your birth control pills? [askme@ppcsi.org](mailto:askme@ppcsi.org) can help. E-mail us we'll answer your questions anonymously. Take advantage of this free educational service.

### Selected Items from our Resource Center on Sexuality and Disability Available for Loan

***Beginnings: A Parent/Child Sexuality Program for Families with Children Who Have Developmental Disabilities.*** 2nd ed. Terri Couwenhoven. Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities. 1992.

***Couples with Intellectual Disabilities Talk about Living and Loving.*** Karin Schwier. Woodbine House. 1994.

***Doubly Silenced: Sexuality, Sexual Abuse and People with Developmental Disabilities.*** Patricia Miles Patterson. Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities. 1991.

***An Easy Guide to Loving Carefully for Women and Men.*** Lyn McKee and Winifred Kempton. Stiggall-Muccigrosso Associates. 1997.

***Enabling Romance: A Guide to Love, Sex, and Relationships for the Disabled (and the People Who Care about Them).*** Ken Kroll and Erica Levy Klein. Harmony Books. 1992.

***Fully Human: A Program in Human Sexuality for the Developmentally Disabled.*** Nancy Howes. Sun-Rose. 1988.

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We're on the Internet! [www.ppin.org](http://www.ppin.org). Check us out!