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Sexuality

The Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council supports the views and position of The Arc of the United States on sexuality for people with disabilities.

Issue

For many years, people have thought that individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD) are not sexual. They thought people with I/DD do not need to be in loving relationships with others.

Sexuality is a basic human right. It is important and a need for most people's health and well-being. But many people with I/DD have been denied this right. This loss has hurt people with I/DD by affecting their:

- Friendships.
- How they behave with other people.
- Feelings about themselves and their bodies.
- Understanding of their emotions and how to share them (emotions are things like happiness, sadness, and anger).

People with I/DD often are not taught about sex education in schools and other places. They also often do not have a chance to express their sexuality the way they want. Instead, some people may participate in sexual activity because:

- They do not have good options.
- They have been manipulated. That means someone said or did things to get them to have sex when they did not want to.
- They are lonely.
- They were forced to.

Position

Every person has the right to make choices about their sexuality and relationships. Just because a person has an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD) does not mean they lose their right to sexuality.

All people have the right to:

- Develop friendships as well as emotional and sexual relationships where they can love and be loved.
- Begin and end relationships as they choose.
- Be respected for who they are and treated well.
- Privacy and freedom to be with who they want.

Related to sexuality, people have a right to:

- Be sexual in the ways they want.
- Sex education that considers their cultural, religious, and moral beliefs, and includes responsibilities.
- Education and information that meets their individual needs. It should help people make their own decisions. It should include topics like having children, marriage and family life, choosing not to have sex, safe sexual activity, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.

“Sexual orientation” refers to who someone is physically and romantically attracted to. The most common sexual orientations are “straight” (people attracted to the opposite sex and “gay” (people attracted to the same sex).

“Sexual abuse” is when someone has unwanted sexual contact with another person.

“Sexually transmitted diseases” are diseases people can get when they have sex with another person.

- Protection from sexual harassment, and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

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Everyone has a responsibility to consider the values, rights, and feelings other people have about sexuality.

Related to having and raising children, people with intellectual or developmental disabilities have the right to:

- Education and information about having and raising children. This must be provided in ways that each person can understand.
- Make their own decisions related to having and raising children, with support as needed.
- Make their own decisions about to using birth control while considering their own personal or religious beliefs.
- Have control over their own bodies.
- Not be sterilized just because they have a disability. “Sterilized” means having a medical procedure so you cannot get pregnant or get someone else pregnant.

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