

Module 1: The Case for Sexuality Support

Why This Matters

Module Overview

This foundational module challenges leaders to examine how their beliefs, organizational culture, and policies influence the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Participants will explore sexuality as a fundamental part of the human experience and recognize that supporting healthy sexuality is not simply about preventing risk—it is about promoting dignity, autonomy, informed choice, and meaningful relationships.

Leaders will leave this module with a new perspective: avoiding conversations about sexuality does not eliminate sexuality. Education, person-centered planning, and supportive policies create safer environments than silence and restriction.

Estimated Time

90 Minutes

Intended Audience

- Executive Directors
- CEOs
- Program Directors
- Clinical Directors
- Residential Directors
- Human Rights Committee Members
- Compliance Officers
- Quality Assurance Staff

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Explain sexuality as a basic human right.
- Describe how sexuality contributes to quality of life.
- Identify myths surrounding sexuality and people with IDD.
- Recognize how organizational culture influences support practices.
- Differentiate protection from unnecessary restriction.
- Apply a person-centered philosophy to sexuality support.

- Assess their organization's readiness to support healthy relationships.

Materials Needed

- Participant Workbook
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Flip Chart or Whiteboard
- Sticky Notes
- Pens
- Agency Readiness Assessment
- Self-Reflection Worksheet

Vocabulary

Participants should understand the following terms:

- Sexuality
- Intimacy
- Human Rights
- Person-Centered Support
- Informed Choice
- Dignity of Risk
- Consent
- Privacy
- Restrictive Practice
- Self-Determination

Instructor Introduction

Suggested Script

“Welcome to Intimacy Matters™ Academy.

Today we begin by discussing one of the most misunderstood topics in disability services.

This course is not about encouraging sexual behavior.

It is about recognizing that every person has the right to dignity, meaningful relationships, privacy, education, and informed choice.

Throughout today's session, I encourage you to remain curious, challenge long-held assumptions, and consider how your own experiences influence the support you provide.”

Activity One

Love Without Limits

Time: 15 Minutes

Instructor Directions

Invite participants to close their eyes.

Read slowly.

Think about someone you love.

It may be your spouse.

Your partner.

Your child.

A parent.

A grandparent.

Your best friend.

Remember the first time you met.

The excitement.

The laughter.

The conversations.

The hugs.

The first kiss.

The moments that made you feel seen.

Now imagine someone tells you:

You are no longer allowed to date.

You may never kiss again.

You cannot marry.

You cannot choose your partner.

You cannot have privacy.

Every relationship decision must be approved by someone else.

Pause for approximately 30 seconds.

Then ask participants to open their eyes.

Debrief Questions

- How did that exercise make you feel?
- Which restriction affected you the most?
- Why?
- How would those restrictions affect your quality of life?
- Do people receiving services experience these restrictions?

Allow open discussion.

Teaching Point

Say:

“For many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, these restrictions are not hypothetical.

They are everyday experiences.

Our role is not to eliminate risk by eliminating relationships.

Our role is to provide education, support, and opportunities that allow individuals to exercise their rights safely.”

Mini Lecture

What Is Sexuality?

Many people hear the word “sexuality” and immediately think of sexual intercourse.

Sexuality is much broader.

Sexuality includes:

- Identity
- Affection
- Friendship
- Love
- Emotional intimacy
- Dating
- Marriage
- Family
- Touch
- Body image
-

- Privacy
- Personal values
- Self-esteem
- Communication
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Romance
- Personal expression

Discussion Prompt

Ask:

“Looking at this list, how much of sexuality has absolutely nothing to do with sexual activity?”

Myth vs. Reality Exercise

Divide participants into small groups.

Each group receives one statement.

Groups decide whether the statement is Myth or Fact and explain why.

Statements

- People with IDD do not have sexual feelings.
- People with IDD should never date.
- Individuals with IDD cannot consent.
- People with IDD are forever children.
- Talking about sex encourages sexual behavior.
- Healthy sexuality education reduces risk.
- Everyone deserves dignity and privacy.

After discussion, review each statement together and explain the evidence-based response.

Teaching Discussion

The Cost of Silence

Discuss the consequences of avoiding sexuality education.

When education is absent:

- Individuals may struggle to understand consent.
- Healthy boundaries may never be learned.
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Abuse is less likely to be recognized or reported.

- Public versus private behavior may not be understood.
- Relationships may become unhealthy or exploitative.
- Opportunities for connection and belonging may be unnecessarily restricted.

Instructor Statement

“Silence does not create safety.

Education creates safety.”

Activity Two

Protection or Person-Centered?

Divide participants into groups.

Provide scenario cards.

For each scenario, groups answer:

1. What is the immediate safety concern?
2. What rights are involved?
3. How can we support both safety and dignity?

Sample Scenario

Two adults living in the same residence wish to begin dating.

Groups identify supportive responses rather than automatically restricting the relationship.

Repeat with several scenarios.

Self-Reflection Exercise

Participants complete the worksheet independently.

Questions include:

- What messages did I receive growing up about sex?
- How comfortable am I discussing sexuality?
- Do I believe adults with IDD deserve romantic relationships?
- Have I ever unintentionally restricted someone’s rights?
- What fears influence my decision making?
- What assumptions am I willing to challenge today?

Participants are encouraged to share only what they feel comfortable

discussing.

Agency Readiness Assessment

Participants rate each statement from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Our organization:

- Has written sexuality policies.
- Provides staff education.
- Supports privacy.
- Teaches consent.
- Includes sexuality in person-centered planning.
- Educates families.
- Encourages informed choice.
- Understands dignity of risk.
- Documents appropriately.
- Views sexuality as part of whole-person support.

Reflection

After scoring, participants identify:

- Three organizational strengths
- Three opportunities for growth
- One priority action to begin within the next 90 days

Key Takeaways

Participants should leave understanding that:

- Sexuality is a normal part of being human.
- People with IDD have the same need for love, belonging, intimacy, and connection as everyone else.
- Rights and safety are not opposing goals.
- Education is one of the strongest forms of protection.
- Organizational culture determines whether sexuality is ignored, feared, or supported with dignity.

Knowledge Check

1. Define sexuality in your own words.
2. Explain the difference between protection and unnecessary restriction.
3. List three myths about sexuality and IDD.

4. Describe one way organizational culture impacts people receiving services.
5. Explain why education promotes safety.

Action Assignment

Before the next module, participants will:

- Review their organization's current sexuality-related policies.
- Identify one policy that promotes dignity.
- Identify one practice that may unintentionally limit rights.
- Bring one real-life leadership challenge related to sexuality to discuss during Module 2.

Closing Reflection

Read aloud:

“Our responsibility is not to determine whether people with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve love, privacy, intimacy, or meaningful relationships. Those rights already belong to them. Our responsibility is to ensure they have the education, support, and opportunities to pursue those rights safely, respectfully, and with dignity.”

Invite participants to write one sentence completing the prompt:

“After today’s session, I will lead differently by...”