

Intimacy Matters™ Academy

Track 1: Provider Leadership Certification

Module 2

Human Rights, Sexual Rights & Ethical Responsibilities

Module Length: 3 Hours

Module Overview

Supporting the sexuality of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) requires leaders to balance autonomy, dignity, safety, and ethical responsibility. This module explores the legal and ethical principles that guide decision-making while emphasizing that people with IDD retain fundamental human rights, including the right to privacy, relationships, and informed choice.

Participants will learn how to evaluate complex situations using a person-centered framework rather than making decisions based on fear, assumptions, or organizational habit.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Explain the relationship between human rights and sexuality.
 - Differentiate legal responsibilities from organizational preferences.
 - Apply the principles of self-determination and person-centered support.
 - Recognize how privacy, dignity, and informed choice intersect with service delivery.
 - Understand the role and limits of guardianship.
 - Discuss decision-making capacity in a thoughtful, individualized way.
 - Use an ethical decision-making framework to analyze difficult situations.
 - Lead discussions that balance rights with health and safety.
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Module Agenda

Section 1 – Human Rights

Time: 30 Minutes

Discussion Question

“What rights do you automatically expect to have as an adult?”

List participant responses such as:

- Choosing where to live
- Choosing friends
- Dating
- Marriage
- Privacy
- Expressing affection
- Using a cell phone
- Religious beliefs
- Medical decisions

Then ask:

“Which of these rights should automatically disappear because someone has an intellectual disability?”

Use this discussion to reinforce that disability does not erase personhood or fundamental rights.

Key Teaching Points

Human rights include:

- Respect
- Equality
- Privacy
- Freedom from discrimination
- Freedom from abuse
- Personal autonomy
- Community inclusion
- Meaningful relationships

Section 2 – Sexual Rights

Time: 30 Minutes

Discuss sexuality as part of whole-person wellness.

Topics include:

- The right to receive sexuality education
 - The right to privacy
 - The right to form relationships
 - The right to express affection appropriately
 - The right to marry where legally permitted
 - The right to make informed reproductive decisions
 - The right to refuse intimacy
 - The right to bodily autonomy
- The right to protection from abuse and exploitation

Group Discussion

Ask:

“What happens when agencies ignore these rights?”

Facilitate discussion on isolation, loneliness, increased vulnerability, misinformation, and reduced quality of life.

Section 3 – Self-Determination

Time: 20 Minutes

Definition

Self-determination is the ability to make choices about one’s own life, with support when needed.

Discuss:

- Choice versus control
- Independence versus support
- Supported decision-making

- Respecting individual preferences

Activity

Provide examples and ask participants whether the response reflects **supporting** or **controlling** the person's choices.

Section 4 – Privacy & Dignity

Time: 25 Minutes

Discuss how privacy extends beyond closing a bedroom door.

Topics include:

- Knock before entering
- Private phone conversations
Confidential medical information
- Dating conversations
- Hygiene
- Clothing choices
- Masturbation education in appropriate private settings
- Respectful language

Reflection

Ask:

"Would this practice be acceptable if it involved someone without a disability?"

Section 5 – Informed Choice

Time: 20 Minutes

Discuss the difference between making a choice and making an informed choice.

An informed choice includes:

- Understanding options
- Knowing benefits and risks
- Asking questions

- Receiving information in an accessible format
- Freedom from coercion

Small Group Activity

Participants identify ways to improve informed decision-making for individuals receiving services.

Section 6 – Supported Decision-Making

Time: 20 Minutes

Explain that needing support with decisions is not the same as lacking the right to make them.

Examples include:

- Using visual aids
- Plain-language materials
- Trusted supporters
- Repetition and teaching
- Communication supports

Discussion

How can staff increase independence instead of making decisions for the individual?

Section 7 – Guardianship

Time: 30 Minutes

Discuss the purpose and scope of guardianship.

Key points:

- Guardianship does not automatically eliminate every personal right.
- Guardians generally have authority only in areas granted by the court.
- The individual should remain involved in decisions to the greatest extent possible.

- Agencies should understand the specific guardianship documents before making assumptions.

Case Discussion

An adult receiving services wants to date. Their guardian says, "Absolutely not."

Questions:

- What rights does the individual have?
 - What role does the guardian play?
 - How should the provider respond?
 - What additional information is needed before making a decision?
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Section 8 – Capacity

Time: 30 Minutes

Discuss capacity as decision-specific.

Topics include:

- Capacity is not all-or-nothing.
- Capacity may vary depending on the decision.
- People can often learn and improve understanding through education and support.
- Avoid assumptions based solely on diagnosis.

Group Exercise

Review short scenarios and discuss what additional information or education might help evaluate the individual's understanding.

Section 9 – Ethical Decision-Making

Time: 35 Minutes

Introduce the Intimacy Matters™ Ethical Decision Framework:

Step 1

What does the individual want?

Step 2

What rights are involved?

Step 3

What are the potential risks?

Step 4

How can education reduce those risks?

Step 5

What supports can increase safety?

Step 6

What is the least restrictive option?

Step 7

How will the decision be documented and reviewed?

Emphasize that ethical leadership often means finding ways to support rights safely—not simply saying “no.”

Leadership Lab

Participants work in teams to analyze realistic scenarios.

Examples:

- Two adults receiving services want to date.
- An individual requests condoms.
- A guardian objects to a relationship.
- A resident wants privacy with a romantic partner.
- An individual expresses interest in same-sex dating.
- A person asks staff questions about sexual health.

For each scenario, teams identify:

- Rights involved
- Ethical considerations
- Risks
- Protective supports

- Recommended response
 - Documentation needs
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Reflection

Ask participants to consider:

Which topic challenged your thinking the most?

- What assumptions did you recognize in yourself or your organization?
 - How can leadership model respect for rights while maintaining safety?
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Knowledge Check

Participants complete a brief assessment that asks them to:

- Define self-determination.
 - Explain informed choice.
 - Describe supported decision-making.
 - Differentiate capacity from diagnosis.
 - Identify strategies for balancing rights and safety.
 - Apply the ethical decision-making framework to a case study.
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Leadership Assignment

Before the next module, participants will:

1. Review one current organizational policy related to relationships, privacy, or sexuality.
 2. Identify whether the policy supports rights, creates unnecessary restrictions, or needs revision.
 3. Write one recommendation to improve the policy using the principles learned in this module.
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Module Closing

"Leadership is not measured by how effectively we eliminate risk. It is measured by how responsibly we uphold rights while creating environments where people can live full, meaningful, and self-directed lives. Every decision we make should move us closer to dignity, not farther from it."