

# Healthy Sexuality and Relationships



How to Support People with Disabilities to have them  
Kathy O'Connell, LMHC, CRC  
[RadiantAbilities.com](http://RadiantAbilities.com)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Download a  
guide sheet for  
this  
presentation at

[https://  
radiantabilities.lpages.co/  
healthysexuality/](https://radiantabilities.lpages.co/healthysexuality/)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What You'll Learn in this Presentation

- \* Ways to **transform societal myths** about sexuality and disability.
- \* How to **address negative body images and shame associated with a disability** to create more positive body images.
- \* How fostering the first two objectives is the **most effective way to educate and protect people** with disabilities from sexual assault.
- \* Family members and professionals will learn in this presentation how to **effectively support someone to develop healthy relationships and sexuality.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Desire and Need for Relationships

- \* We all desire a closeness and a sense of connection with others as a means to grow and live life.
- \* It is so critical that you, as a support person to someone with a disability field, not only honor this fact, but help foster it.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

In some incidences, you may be the only person in someone's life that help process issues about sexuality and relationships. You may be the only person someone trusts with their deepest longings, or with difficult, sensitive questions.



The most important thing you can do is keep the window of possibilities open to people.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Societal Myths and False Beliefs (aka The Walls that Hinder)

- \* For many people with disabilities, there are STILL societal myths and false beliefs which prohibit the growth of a healthy sense of sexuality and relationships. Thus, creating walls that hinder the development of a healthy sense of sexuality.
- \* Society, media, and social media reinforce myths about what is beautiful and also promote unhealthy and unreasonable body images.



---

---

---

---

---

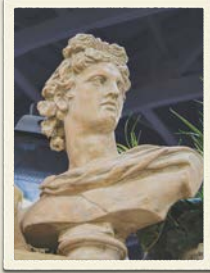
---

---

---

## Sampling of False Beliefs

- \* Projections of people with disabilities as being **"fragile" or "a potential victim"**
- \* Perceived need from caregivers to **"protect"** people from relationships, or at the very least, being **"supervised"**
- \* A continued perpetuated myth that people with disabilities are **asexual**
- \* Mistaken belief that people with disabilities **have less to offer**
- \* False belief that people with disabilities generally get into **unhealthy and unbalanced relationships**



---

---

---

---

---

---

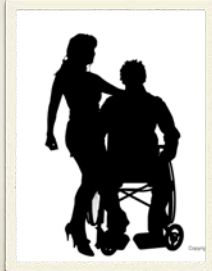
---

---

## Ways to Transform Societal Myths About Sexuality and Disability

We diminish the power of this myth by honoring people's sexuality. We do this by:

- **answering questions** people have about sexuality and relationships
- **encouraging people** to pursue desires in this area
- **teaching people** how to take responsibility for oneself
- **offer guidance** in developing healthy relationships.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Sexual ableism** is a system of beliefs that discriminate against people with disabilities in dating, intimacy, and relationships, suggesting the very presence of disability implies inferiority.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Ways to Effectively Counter Sexual Ableism

- \* Name it; use the phrase
- \* Educate all people
- \* As in any "ism," it's the triggers of judgment and fear that fuel it.
- \* Heal the pain



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Body Images

Why it's so important for people with disabilities

- \* Ways in which disabilities affect body image - **movement, appearance, judgments** from other people. Some people with disabilities deal with realities that are not considered "**socially acceptable**," such as drooling, falling, having spasms, etc.
- \* Views of body images get reflected through the **people we know, media, society, and disability services**.
- \* There's a **strong connection between self-esteem and body image** - the lower one's perception of oneself, the more negative or distorted their body image is.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Having a positive body image is a key component to healthy sexuality. The better people feel about themselves and their bodies, the more people will seek love for the right reasons.

They will have a tendency to truly care about the other person, want to be with them, and their desire for a relationship comes from a true desire to share themselves, rather than from need.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Promoting Positive Body Image

The role of positive body images in forming healthy relationships. Having a positive body image is when someone **feels good about their body, can accept its differences, and sees their disability as an asset to one's uniqueness.**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Positive Body Images Increase the Developing Relationships with:

- \* Healthy boundaries; **two people valuing and respecting one another.**
- \* **A foundation based desire rather than need.** This is key when people have a disability because there are many logistical needs people have; adding another layer of need that doesn't have to be there, complicates the dynamics of the relationship.
- \* **Promotion of growth and expansion** of who someone is, rather than limiting or restricting someone, which can lead to disempowerment.

---

---

---

---

---

---

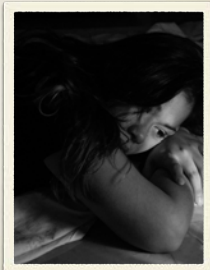
---

---

## A Word About Shame

A key component to helping people develop positive body images is to address the issue of shame related to a disability.

*Remember, though, not everyone with a disability feels shame about their disability.*



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- \* Many people do and this is usually manifested through lack of self-confidence, negative self-talk, and limiting beliefs about oneself and one's life.
- \* Shame, in terms of disability, is a weight from a belief that there is something inherently wrong with a person and that it needs to be "fixed."

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Releasing Body Shame

- \* Due to disabilities often being physical in nature, people can have body shame, negative feelings about how the body looks and/or the effects of a disability on the body.
- \* Body shame naturally affects self-esteem which can affect the kind of relationships a person gets involved in.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- \* Releasing shame is the most effective way to enhance body image. **Talking about the shame someone feels is actually one of the best ways to begin the healing process.** Giving a voice to it helps to lessen the weight of shame and free up a person's energy to focus on their attributes and what they offer to relationships.
- \* One has to carefully consider the entire body all its unique characteristics - muscle movements, different facial features, size and form, spasms, intellectual difference, and other effects - and **begin to teach people to honor them as distinct parts of one's attractiveness.**
- \* Healing shame leads to developing the **Power to Attract.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

AND THIS

# HAS TO BE MENTIONED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Scary Stats

- \* According to 2017 US Justice Department statistics, people with intellectual disabilities are **seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted.** (1)
- \* As many as **83% of women** with developmental disabilities and **32% of men** are victims of sexual assault. (2)
- \* For most people with developmental disabilities, their first "sexual" (and I use that term loosely) encounter is rape. (3)
- \* Only about **3% of perpetrators** of people with disabilities serve time. (4)
- \* **49% of people** with developmental disabilities suffer from chronic sexual abuse. (5)

---

---

---

---

---

---

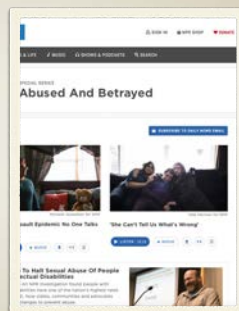
---

---

## Must Hear Series

National Public Radio Series on the prevalence of sexual assaults to people with intellectual disabilities.

<https://www.npr.org/series/575502633/abused-and-betrayed>



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Education and Prevention

- \* At the core of this problem are these **very preventable** reasons.
- \* People with **low self-esteem** tend to have weaker personal boundaries which can make them more susceptible to abuse.
- \* People who are **not given information** about sex and sexuality will try to find it out for themselves. Hungry for information, people might find themselves with dangerous people and in dangerous places.
- \* When people are **denied the opportunity** to develop their sexuality, the result will lead to the above issues.

---

---

---

---

---

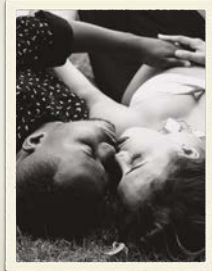
---

---

---

## Healthy Sexuality What does it look like?

- \* Healthy sexuality is about our ability to open our hearts to people and consciously be intimate with them, emotionally and physically.
- \* Sexual intercourse is just a small piece of being intimate. Allowing people inside our emotional selves is the more meaningful part of sexuality.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

As human beings, it's our basic need to be close to others. Our lives are enriched by sharing ourselves with others. That's how we grow.

Because of this, we are all sexual beings, no matter what our life circumstances may be and no matter what form our abilities take on.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

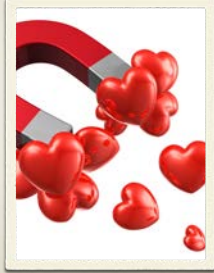
---



## The Power to Attract

\* The most influential factor that can either **promote or hinder one's sexuality** is people's ability to own their Power to Attract.

\* The Power to Attract relates directly to one's **recognition and ability to bring forth their strengths and most endearing qualities of oneself.**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

\* For example, if someone is a **good listener, makes thoughtful decisions, has a great sense of humor, and soulful eyes**, that's what will draw people to him. This is an example what contributes to someone's Power to Attract.

\* The Power to Attract feeds one's sense of sexuality and ultimately **gives people their power to shine.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Recap

\* All people of all abilities desire and need in all people to have loving relationships.

\* Be aware of the societal myths and false beliefs that present barriers to people with disabilities in having healthy, loving relationships.

\* **Fostering a healthy sexuality and creating positive body images in people with disabilities is a key component to healthy sexuality and relationships.**

\* People need to be taught they have the Power to Attract.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Implementing What You Learned

"Insight without action is worthless."  
-Marie Forleo

- \* All my trainings include a downloadable guide sheet to help you begin to implement insight into what is learned and begin making the changes you want to make, either in your life or your work with people with disabilities.
- \* Download it at <https://radiantabilities.lpages.co/healthysexuality/>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Sources

1. National Public Radio report, NPR Investigation Finds Hidden Epidemic Of Sexual Assault, January 8, 2018.
2. Johnson, I., Sigler, R. 2000 "Forced Sexual Intercourse Among Intimates," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 15 (1)
3. David Hingsburger sexuality training, Cazenovia College, October 2006.
4. Valenti-Heim, D., Schwartz, L. 1995. The Sexual Abuse Interview for Those with Developmental Disabilities.
5. Valenti-Heim, D., Schwartz, L. 1995. The Sexual Abuse Interview for Those with Developmental Disabilities.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---