

Sexuality and Developmental Disability

Factsheet for Parents of Youth with Disabilities



Concepts to Teach

Many parents find it uncomfortable to talk with their child about sexuality and puberty — you're not alone. Remember, it is normal for all children to be curious about sex. Becoming comfortable with talking about these topics with your child is important as these conversations are critical for your child's health and safety. They help the child with a disability develop self-care skills, social skills, appropriate behaviors, and increase personal safety. Parents know their children best and can determine when their child needs information regarding sexual health. All people have the right to safe and healthy relationships.



1. **Body Knowledge and Body Rights** – Teaching your child the appropriate names for their body parts can help them understand and communicate about their body to doctors and trusted adults. Teach the difference between public body parts and private body parts.



2. **Public / Private Places** – A public space is where there is more than one person and/or a place where you are likely to see other people. A private space is a space where someone can go to be alone. In general, there are two private places, a bedroom when alone and a bathroom at home when alone.



3. **Public / Private Behaviors** – Public behaviors are things you can do when you are with other people or around other people: things like playing at the park, eating dinner at a restaurant, or watching tv with others. Private behaviors are things you do when you are by yourself and are activities that should occur in private spaces: things like taking a shower, scratching an itch on a private part, and getting dressed.



4. **Consent** – Communication and touch should feel okay and healthy for everyone involved. Each person's body belongs to them. It is important that your child knows that someone needs to ask and get consent from them before they touch them and vice versa.



5. **Safe and Healthy Boundaries** – Boundaries are informal rules that people set to be respectful. We all have boundaries, and we need to respect other people's boundaries. Some examples: shaking hands instead of hugging, not entering personal space, or asking private questions. It is important that children learn about boundaries from an early age, so they do not get hurt or hurt other people.



6. **Appropriate Touch** – Help your child recognize the different types of affection that are appropriate in different types of relationships (family, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, professionals they interact with, and strangers): kiss on lips, kiss on cheek, smile, high-five, wave, hug, handshake, pat on back, hold hand, or no touch at all.



7. **Puberty** – All children, including children with disability, go through puberty as they are making the changes from being a child to an adult. They are noticing these changes, but it can be embarrassing for young people to communicate about this. Make them feel as comfortable as possible. Be open to questions and use resources. Teach your child hygiene skills.



8. **Get Away and Tell Someone** – Your child needs to know it is okay to leave a situation if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This includes in person, on social-media, texting, or talking on the phone. They need to know how to tell a trusted adult if something is dangerous, unsafe, or uncomfortable.



9. **Human Reproduction** – It is important for individuals with and without disabilities to understand how babies are made. Parents can decide when this time is right, but it should be before they reach the age of puberty. You want to make sure they hear accurate information from you. Depending on age, they may also receive some of this information in school family life education or health class.



10. **Romantic Relationships** – Developing a romantic attachment is normal but can be confusing especially regarding sexual feelings. All relationships are about respect and communication. Talk about different types of relationships: crushes, dating, and what to do when experiencing rejection.

Adapted from: [Let's Talk About Sex: Students with Disabilities and their Sexual Health](#)