

THE NEED FOR HEALTHY INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL SELF-ADVOCACY FOR HOOSIER WOMEN WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Sexuality and Women with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

- The general public incorrectly views people with disabilities as asexual, lacking need for physical intimacy and unable to have sexual experiences.¹
- Women with IDD desire intimacy and romance like other people.^{2,3}
- Women with IDD have diverse viewpoints about their sexuality. Some prefer nonsexual relationships, some want physical intimacy but not sexual intercourse, and others want satisfying sexual relationships.^{2,3}
- Unfortunately, people with IDD have lower levels of sexual health knowledge and fewer opportunities for sexual health education, as well as fewer opportunities for intimacy.^{2,3}
- Women with IDD are at high risk for sexual abuse.⁴



What we Learned from Hoosier Women with IDD about their Sexual Health

- Many have had adverse experiences such as abuse or other types of unhealthy relationships, resulting in negative perceptions of sexuality and of intimacy.⁵
- They may not have the autonomy required to make decisions about their own sexual health.⁵
- Most received little, if any, sexual health education in school and limited instruction on sexual health from their parents.⁵
- They report facing challenges in setting personal boundaries or knowing how to say “No” to unwanted sexual activity.⁵
- Some report having negative experiences in their interactions with sexual health care providers.⁵

“[M]ine (my boyfriend) was pretty controlling. So, -- I mean, I told him to stop and he wouldn't listen so, and he kept doing it. So, mine was kind of hard to do. So, I had to get my parents involved and stuff like that.”⁵

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NEED FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL SELF-ADVOCACY

“[W]e just like normal people. Just do things differently, you know, we need how to speak up for ourselves, we do the same things that you do. Like we can get married, we can have family, we can have a job. We just do things differently.”⁵

Why is it Important for Women with IDD to Advocate for their Sexual Health?



- Self-advocacy is an important skill to promote, especially in vulnerable populations. It is about standing up for your rights, being independent and making your own choices.⁶
- Sexual self-advocacy may increase sexual self-esteem and help women manage their sexuality in sensual, satisfying, and safe ways.⁷
- Sexual self-advocacy can help improve access to information and sexual health services.⁸

“People that don't have a disability don't really understand how hard it is for people... they will take advantage of us if they can.”⁵

Recommendations

“I have been through literally pretty much everything. But I think just from my past kind of taught me to stay strong in the future.”⁵

- Women with IDD require and deserve opportunities to explore and develop friendships and healthy social relationships of all kinds.
- Women with IDD need improved access to sexual health education that includes the topics of healthy intimate relationships and sexual self-advocacy.
- Women with IDD should be supported in their right to have intimate relationships, which may or may not include sexual relations.
- Women with IDD should have opportunities to learn how to advocate for themselves in intimate relationships and in interactions regarding sexual and reproductive health services. They need opportunities to practice these self-advocacy skills.
- Indiana needs to build improved, sustainable social support networks that empower women with IDD to have healthy intimate relationships.

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