



C U Y A H O G A C O U N T Y  
**Board of Developmental Disabilities**

# **Sexuality, Safety & Relationships**

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**Cuyahoga Co. Board of DD**

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**Supporting and empowering people with developmental disabilities  
to live, learn, work and play in the community**

# About the Cuyahoga County Board of DD

- Proudly serve over 12,000 people with developmental disabilities of all ages annually
- Employ 900+ professional staff who support people in natural environments, like the home, school, workplace, and community
- Use a person-centered approach to help people achieve meaningful goals
- Administer Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waivers to help people live their lives to the fullest
- Connect people to services and resources available in the community
- Funded in part (63%) by a continuing levy



# What is Sexuality?

- “...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.” (WHO, 2006a)



# What is Sexual Health?

- “...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (*WHO, 2006a*)



# Typical Sexual Development

	Common Behavior	Uncommon Behavior
<b>Preschool Age 0-5 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have questions and express knowledge relating to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Differences in gender and genitalia</li> <li>- Hygiene and toileting</li> <li>- Pregnancy and birth</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Will explore genitals</li> <li>• Showing and looking at genitals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having knowledge of specific sexual acts or explicit sexual language</li> <li>• Engaging in adult-like sexual contact with another child</li> </ul>
<b>School Age 6-8 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have questions and express knowledge relating to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Physical development, relationships, and sexual behavior</li> <li>- Menstruation and pregnancy</li> <li>- Personal values</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Experiment with same-age and gender children including games and role-playing</li> <li>• Self-stimulation in private</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult-like sexual interactions</li> <li>• Having knowledge of specific sexual acts</li> <li>• Behaving sexually in public place or through the use of a phone or technology</li> </ul>
<b>School Age 9-12 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have questions and express knowledge relating to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sexual materials and information</li> <li>- Relationships and sexual behavior</li> <li>- Using sexual words and discussing sexual acts and personal values</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Increased experimentation with sexual behaviors and romantic relationships</li> <li>• Self-stimulation in private</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly occurring adult-like sexual behavior</li> <li>• Behaving sexually in a public place</li> </ul>
<b>Adolescence 13-16 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have questions and express knowledge relating to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision making</li> <li>- Social relationships and sexual customs</li> <li>- Personal values and consequences of sexual behavior</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Self-stimulation in private</li> <li>• Sexual experimentation between adolescents of the same age</li> <li>• Voyeuristic behaviors are common</li> <li>• First sexual intercourse will occur for approximately one third of teens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masturbation in public</li> <li>• Sexual interest directed toward much younger children</li> </ul>



# Sex-Positive Approach

- Working toward ideal sexual experiences, not just avoiding negative experiences
- Why is this important?
  - Want to acknowledge that people with developmental disabilities are more vulnerable than the neurotypical population, however it is important that we don't restrict people from sexual experiences out of fear
  - Education is key to building sex-positive attitudes towards sexuality and increases the chance that safer sex practices will be implemented



# Balancing Safety and Sexual Expression

- It's OK to feel uncomfortable about your child's sexuality
  - Can't avoid it
  - Avoidance/suppression/shame leads to problematic behaviors later
  - Don't be hard on yourself, any conversation is progress



# Balancing Safety and Sexual Expression

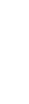
- Start with developmentally appropriate facts
- Start with basics and build up
  - Private vs. public
  - Body parts
  - Sexual feelings are different than other feelings
  - Where and when it's ok to touch yourself
  - What to do if you feel special feelings for someone else
    - Include how to start conversations, ask on a date
- Talk about consent
  - Asking for each act





# Balancing Safety and Sexual Expression

- Offer social opportunities often
  - Loneliness is a huge factor in making unsafe decisions
- Teach empowerment
  - Praise positive attributes
  - Create opportunities to feel successful without having to *do something for someone else*
  - Allow for choice making without criticism or judgement
  - Help individuals recognize where they struggle in a kind and supportive way
  - It's OK to say “no” or “that makes me uncomfortable”



# Break Time

- See you in ~7 minutes



# Power Imbalances

- Natural power imbalance between an individual receiving services and a person providing supports
- People with DD are used to being told what to do
- It is critical to teach what manipulation and abuse looks like
  - Grooming: buying gifts, compliments about appearance, sharing special secrets
  - Manipulation: “if you don’t do this, we can’t be friends”, etc
  - Abuse: verbal, physical, sexual



# Transitioning Into Adult Services/Employment

- New environments, people, expectations
- Relationships and sexual behaviors are often the cause for problems at work
- Explicit expectations need to be explained
  - Pro-tip: discuss the bathroom at work being different from the bathroom at home; it's not a private place!
- *Boundaries At Work* handout



# Counterfeit Deviance

- Lack of knowledge/education
- Age vs. Interest
- Behavior that can be viewed as ‘predatory’
- Time/place confusion
- Boundaries and the “helper” role



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# Common Concerns

- Masturbating in public
- Inappropriate touching of others
- Sexting/giving personal information out to people on the internet



# Digital Safety

- Can serve as a temporary fix to loneliness
- Easier for some to “connect” online
- Instant gratification
  - Good for those with low frustration tolerance
- Risks of exploitation





# Digital Safety

- Pornography
  - Prevalent, easily accessed
  - Doesn't show real sexual experiences
  - Entertainment
- *Digital Safety* handout



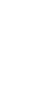
# Resources

- Things Tom Likes and Things Ellie Likes by Kate Reynolds
- Autism-Asperger's and Sexuality : Puberty and Beyond by Mary Newport and Jerry Newport
- Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health: A Curriculum for Teaching Adolescents/adults with High-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Social Challenges by Catherine Davies and Melissa Dubie
- Boyfriends & Girlfriends: A Guide to Dating for People with Disabilities by Terri Couwenhoven
- Planned Parenthood YouTube Videos on Consent:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNN3nAevQKY>
- Additional resources for parents:  
<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/sexed/>



# Citations

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# Questions?

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# Advancing our mission

- Continue to be a vital part of the county's health and human services
- Share our expertise with a wide range of community partners
- Assure safety net services for those with the greatest needs
- Facilitate collaborative initiatives
- Provide high-quality support administration
- Fund services



# INCLUSION

begins with

# YOU



C U Y A H O G A C O U N T Y  
**Board of Developmental Disabilities**

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(216) 241-8230   [www.CuyahogaBDD.org](http://www.CuyahogaBDD.org)



# Five things YOU can do to promote inclusion

**BE INSPIRED** Invite one of our Good Life Ambassadors (advocates) to speak at your agency, business or event.

1

Let's create an inclusive community, together. Schedule a Good Life Ambassador presentation by calling **(216) 736-2924**.

**BE INCLUSIVE** Support ways people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community life.

2

Arrange a free training on inclusive practices or sensory-friendly experiences by calling **(216) 736-2722**.

**HIRE** someone with a developmental disability and enhance workforce diversity. People with disabilities can work and want to work.

3

Meet your hiring needs by contacting the Employment Collaborative of Cuyahoga County at **(216) 931-7458**.

**VOLUNTEER** with us. Share your time, interests and friendship. Become a community friend.

4

Learn more about volunteer opportunities by calling **(216) 736-2722**.

**CONNECT** We're here to support and empower people with developmental disabilities.

5

If you or someone you know is in need of our support, contact us at **(216) 241-8230**.

LEARN: [www.CuyahogaBDD.org](http://www.CuyahogaBDD.org)

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