



POLICY STATEMENT



SEXUALITY

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People with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities¹, like all people, have inherent sexual rights and basic human needs. These rights and needs must be affirmed, defended, and respected.

ISSUE

For years, people with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities have been thought to be asexual, having no need for loving, fulfilling relationships with others. Individual rights to sexuality, which is essential to human health and well-being, have been denied. This loss has affected them broadly in gender identity, friendships, self-esteem, body image and awareness, emotional growth, and social behavior. Our constituents frequently lack access to appropriate sex education in schools and as adults and to training in parenting and child-rearing. At the same time, people with cognitive limitations often engage in sexual relations as a result of poor options, manipulation, loneliness or physical force rather than as an expression of their sexuality.

Moreover, the general public maintains other out-of-date views of our constituents. Many people have an unfounded fear that parents with intellectual disabilities cannot raise or financially support their children and thus will require more government support, including placement of children in the foster care system.

POSITION

Every person has the right to exercise choices regarding sexual expression and social relationships. The presence of intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities, regardless of severity, does not, in itself, justify loss of rights related to sexuality.

All people have the right within interpersonal relationships to:

- Develop friendships and emotional relationships where they can love and be loved and start and stop the relationships as they choose.

¹ "People with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities" refers to our constituency, *i.e.*, those defined by the AAIDD classification and the DSM IV. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by DSM IV.

- Dignity and respect.
- Privacy, confidentiality, and freedom of association.

With respect to sexuality, individuals have a right to:

- Age-appropriate sexual expression, reflective of social development, cultural, religious and moral values, and social responsibility.
- Education and information to allow informed decisions, including education about such issues as abstinence, fertility awareness and reproduction, marriage and family life, safe sexual practices, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Protection from sexual harassment as well as from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and sexual relationships with paid staff.
- Not be denied sexual relationships, including marriage, with individuals of their choice, due solely on the basis of their disability.

With respect to sexuality, individuals have a responsibility to:

- Consider the values, rights, and feelings of others.
- Seek counsel from families, friends, religious leaders, and others on the personal and societal values associated with sexuality.

With respect to the potential for having and raising children, they have the right to:

- Not be denied choices related to having and raising children (with supports if necessary), use birth control methods and techniques within the context of their personal or religious beliefs, to accept personal responsibility for these decisions; and to have control over their own bodies.
- Have, on an individual basis, access to the proper supports to assist them in raising their children within their own home.
- Not be sterilized solely because of their disability and not have such decisions made for them regardless of the severity of their intellectual disabilities.

Notwithstanding any language contained in this position on sexuality, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities always possess the right as individuals to object to any statement or position held by The Arc which they find objectionable due to conscience or personally-held moral or religious beliefs.

Adopted: Board of Directors, AAIDD
October 2007

Congress of Delegates, The Arc of the United States
October 13, 2007

