

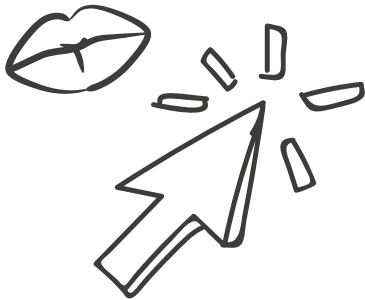
FACTSHEET

Sexual health promotion with young people with disability



The United Nations (2009) identifies people with disability as ‘those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’.

People with disability in NSW have the right to have sexual relationships, to access sexual health services and information, and to make decisions about their own bodies.



Yet young people with disability often have numerous barriers to attaining good sexual health and wellbeing. It is commonly assumed that they don't or can't have sex, or that they don't have diverse gender or sexual identities. Where support workers or professionals hold these assumptions, this may impact a person's ability to access sexual health information and services.

Young people with disability, particularly young people with intellectual disability, may receive limited sexual health education at school and may therefore miss out on learning key sexual health messages. Sexual health programs and resources are often inaccessible or not suited to the person's particular needs or circumstances.

Obligations under disability discrimination legislation and international human rights frameworks, and high rates of sexual assault experienced by people with disability indicate the need for health promotion programs that are inclusive, relevant and accessible, and that support people with disability to make their own choices in addressing their sexual health.

The following tips may assist you when working with young people with disability.

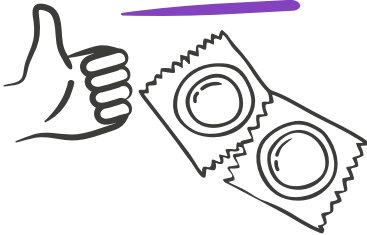
FACTSHEET

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DEVELOPING

inclusive materials **AND** health promotion programs



Include the needs of young people with disability in health promotion programs (including in the planning and delivery of these programs)

Consider how approaches may be adapted to meet the different needs of young people with disability. Focus on making mainstream programs accessible and inclusive and develop disability-specific programs only when required. Ensure a variety of disabilities are represented within health promotion programs. This should be done proactively as not all disabilities are visible, and not all young people with disability identify as having a disability. Here are some examples for making mainstream programs accessible and inclusive.

- Use [Easy English](#) and illustrations/photos for all written resources
- Revisit discussions and new concepts regularly throughout the program, ensure resources and delivery of information can be easily understood regardless of age and duration of time
- Include the stories of people with disability whenever you use stories of young people
- Use close captions and audio descriptions when using video content
- Ensure venues used for events, programs or activities meet the Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010
- Ensure web-based content adheres to [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)

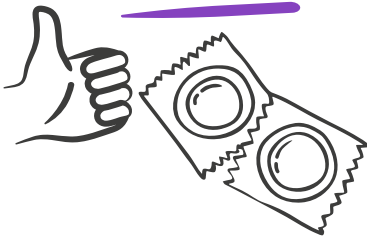
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DEVELOPING

inclusive materials AND health promotion programs



Ensure accessibility of all health promotion programs

- Consider systems, facilities, and services, including the format of resources and activities, the language and images used, and how resources and venues are accessed. Are these accessible for your audience?
- Ask young people with disability you work with to give suggestions and feedback on what works best for them or how your programs can be improved
- Provide health education about a range of topics like safety, consent, relationships, protection, STIs and testing rather than based on a person's assumed capacity. To find out age-appropriate information around sexual health for young people, you can read the [UNESCO Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education](#), or talk to an educator.

Choose broad-ranging approaches that respectfully portray disability, as well as diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, sexualities and intersex variations

Be a visible ally by displaying resources, including posters, videos, factsheets and story boards, that positively depict people with disability in their diversity. The following resources are available to you.

- **Family Planning NSW** has two poster series that tell the stories of people with disability, their sexualities and relationships - [Love and Kisses](#) and [Outing Disability](#) in particular, is an example of a project that uses photo and video to highlight the stories of LGBTIQ+ people who identify as having a disability.
- **Relationship goals** is a booklet designed by Family Planning NSW for people with intellectual disability and autism. The booklet asks important questions to help learn about oneself and relationships to then be able to set some [relationship goals](#).

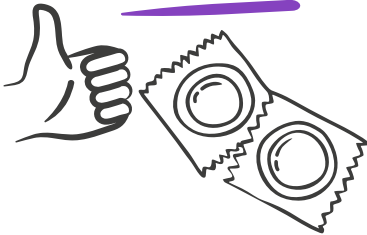
FACTSHEET

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- **All About Sex** is a fact sheet series created by Family Planning NSW to facilitate conversations between people with intellectual disability and their support workers, providing [information about sexuality and relationships](#). Designed in easy-to-read explicit language and illustrations, this resource covers a range of topics, including bodies, relationships, sex, pregnancy and reproduction, sexual health and sexual assault.

- **Sex, Safe and Fun** is a [resource pack](#) for support workers, advocates, teachers, parents, and clinicians who want to talk with a person with intellectual disability about sexuality. The resource presents a factual and balanced view of the rights and responsibilities associated with a range of sexual activities. There are important messages about consent, enjoyment, intimacy, privacy and safety in an easy-to-read format.

Create and maintain safe settings

- Raise awareness of the sexual rights of people with disability and actively combat misconceptions, stigma and lack of knowledge amongst colleagues and also within the broader community.
- When discussing sexual health with young people with disability, always use a participatory approach and ensure you have conversations in a trauma informed way. Check out Play Safe Pro's [Trauma Informed Care Booklet](#) for more information.

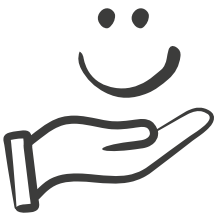
FACTSHEET

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Learn how to support people with

DISABILITY



Establish links with organisations of and for people with disability

There are a variety of national, state and local organisations led by, and working on behalf of, people with disability. Some organisations represent people with all types of disabilities, while others represent groups of people with specific disabilities. They can assist in connecting to local young people with disability, and provide guidance on how to ensure systems, facilities and services are inclusive and accessible.

Some organisations you can reach out to are:

- Family Planning NSW
- The Advocate for Children and Young People
- Youth Action
- Disability Advocacy NSW
- Physical Disability Council of NSW
- Disability Advocacy Network Australia

Support people with disability

We have a role to play in support young people who discuss their sexual health or want to learn about their sexual health receive positive, non-judgemental and useful experiences.

- Identify the young person's level of knowledge and understanding of sexual health and use appropriate communication techniques and check in with them to see if they have understood the information you have provided
- Never assume a young person's sexuality, gender identity or sexual experiences based on their ability. Humans are sexual beings with sexual thoughts, feelings and desires and supporting this in a safe way is important

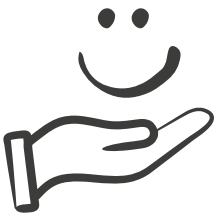
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Learn how to support people with

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Support people with disability

- Create and maintain safe and accessible settings by displaying welcoming and inclusive signs such as diverse health promotion material, including posters
- Promote safety and ensure cultural competence by upskilling yourself. [Family Planning NSW](#) and [Children and Young People with Disability Australia](#) have excellent resources and trainings available
- Provide health information in a broad-ranging approach that respectfully includes experiences of disability

CONSIDER

your own approaches



Be aware of your assumptions

Don't assume a person's knowledge, experience or decision-making capacity based on their disability. Don't assume a person needs or wants your assistance. Always listen and ask.

Use appropriate language

In Australia, best practice language is to use "person with disability" or "people with disability". Avoid terms that may have negative meanings (e.g. retard, invalid, suffers from..., crippled) or imply that people with disability are courageous, brave, inspirational or pitiable for living with a disability. It is okay to use common expressions like "see you soon" or "I'd better be running along", even if a person is vision impaired or uses a wheelchair.

FACTSHEET

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What I can do to improve

MY PRACTICE



- Advocate for the rights and relevant policies regarding people with disability. For example, does your organisation have a policy that recognises the sexual rights of people with disability?
- Create programs and resources that recognise and overcome the barriers and gaps in sexual and reproductive health education and accessibility of services for people with disability
- Create written resources in easy-to-read format, followed by accessibility guidelines
- Ensure workplace training is provided and prioritise the need to tailor approaches as required for health promotion programs for people with disability
- Seek feedback and direction from people with disability to shape resources and programs alongside ensuring inclusivity of LGBTQA+ and people with disability representation through pictures and stories
- Deliver sexual and reproductive health education without discrimination

FACTSHEET

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Resources

- ➔ **Family Planning NSW** - has an extensive collection of reproductive and sexual health resources available for free download and loan to people with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorders, and their support people, including parents and carers, disability workers, clinicians and students. Go to fnsw.org.au/disability for more information.
- ➔ **Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health for Persons with Disabilities:**
WHO/UNFPA Guidance Note.
See unfpa.org/publications/promoting-sexual-and-reproductive-health-persons-disabilities
- ➔ **Australian Network on Disability**
Factsheets on understanding disability.
See and.org.au/pages/understanding-disability.html
- ➔ **People with Disability Australia**
Inclusive language guide
pwd.org.au/resources/language-guide
- ➔ **Women with Disability Australia Youth Network** - multiple articles
youth.wwda.org.au
- ➔ **Insight** - Sex and Disability episode
youtube.com/watch?v=eMAJHmoj9zs
- ➔ **Planet Puberty** planetpuberty.org.au

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