

PATHWAYS ABILITIES SOCIETY

POLICY: SEXUALITY

Applies to: All Personnel, Volunteers, Persons Served, Families, Advocates and Caregivers

Original Approval Date: April 28, 2003

Date Board Approved: March 29, 2021

Replaces Policy Dated: December 21, 2012

Board Member's Signature

PREAMBLE

Sexuality is the integration of a person's feelings, thoughts, experiences, attractions, and behaviors towards other people. Sexuality is composed of a person's biological gender, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation. Sexuality means all the parts of us.

Sex and gender are often used interchangeably, when in fact they have different meanings. Sex means the biological and physiological attributes that a person is born with which determine how they are identified (male, female, or intersex). Gender is a broad social construct and therefore not based on nature. While many people think of gender as male or female, there is a broad spectrum of gender identities between and outside of the traditional maleness and femaleness. These gender identities include male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, third gender, and all, none or a combination of these.

There will be some aspects of this policy, with which, on the basis of a person's own ethical or moral code, employees might disagree with or find personally unacceptable. There is no expectation that such staff should change their own values. Equally, they will not as professionals, impose their values upon the individuals they support.

Why are guidelines necessary?

- The sexuality of people with diverse-abilities is something-that is often ignored.
- There is considerable evidence that people have difficulty or limitations learning about sexuality. The resulting lack of knowledge and limited skills would suggest there is a need for more structured help from those employed to support them.
- Often staff and parents are anxious over the possible sexual exploitation of a person with diverse-abilities. This fear may result in over-protection and therefore the person is deprived of opportunities to express their sexuality.
- People with diverse-abilities need to be acquainted with the sexual and social rules of society in order to reduce their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

If staff are to compensate for the lack of sex education people with diverse-abilities have, they first need to be aware and sensitive to the sexuality of people with diverse-abilities. And second they need to counter the risk of sexual exploitation, and give specific and practical guidance in this area.

Sexuality is only one aspect of a wider range of interpersonal skills. These skills are rarely the result of formal teaching, but are built over time from incidental learning experiences. For most people, learning is made possible by the availability of a series of different environments, and a variety of other people to learn from. Unfortunately, such opportunities are frequently missing from the lives of people with diverse-abilities. Their social interactions are usually supervised and restricted to other people with diverse-abilities and staff. If people with diverse-abilities are to develop meaningful relationships, then staff need to provide the “personal space” necessary and the opportunities to experience and develop a wide range of relationships.

POLICY

Pathways Abilities Society provides an environment of openness and safety that promotes healthy appropriate and informed decision-making regarding sexuality. Pathways Abilities Society encourages individuals to experience all aspects of community living including the expression of one’s sexuality or gender, regardless of the person’s abilities.

Pathways Abilities Society believes that people with diverse-abilities have the right to be provided with information and education on human sexuality, express their sexuality, establish relationships, marry or live together, have children and make choices in all areas of human sexuality.

Pathways Abilities Society staff’s role is to provide information to individuals to make informed decisions, offer guidance and facilitate individual’s questions. Staff does not impose or discuss their own beliefs or opinions related to sexuality or gender. They only provide factual information intended for educational purposes that has been approved by Pathways Abilities Society management. This can also be done with the help of the individual’s physician or public health nurse.

Underlying this policy is the belief that people with diverse-abilities, no matter how severe, have the same rights to experience the patterns of life that we value for ourselves.