

Prevention through education: Outcomes and barriers

HEIDI LERSCH

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Meet the presenters

Professional experience:

- Co-developed and taught healthy relationships curriculum for students with IDD
- Job coach for students with disabilities in a transition program
- Education team lead at residential day program
- Family Crisis Center Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Prevention Educator
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteer (children with disabilities)



HEIDI LERSCH

Meet the presenters

Professional experience:

- SAFE Disability Services: Co-developed and taught healthy relationships curriculum for students with IDD.
- SAFE Sexual Assault Advocacy
- The Arc of Texas Policy Fellow
- Licensed Social Worker
- Volunteer with Texas Advocates



MEGAN WESTMORE

SAFE | stop abuse for everyone

A merger of Austin Children's Shelter and SafePlace

Training for people with disabilities on topics including personal safety, healthy relationships, and safer sexuality

Information, technical assistance, and training for:

- disability service organizations
- victim service professionals (domestic & sexual violence)
- criminal justice staff
- Family members and others stakeholders

Working with community partners to recognize and address gaps in services for people with disabilities

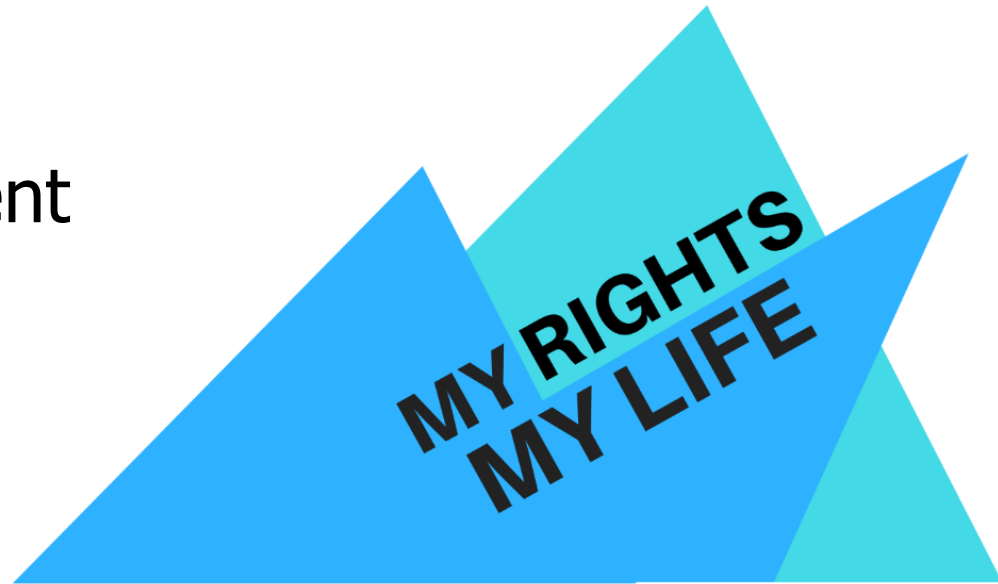
Webinar overview

1. Explore My Rights My Life curriculum, a healthy relationship, safer sexuality, and self-advocacy curriculum for students with IDD.
2. Examine the successes and barriers to implementing an accessible healthy relationship and safer sexuality curriculum for students with IDD in public schools.
3. Discuss long-term goals for maximizing the effectiveness of My Rights My Life curriculum in increasing safety and preventing sexual violence.

Year 1: Implementing My Rights My Life curriculum

Project overview

- Development and demonstration project
- Three main areas:
 - ✓ Relationships development
 - ✓ Sexuality
 - ✓ Self-advocacy



Student population

- 18-22 year olds with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving transition services
- Spectrum of support and accessibility needs vary by classroom and district.
- Why transition students?
 - Adults with adult rights (guardianship?)
 - Staff to student support ratio
 - Content aligns with transition focus (social/community learning)



Student population: Two districts

- **Austin Independent School District**

- Student population: 81,346
- Economically disadvantaged: 53.4%
- Bilingual/ESL: 29.2%

- **Eanes Independent School District**

- Student population: 8,055
- Economically disadvantaged: 2.7%
- Bilingual/ESL: 2.1%



How we engaged parents

An effective way to involve parents:
Monthly Newsletters!

MARCH NEWSLETTER



March Calendar:
 Week 1. What is community?
 Week 2. Identifying common issues
 Week 3. Leadership and advocacy skills
 Week 4. Planning for change

MY RIGHTS | MY LIFE

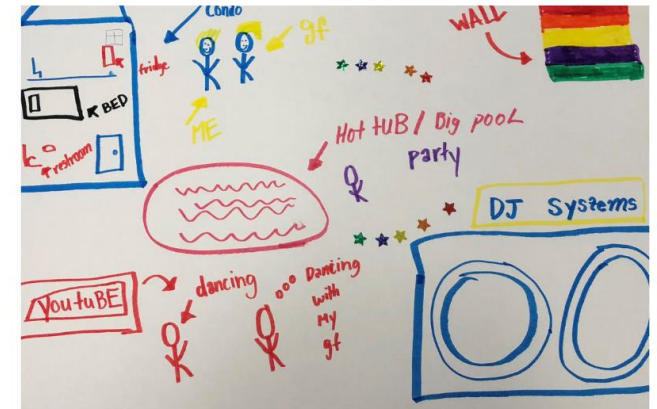
This month in the SAFE Class:

We can't believe Unit 2 is finished and this month students will start the final unit, Unit 3! We are so excited to support each student as they learn about leadership and advocacy in their communities. This month we will begin by exploring what community means. We will view a video about community and think and talk about what communities they belong to. The class will draw and write about how their community groups, (e.g. faith communities, service organizations, and neighborhood groups) help and support them. In the following week, class members will explore what community issues are important and meaningful to them. Students will learn about ways to create positive change. One example is to speak with a legislator about sub minimum wage laws. Class members will also define and discuss activism and self-advocacy. The next class will focus on community leadership skills. Students will begin to think about and prepare for the upcoming Unit 3 field trip to the Capitol. The students will explore in more detail different approaches to creating positive change. Through role play each student will practice using their leadership skills to advocate for a community issue they are passionate about. In the final week of March students will create a guide they can use to talk to legislators or testify in a committee hearing. The class will review the steps of the Advocacy Guide together before each student creates their own. Every student will use writing, drawing, and collage, to communicate their commitment to an issue they would like to change. The class will end by acknowledging and discussing any emotions the students feel about visiting the Capitol and talking to legislators.

Tips for continuing the conversation and resources on back

Creating content for all students

- Pictures, visuals
- Physical objects and art
- Games and role playing
- Culturally relevant content
- Repetition



Accessible and engaging activities



French Fry Consent Game



The "Relationship Game"

A toolbox for boundaries and safety



Relationship Toolbox

Understandable safer sexuality education



OUR BODIES AND SEX

Knowing about your body and body parts and other bodies and body parts can help you stay safe and feel good when you are being sexual.

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**REPRODUCTION:
MAKING A BABY**

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(How to not make a baby)

BIRTH CONTROL

Birth control is what we call the things that people use so that they do not make babies when they have sex.

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Students with high support needs

- **Build rapport** with all students.
- Include a **variety of participation opportunities**.
- Work with teachers and staff to **learn student support needs**.
- Use the **method of communication** that works best for the student.
 - Work with staff to pre-program content on communication devices.
 - Use existing communication boards or other communication support.
 - Incorporate basic ASL during lesson.



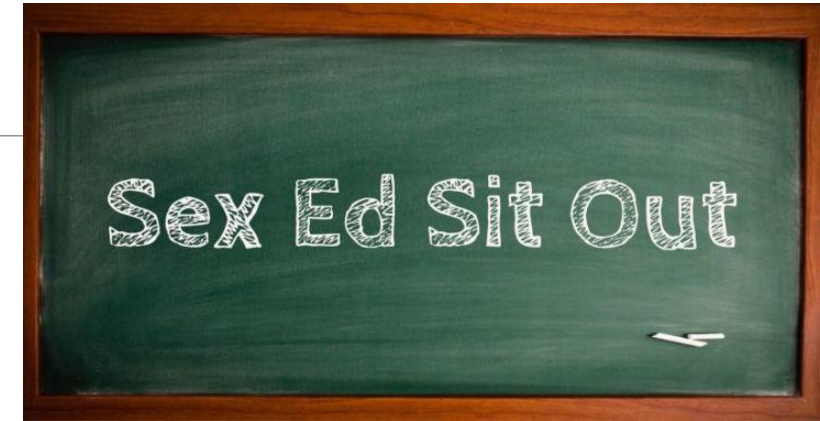
First year accomplishments

- ✓ Seventy-six (76) transition students completed the classes.
- ✓ Positive response from school personnel
- ✓ Positive response from students
- ✓ Satisfaction survey: **93% responded favorably**
- ✓ Students demonstrated key concepts



Barriers to implementation

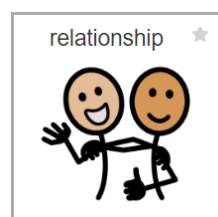
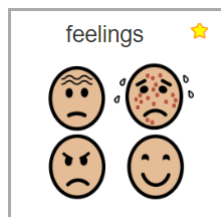
- Lack of parent and family involvement
- Language barriers
- Parents/guardians opted students out of individual sessions
- Education code does not provide clear guidelines on sex education with 18+ transition students.
- Limited ability to incorporate content throughout school week



Room for growth: Where we go from here

Expanding our reach to all students

- ❑ **Communication boards** with picture symbols on class topics.
- ❑ **Topic boards** with visual reminders and prompts.
- ❑ **Pre-teaching vocabulary and concepts** for students who learn best with repetition and processing time.
- ❑ May provide instruction and/or curriculum materials **in Spanish.**



GROSSED OUT



HURT



SAD



MAD



SCARED

Expanding safer sexuality content

Gaps in sexuality education:

Students with IDD either excluded from sex education or provided inaccessible sex education.



Expanding safer sexuality content

To meet student needs, include more on:

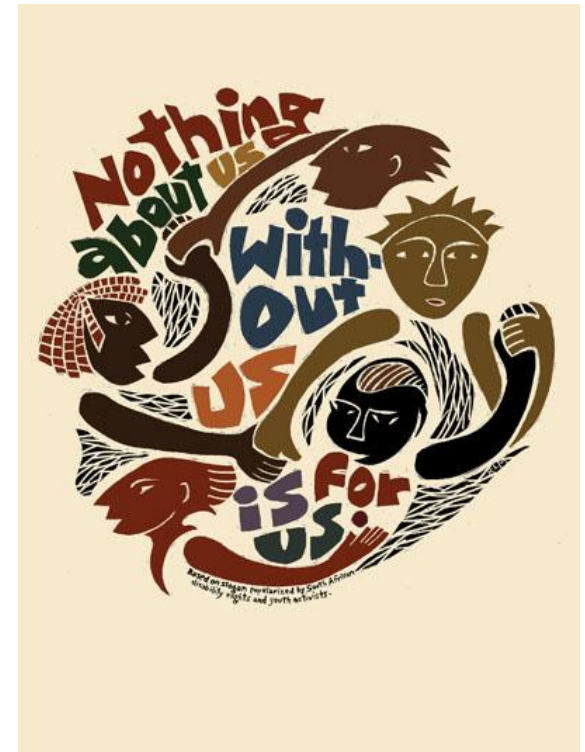
- Cultural misconceptions around romantic relationships and sex
- Barriers for STIs (condoms, dental dams, internal condoms)
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Sexual harassment
- Birth control
- Cyber safety

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Videos to support student learning

- Create limited series of My Rights My Life **videos on key concepts**
- Developed with and **starring self-advocates**
- Will **support teacher facilitation** of curriculum
- **Relevant and accessible** outside school setting—can be viewed by individuals, parents, support staff, etc.



Long term goals: Wraparound education and policy change

Starting early for better outcomes

- National Sexuality Education Standards provide guidelines for comprehensive, age-appropriate curriculum for K-12.
- Starting sex education in primary school lowers unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, maternal deaths, and STIs, according to study from Georgetown University (Melker, 2015).
- Comprehensive sex education in middle and high school is a protective factor against sexual assault in college, according to a Columbia University-funded study (Santelli, etc.al., 2018).

Wraparound education: Parents and families

Why educate parents, guardians, and family?

- Can reinforce relationships and communication skills
- Have authority over sexual expression of people with IDD.
- Essential advocates for the right to sexual expression
- Essential advocates for the right to healthy relationships
- Can increase their ability to identify abuse and respond in trauma-informed ways.

Wraparound education: School staff

Why educate school staff?

- Create classroom and school cultures of consent.
- Students likely to explore romantic relationships at school.
- School staff can reinforce and support continued learning of relationship and communication skills.
- Increase staff ability to identify abuse and respond in trauma-informed ways.

Wraparound education: Residential staff

Why train residential staff?

- Without training, residential staff are likely to impose their own values/biases when clients express sexuality.
- Residential staff need training on providing support based on consent and respecting client boundaries.
- Residential staff can support safe and private opportunities for clients to express sexuality.
- Lack of policy and training on supporting the sexual expression of clients increases risk for abuse.

Policy needs: Sexual expression in residential settings **SAFE**

Survey of disability service professionals:

- 55% were unaware of agency policies re clients' relationships and sexuality.
- 62% received no training on clients' romantic/sexual relationships.



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Multnomah County Health Department, 2018
Samowitz, 2010

SAFE |

Creating positive change now

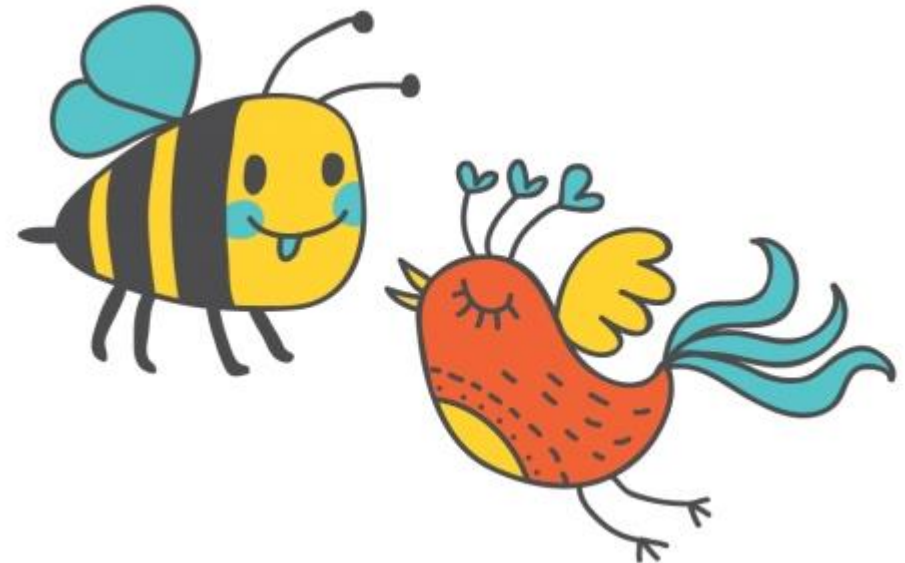
Drafting an agency policy: Right of sexual expression in residential settings

Start with statement about clients' sexual expression rights.

Clearly define support staff's role in each area.

Other areas to address:

- Choices and consent
- Friendships and relationships
- Education and information
- Reproduction and contraception
- Internet use



Samowitz, 2010

National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics (2016)

As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain relationships.

- Advocate for the people I support when they do not have access to opportunities and education to facilitate building and maintaining relationships.
- Recognize the importance of relationships and proactively facilitate relationships between the people I support, their family and friends.
- Assure that people have the opportunity to make informed choices in safely expressing their sexuality.
- Separate my own personal beliefs and expectations regarding relationships (including sexual relationships) from those desired by the people I support based on their personal preferences. If I am unable to separate my own beliefs/preferences in a given situation, I will actively remove myself from the situation.



Making a world of difference
in people's lives

Direct support professionals: Key points

1. You don't have to know all the answers.
2. Be sensitive to your client's values.
3. Explore informed consent.
4. Be aware of ethical guidelines.
5. Know organizational policies and local laws.
6. Support development of intimate relationships.
7. Support safer sex.
8. Sexual aids can be helpful.
9. Sexual health checks are important.



Arnold & Vincent-Pennisi, 2010

Creating a culture of consent

- Creating a culture of consent starts with YOU!
- Crucial for counteracting compliance training and preventing abuse
- Consent must be demonstrated before:
 - ✓ Providing care
 - ✓ Touching someone's body or possessions
 - ✓ Sharing personal information
 - ✓ Providing assistance
 - ✓ Initiating services



What parents and families can do

Advocate for accessible healthy relationship and sex education curriculum in schools.

Start conversations early! You can teach consent and boundaries at any age—the earlier the better.

Awkward is OK. It can be awkward to talk to your child about bodies and sex, but doing so increases their safety.

You are not alone! There is help and support out there.



Resources

amaze.org – animated videos on a variety of healthy relationship and safer sexuality topics, as well as a section for educators with toolkits and lesson plans, all free.

The Arc of Spokane’s “Healthy Relationships Workbook” can be downloaded for free at: arcwhatcom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Healthy-Relationship-Workbook.pdf

The Birds and the Bees provides information about teaching sexuality to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. <https://asdsexed.org/>

ConnectSafely educates technology users about safety, privacy, and security online for young adults and parents. Their “Tips and Advice” section includes fact sheets about today’s Internet safety issues. connectsafely.org



Resources

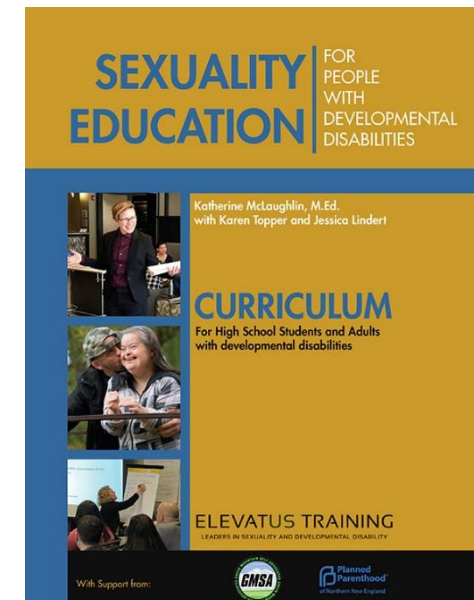
King County 28-week special education curriculum on healthy relationships and safer sexuality.

www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/family-planning/education/FLASH/special-education.aspx

Katherine McLaughlin curriculum on sexuality of individuals with IDD, available for sale at www.elevatustraining.com/. Several webinars available on this website.

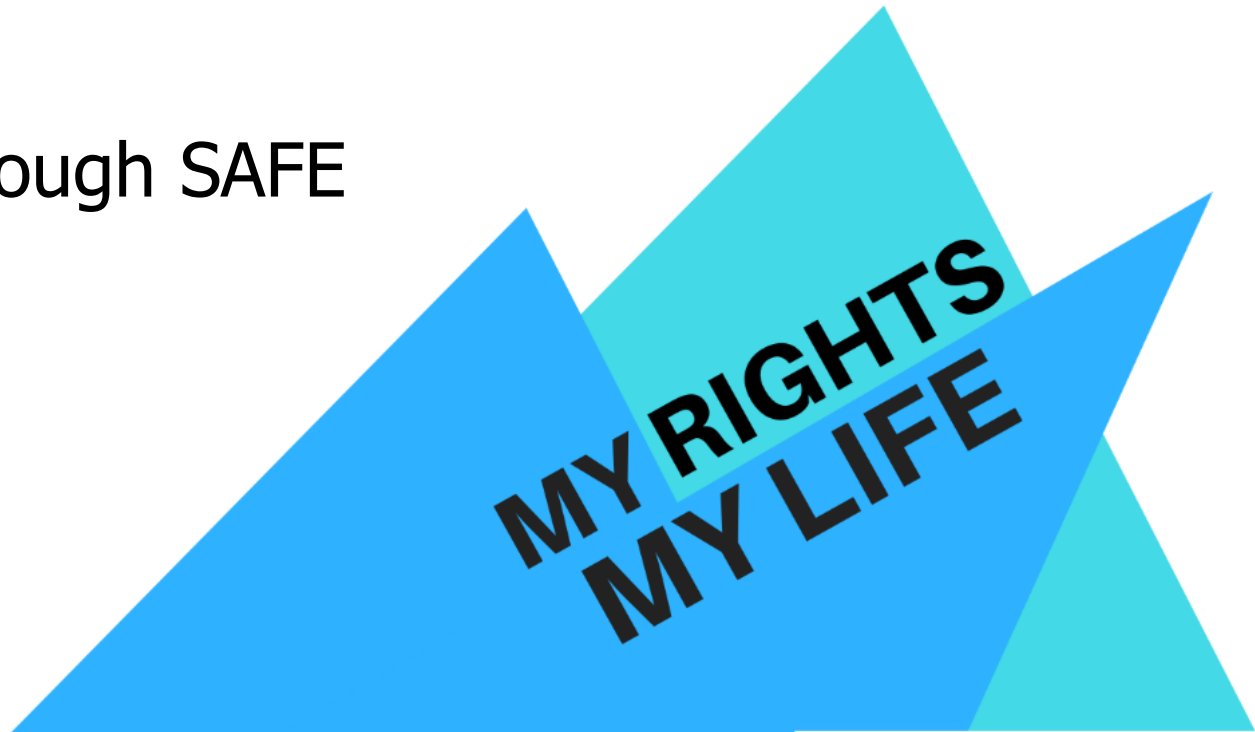
A report from **Multnomah County** on supporting the sexual health of individuals with IDD at multco.us/school/sexual-health-youth-developmental-disabilities

Planned Parenthood locations throughout Texas provide affordable healthcare to individuals with and without insurance. Wealth of educational information at www.plannedparenthood.org



When will curriculum be available?

- Projected completion of My Rights My Life curriculum is 2022
- Will be available through SAFE



Questions??



Thank you!

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For Deaf/HH/Deaf-Blind community, use relay/VRS

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