



Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Promotion with Disabled Youth

Easy Read



FUNDING

Financial contribution from



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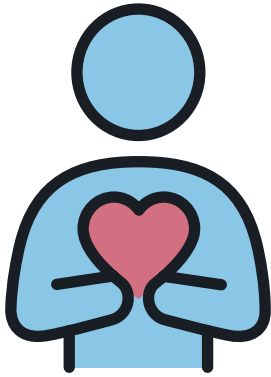
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Introduction

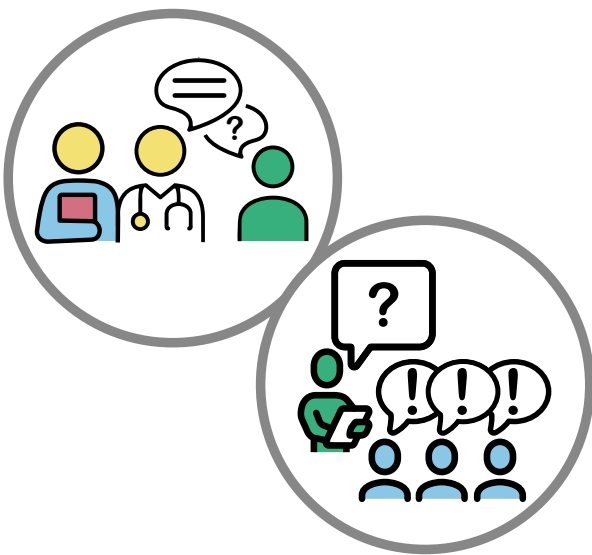


What is the project about?

The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) did a project to make sexual health promotion better for disabled youth.

To do this, SIECCAN asked:

- Service providers, what information they need to know to support disabled youth
- Disabled youth, what information they need about sexual health



SIECCAN used this information to write the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Promotion with Disabled Youth*.

What is physical disability?



There are many types of physical disabilities. This report is about disabilities related to movement. For example, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, and spinal cord injury.



There are also many ways of thinking about disability. Sometimes people think disability is caused by a person's body differences. Sometimes people think disability is caused by society because it is not accessible or inclusive.

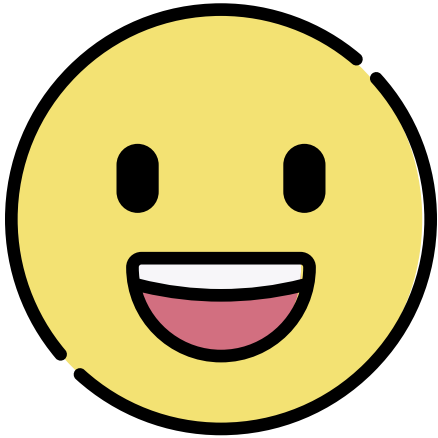


In this project, we used the World Health Organization definition of disability. Based on this definition, disability is about a person's ability to participate in society. It is influenced by their body **and** by society.

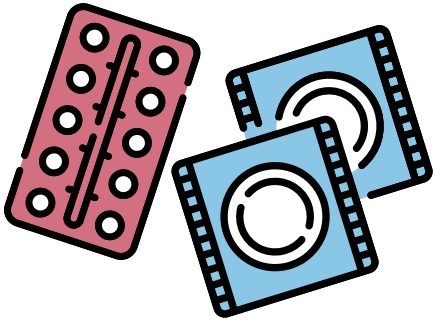


This means that body differences can make it more difficult for disabled people to participate in society. But a society that is not accepting of disabled people and not made for disabled people can also make it harder for disabled people to participate.

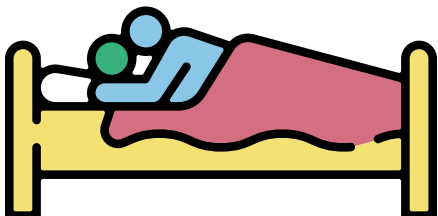
What is sexual health promotion?



Sexual health is when a person feels good about their sexuality. This means feeling good physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially.



Sexual health also means preventing negative things from happening. For example, sexually transmitted infections or becoming pregnant when you do not want to.



Sexual health promotion is about giving people what they need so that they can have a happy and satisfying sexual life.

Why is this project important?



Disabled youth deserve and need sexual health information and services. But, right now, they do not have access to the supports they need.

By respecting disabled youths' sexual rights and giving them the information and services they need, disabled youth can:



- Make their own decisions

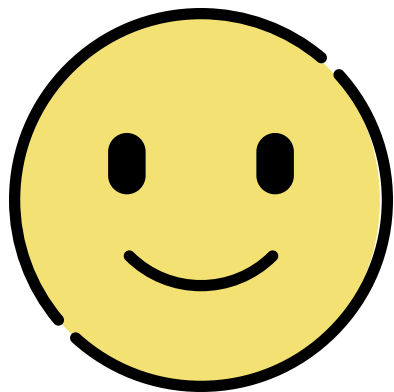


- Have safe and satisfying dating, relationship, and sexual experiences

Section I:

Importance of sexual health promotion with disabled youth

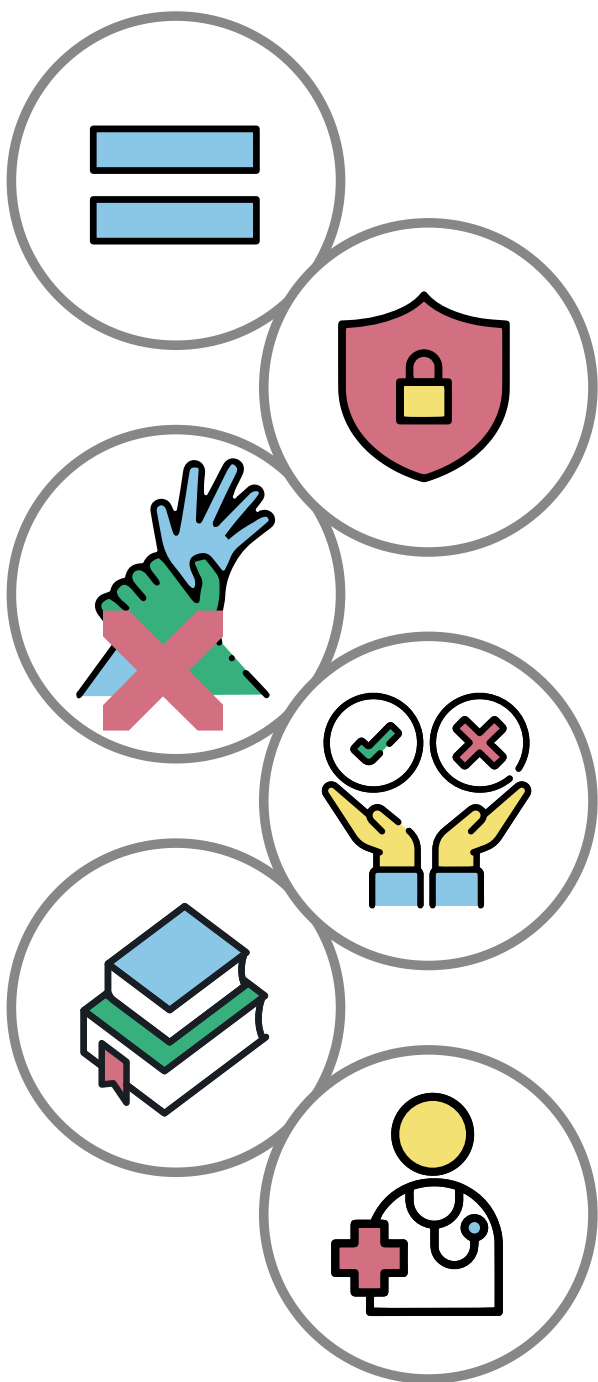
Sexual rights of disabled youth



Sexual rights are about making sure people can express their sexuality and feel good about their sexuality. It is also about respecting other people's rights to do the same.

For this to happen, people's human rights need to be respected. Human rights include the right to:

- Equality
- Privacy
- Not experience violence
- Make own choices
- Information and education
- Health services





The United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) says that disabled people should have sexual rights. However, the sexual rights of disabled people have not always been respected.

Improving quality of life



Sexual well-being is important to disabled youths' overall well-being.



Some people think that disabled youth do not want to have sexual or romantic relationships. This is not always true.



Many disabled youths want to have sexual or romantic relationships. But disabled youth do not always have the same opportunities as non-disabled people to have sexual or romantic relationships.

Disabled youth are diverse:



- Some disabled youths want sexual experiences and some disabled youths do not

- Disabled youth can have different gender identities or sexual orientations

- Sexual activity can look different for disabled youth compared to non-disabled youth



When we embrace each other's differences, everyone in society will feel accepted and like they belong.

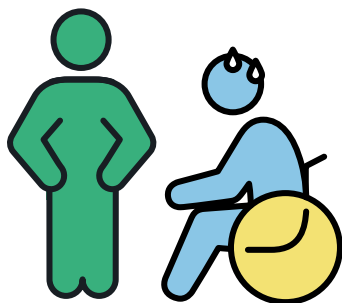
Preventing negative outcomes

ABUSE

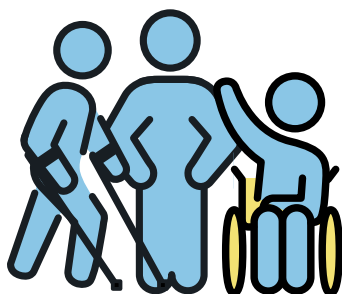
Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to experience abuse.



Sometimes, a person who is supposed to take care of a disabled person takes advantage of them.



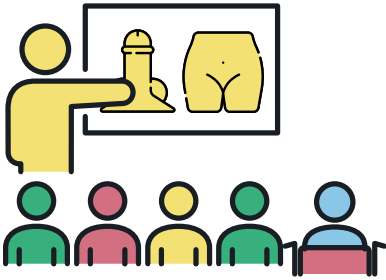
It is important to remember that having a disability does not make a person more vulnerable.



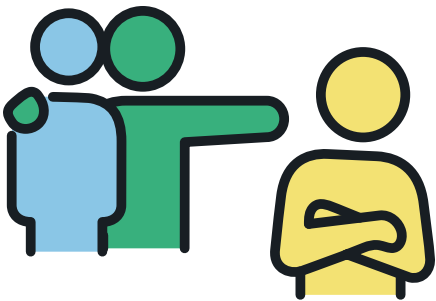
It is the negative ways that some people see and treat disabled people that make disabled people more vulnerable to abuse.



To prevent disabled youth from being abused:



- Disabled youth need to be taught about sexual health



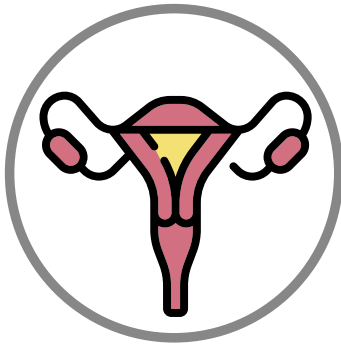
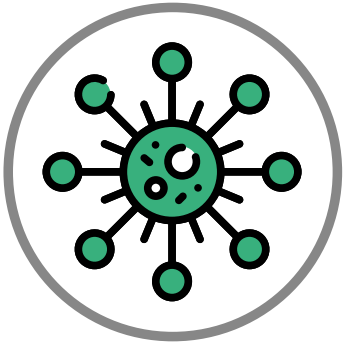
- We need to do more in society to make sure that people who are supposed to help disabled youth do not abuse them



- We need to change how society sees and treats disabled people

NEGATIVE SEXUAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to have negative sexual health experiences like:



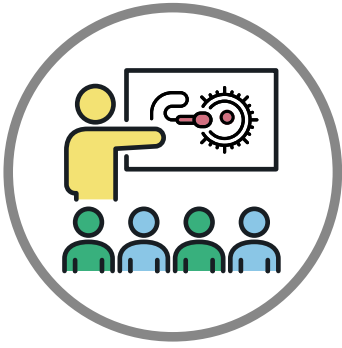
- Sexually transmitted infections

- Cervical cancer

- Pregnancies that they did not plan for

- Negative experiences during pregnancy

To prevent negative sexual health experiences:



- Disabled youth need to be taught about sexual health



- Disabled youth need to have access to sexual health services that meet their needs



- We need to change society's wrong beliefs about the sexuality of disabled people



- We need to protect disabled youths' right to make their own choices about their sexual health

Section 2:

Barriers to sexual health promotion for disabled youth

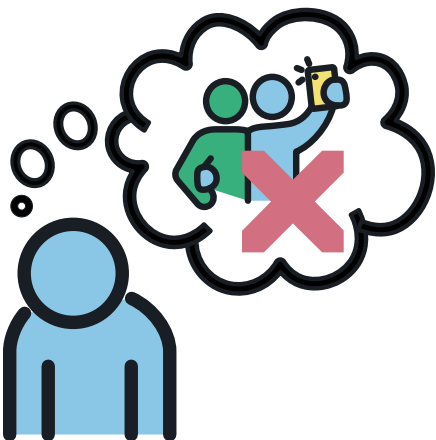
SOCIETAL BARRIERS

Ableism

Ableism means negative beliefs or beliefs that are not true about disabled people.

For example, some people in society think that all disabled people do not like sex or cannot have sex.

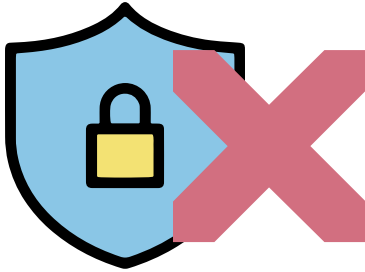
Because of this thinking, opportunities to date, have relationships, and learn about sexual health are taken away from disabled youth.



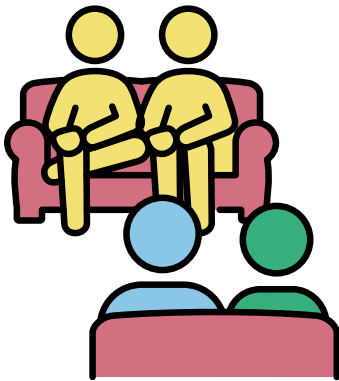
COMMUNITY BARRIERS

Private and community spaces

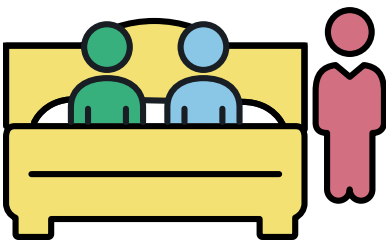
Many times, disabled people do not have access to privacy.



Many disabled people live with their parents or in a group home.

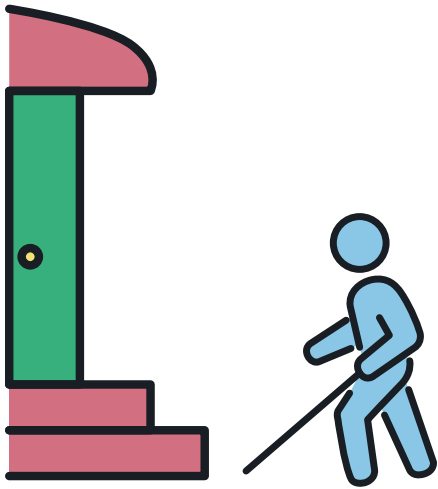


Some disabled people have a care provider who is always around.



All of this can make it harder for disabled youth to have intimate relationships.





Community spaces are not always accessible to disabled people.



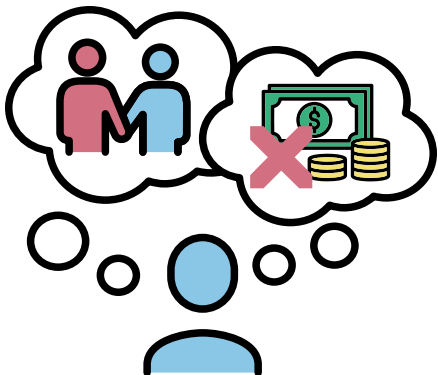
This makes it harder for disabled youth to go on dates or meet other people in their communities.



Going on dates and doing activities with a partner also cost money.

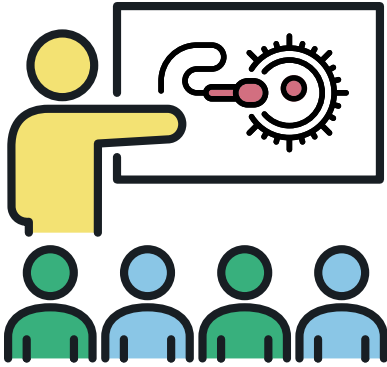


Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to live in poverty or to not have a job.



This can make it harder for disabled youth to pay for date activities.

Sexual health education



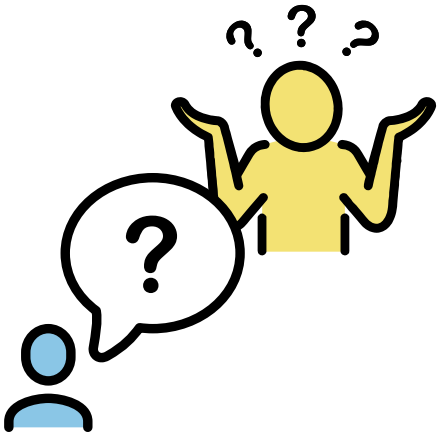
Sexual health education gives people the information they need to make better choices about their sexual health. But most disabled youth do not get enough sexual health education.



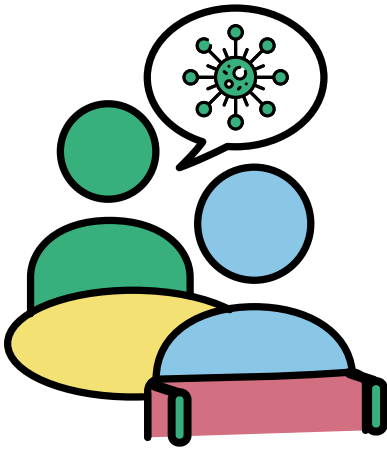
Some people think that not talking about sexual health with disabled youth protects them from negative experiences like abuse. But this is not true.



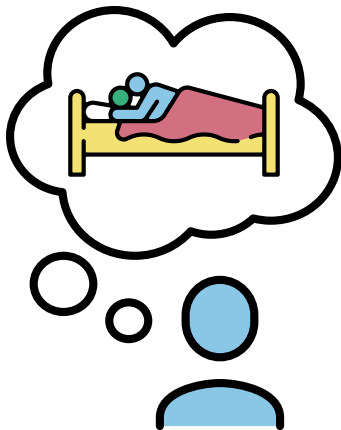
When disabled youth do not get the sexual health information they need, it makes them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of.



People who teach about sexual health, like teachers, nurses, or doctors, do not always know what to teach disabled youth and how.



When disabled people do get sexual health education, it is usually only about preventing negative experiences.

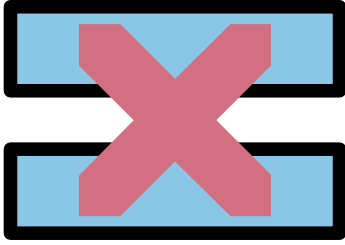


It does not give information about how to have positive experiences.

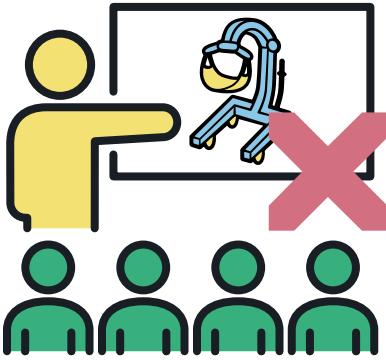


It also does not include the experiences of disabled people.

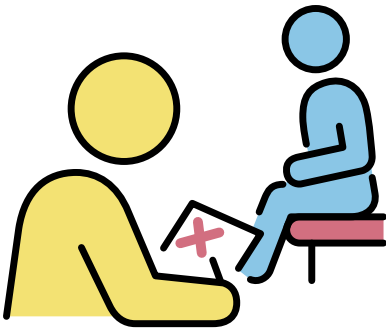
Sexual health services



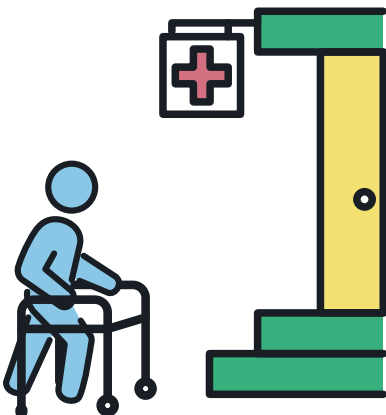
Disabled youth face many barriers to getting sexual health services.



People who provide sexual health services are usually not trained to give these services to disabled youth.



Some may not offer sexual health services to disabled youth because they think disabled youth do not need them.



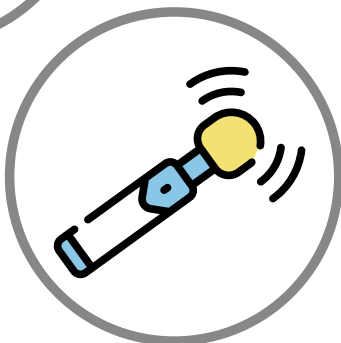
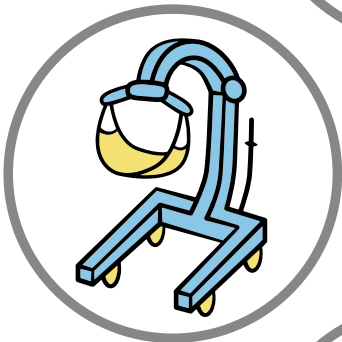
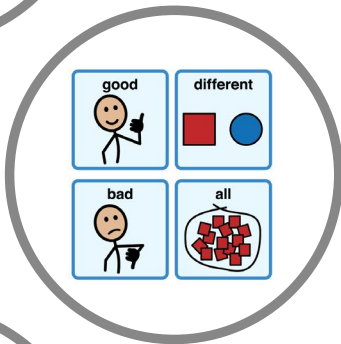
Places where people go to get sexual health services are not always physically accessible for disabled youth. This makes it harder for disabled youth to access the services they need.

Assistive technology

Assistive technology are tools that disabled people can use to help them do everyday activities.

Assistive technology can help disabled youth access sexual health information, services, and opportunities. For example:

- Some people use wheelchairs or walkers to go on dates
- Some people use communication tools to communicate with their partners
- Some people use lifts to get onto examination tables at a doctor's office
- Some people use sex toys and pillows to make sexual activity more comfortable and fun





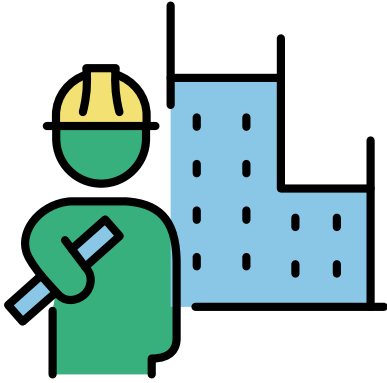
Sometimes it can be hard for disabled people to get the assistive technology they need because they are not available or they are expensive.



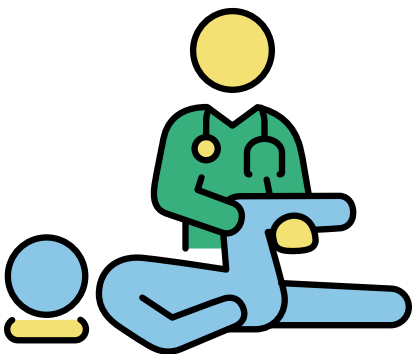
It can also be hard to use assistive technology if society is not accepting of them or if society is not set up for people to use them.



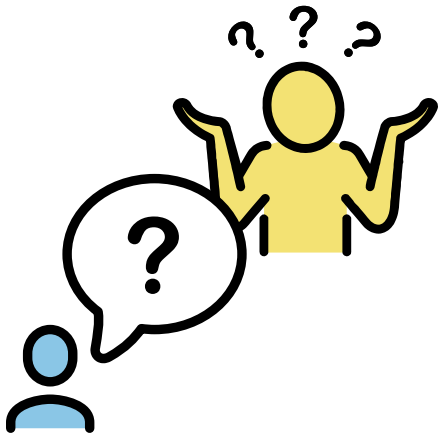
Making it easier for disabled youth to access and use the assistive technology they need can make their sexual health better.



It is also important to think about the needs of disabled people when designing places, things, or services.



That way disabled youth can use places, things, and services that non-disabled people use, without always needing assistive technology.



RELATIONSHIP BARRIERS

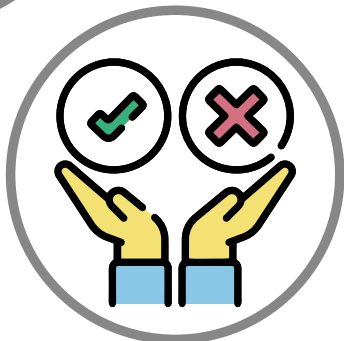
People who are supposed to support disabled youth do not always know how to or feel comfortable supporting disabled youths' sexual health.

People need to be more empathetic and accepting of disabled youths' needs and desires.

Parents and family members

Parents and family members need support to:

- Discuss sexual health with disabled youth
- Give disabled youth opportunities to make their own choices

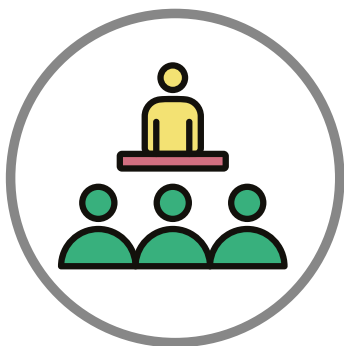


Personal support workers

Personal support workers need:



- More information about how to better support the sexual health of disabled youth



- Training on supporting the sexual rights and dignity of disabled youth

INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS

Different types of physical disabilities

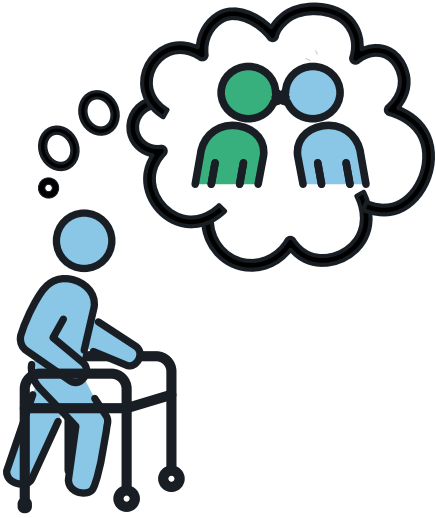


There are many different types of physical disabilities. The experience of each disabled youth is different.



It is important to think about these differences when supporting the sexual health of disabled youth.

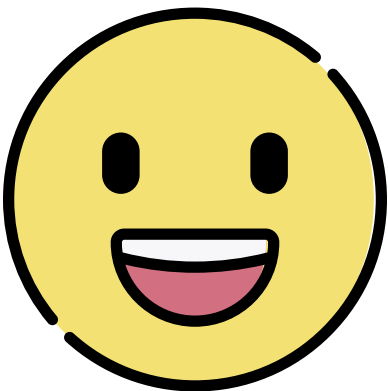
Sexual esteem



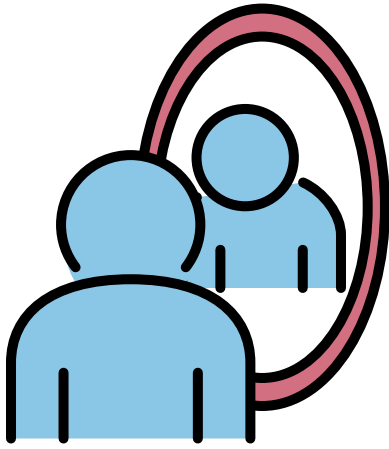
Sexual esteem is about a person's feelings about themselves as a sexual person.



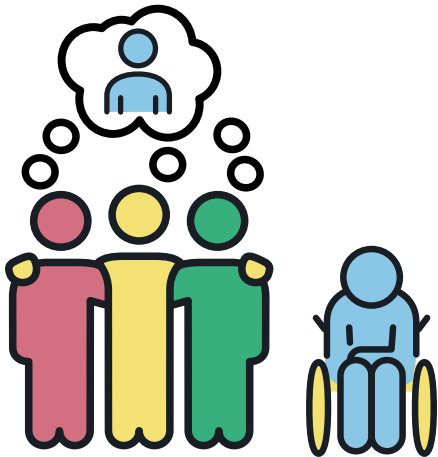
It is about feeling like you have the skills to do sexual things in ways that are safe and enjoyable.



It is also about feeling sexually attractive and desirable.



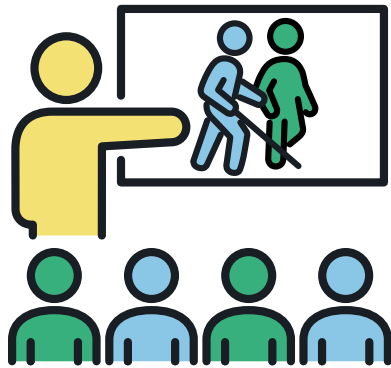
Many disabled youths have negative feelings about their sexuality.



Many people in society have negative thoughts about the sexuality of disabled people and do not treat disabled people with respect.

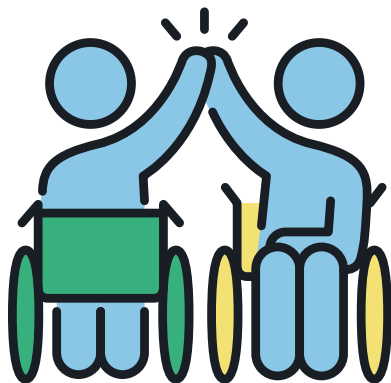


This can make disabled people feel badly about themselves.



To help disabled youth have more positive sexual esteem:

- Include the experiences of disabled people in discussions about sexual health

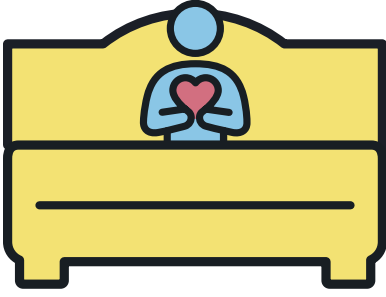


- Connect disabled youth with mentors and role models



- Change society's negative beliefs and feelings about the sexuality of disabled people

Sexual functioning



Sexual functioning is about your body being able to do sexual things and to experience sexual pleasure.

Having sex can sometimes be more challenging for some disabled youth. For example:



- Some people might feel tired more easily



- Some sexual behaviours can be painful for some people

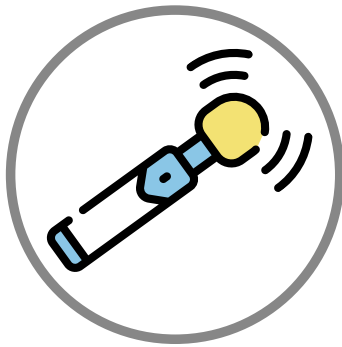


- Some movements can be more difficult for some people

To help disabled youth have more positive sexual experiences:



- Disabled youth need information about sexual activity and disability so they can make choices for themselves



- Disabled youth need information about assistive technologies that can make their sexual health better



- People who give sexual health services need to know about the sexual health experiences of disabled youth so they can answer youths' questions



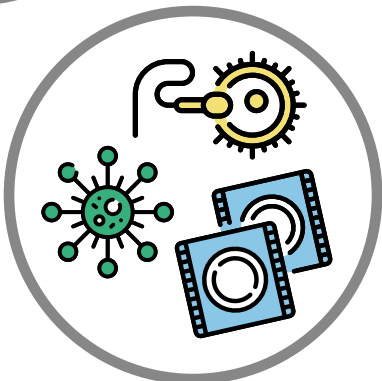
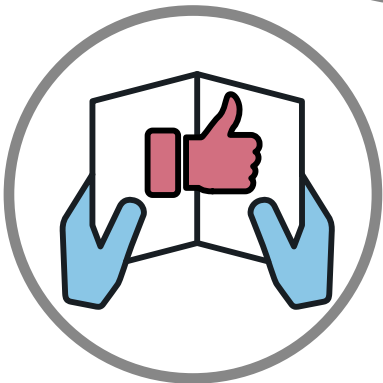
- Society needs to accept and embrace the different ways that people can have sex

Section 3:

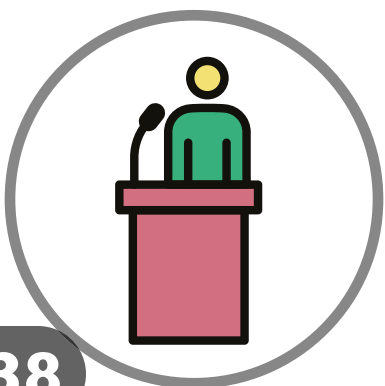
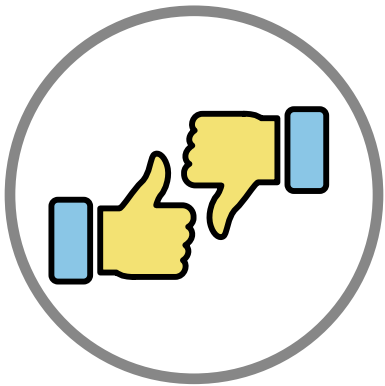
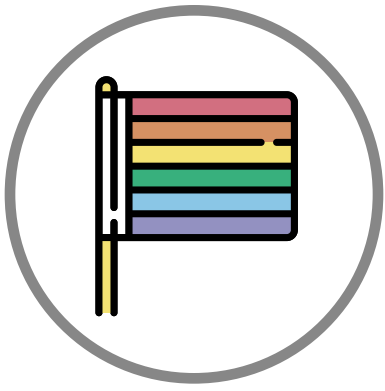
Important principles for sexual health promotion with disabled youth

There are 19 important principles for sexual health promotion with disabled youth.

Sexual health promotion with disabled youth:



1. Is accessible to all people
2. Promotes human rights
3. Gives information that is true
4. Teaches about many different sexual health topics



5. Includes the experiences of people who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, nonbinary, and asexual (2SLGBTQINA+)

6. Promotes gender equality

7. Teaches about how to have positive experiences and how to prevent negative experiences

8. Teaches about topics that are important in the moment

9. Is taught by people who know a lot about sexual health



10. Considers how disabled youths' different identities can impact their experiences



11. Promotes the perspectives of those who are the most disadvantaged



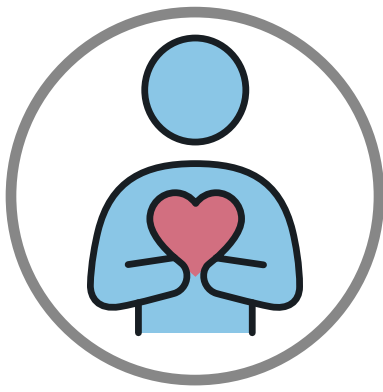
12. Changes society's ableist beliefs



13. Works with other groups that are disadvantaged in society



14. Sees the many aspects of a person's identity and experiences



15. Encourages people to listen to their bodies and needs



16. Considers the needs of people with all types of disabilities



17. Sees the importance of building community and relationships



18. Makes spaces more accessible for everyone



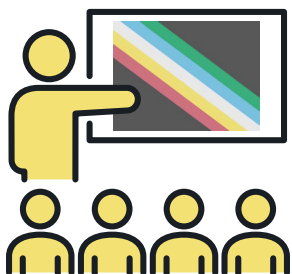
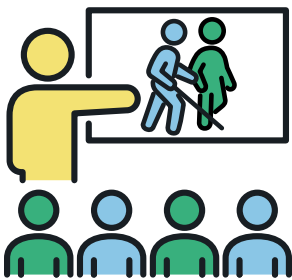
19. Makes sure that no one is left behind

Section 4:

Guidelines for sexual health promotion with disabled youth

Guideline 1:

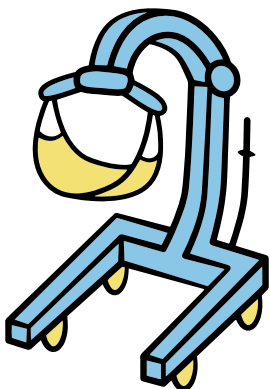
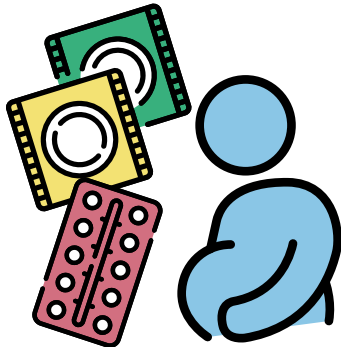
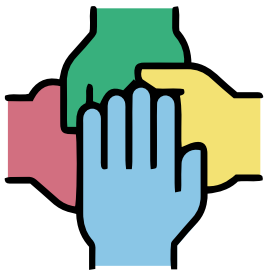
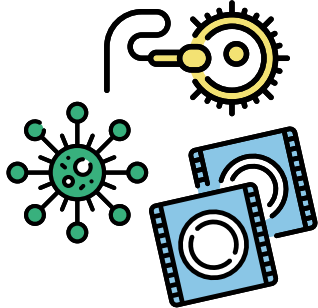
Promote disability acceptance



- Recognize disability as a difference that should be accepted and embraced
- Make policies that improve how people in society think about the sexuality of disabled people
- Promote disability awareness and acceptance in schools
- Teach non-disabled youth about the sexuality of disabled people
- Give service providers training about disability acceptance

Guideline 2:

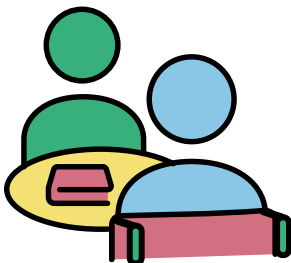
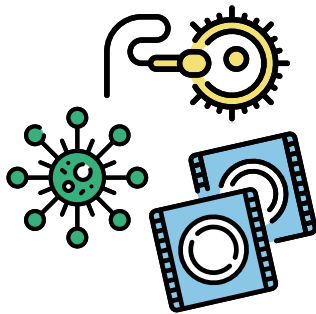
Give sexual health services to disabled youth



- Bring up the topic of sexual health with disabled youth
- Build trust with disabled youth
- Discuss pregnancy and contraception choices with disabled youth
- Make sexual health services more physically accessible

Guideline 3:

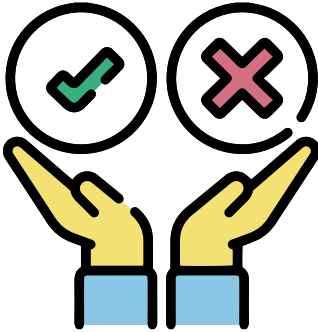
Give sexual health education to disabled youth



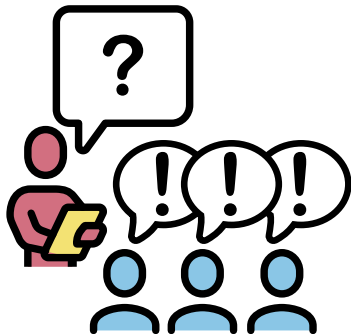
- Teach disabled youth about their sexual rights
- Teach disabled youth the same sexual health topics that are taught to non-disabled youth
- Give disabled youth information about different ways they can have sex
- Give disabled youth information about preventing abuse
- Use inclusive ways to teach about sexual health

Guideline 4:

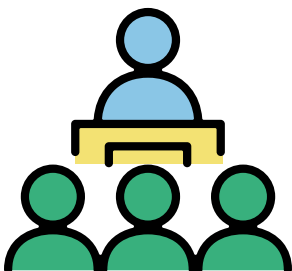
Give disabled youth opportunities to help develop sexual health education and services



- Support disabled youth to make their own choices



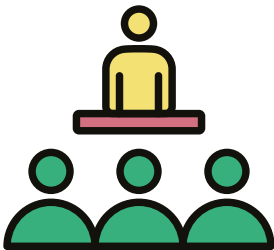
- Consult with many different disabled youths to develop sexual health education and services



- Give disabled youth opportunities to be leaders

Guideline 5:

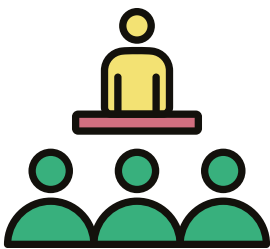
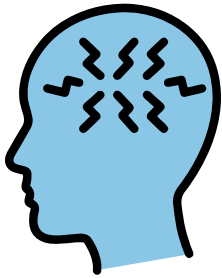
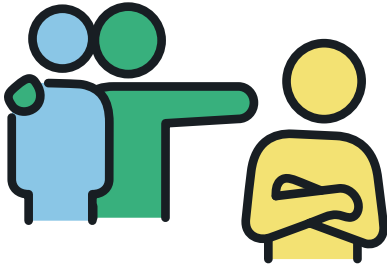
Help service providers and family members to feel more confident to promote sexual health with disabled youth



- Make policies that help service providers know how to support the sexual health of disabled youth
- Make policies that encourage disabled people to make their own decisions (supported decision-making)
- Give service providers training
- Give parents/families resources and support
- Encourage service providers to work with families and with disabled youth

Guideline 6:

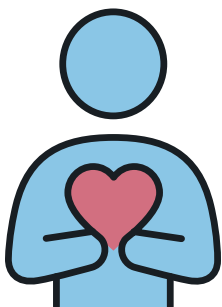
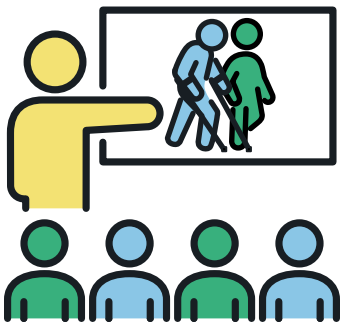
Protect disabled youth from abuse



- Do more in the community to protect disabled youth
- Take extra care to not cause trauma when supporting disabled youth
- Give service providers training about supporting disabled youth who have been abused
- Support disabled youth who have been abused to come up with a plan to stay safe

Guideline 7:

Do more research about the sexual health needs of disabled youth



- Research about the sexual health needs of diverse disabled youth
- Research about helpful training programs and guidelines for service providers and service agencies
- Research about the sexual health education needs of disabled youth
- Research about how to make sexual health promotion better for disabled youth

