

Myths about Disability and Sexuality

There are many common myths about sexuality and disability. The biggest myth of all, which is that people with disabilities are all the same, and that you can talk about them as one single group. This is completely false. People living with disabilities do not all have the same experiences or the same perspectives.

MYTH: If people with disability are taught about sexuality and allowed to express their sexuality they will not be able to control themselves.

FACT: This myth is a branch of a much wider one - that no one needs sexuality education. Sex education is often misunderstood as teaching children how to have sex or 'permitting experimentation'. In reality, sexuality education encompasses a lot more than the mechanics of sex.

When people with disabilities are not given adequate sex education they are at increased risk of being taken advantage of sexually. It is important to communicate sex information in a way that meets the individualized needs of people with various disabilities.

MYTH: People with disability do not have sexual feelings or sexual awareness and are incapable of sexual functioning.

FACT: All humans are sexual, regardless of how their sexuality is expressed. People with disabilities are denied sexual rights probably in part because people with disabilities are treated as if they are children. People living with disabilities are as sexual and express their sexuality in ways as diverse as everyone else. They are unable to express their sexuality fully not so much because of a disability but because of the assumption that they are not sexual. Other barriers include restrictions on their mobility, negative societal attitudes and the lack of educational, social and health services and rights that other people have.

MYTH: People with disability cannot control their sexual desires or express sexuality in a socially appropriate way.

FACT: Since people with disabilities are seen as 'childlike' and aren't supposed to be sexual, any sexual desire they express is seen as perverted or 'too much'. However, this is more likely a result of a lack of information than that of an 'oversexed' mind or body. Also, because they are not meant to express this aspect of themselves, when they do, it is seen

as a problem. Seeing people with disabilities as oversexed is dangerous because it exposes them to sexual abuse under the guise that they 'enjoy' it. No one deserves an unwanted sexual encounter, and this includes people with disabilities.

MYTH: People with disabilities don't get sexually assaulted.

FACT: People with physical disabilities are far more likely to be victims of sexual assault, statistics suggest between 2 to 10 times more likely. People with developmental disabilities are at risk of being sexually abused because they are frequently taught to comply with what others are asking them to do, and they often want to please others.

MYTH: People with disability are not able to have healthy, sexual relationships, and/or build relationship skills

FACT: Relationships are hard and full of compromise, and a good relationship involves equal work from the people in it. People who partner with people with disabilities are often told how 'noble' they are, as if being with someone with a disability makes them nothing but a burden. The fact is that living with a disability does not mean that they contribute less to a relationship. This reflects a negative attitude towards disability and suggests that a person with a disability is less worthy than a non-disabled person.

MYTH: People with disabilities should not have children.

FACT: Creating a family is a natural part of human existence and many people with disabilities chose to have children of their own. Depending on the disability, children may or may not have the same disability as their parents. Some people may want to get genetic testing before making the decision about whether to have children or adopt.

Reference:

Myths and Misperceptions of Disability and Sexuality. Sexuality and Disability Consortium. Retrieved on November 25th 2015 from: <http://ahs.uic.edu/media/uicedu/ahs/documents/dhd/sdc/MythsAndMisperceptions.pdf>

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