

Thoughts on Relationships and Sexuality

'Sexuality continues to be a core and profound component of humanity in which human beings need other humans. This capacity for giving and receiving love and affection remains throughout life. The success or failure encountered by children and youth with regard to their sexual system development significantly contributes to the potential success or failure of their appropriate transition to adult life.

A common myth among parents and society in general about youth with disabilities or chronic illness is that these children and adolescents are asexual, that they suppress their sexual needs because of their disability, are not subject to sexual abuse, and do not require any type of sexuality education. ...such concepts are not true and ...all adolescents, whether healthy or not, are sexual human beings and need comprehensive sexuality education.⁴

As suggested by the quotation above, sexuality is a universal part of human life. Though we often think of sexuality primarily as the sex act, there is really much more to human sexuality than that. Sexuality includes not only the physical act of sex, but also gender identification, self esteem, physical maturation, body image and social relationships. Just as for typically developing children, support of healthy social and sexual development is very important for children with chronic physical or mental illness, physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities. As with all other education, promotion of healthy relationship and sexuality development should begin early in the child's life and be adapted to their developmental level and needs, and the family's values.

⁴ Sexuality issues and gynecologic care of adolescents with developmental disabilities. Greydanus DE, Omar HA. *Pediatr Clin N Amer* 55:1315-1335. 2008.