



Intimacy and Disability

Sister Kenny Rehabilitation Institute
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Dating, Romance, Relationships, and
Sexuality relating to Individuals Experiencing
the Effects of Disability and/or Aging



Presenter

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Self-Reflection Exercise

Set aside 30 minutes or so to privately write down your initial thoughts to the following questions on a piece of paper that only you will see and will destroy afterward...



Self-Reflection Exercise

Do you have family, friends, peers, or community members that experience the effects of disability and/or aging?



Self-Reflection Exercise

What are your thoughts about dating, romance, relationships, and sexuality relating to them?



Self-Reflection Exercise

Have you ever dated an individual experiencing the effects of disability and/or aging? Assuming the circumstances were right, would you? Under which circumstances? Why or why not?



Self-Reflection Exercise

Have you ever been romantically involved with an individual experiencing the effects of disability and/or aging? Assuming the circumstances were right, would you? Under which circumstances? Why or why not?



Self-Reflection Exercise

Have you ever been sexually intimate with an individual experiencing the effects of disability and/or aging? Assuming the circumstances were right, would you? Under which circumstances? Why or why not?



Self-Reflection Exercise

KEEP YOUR REPOSSES IN MIND...



Overview — Topics

May Include, But Are Not Limited To...

- **Myths**
- **Stereotypes**
- **Prejudices**
- **Effects**
- **Challenges**
- **Resources**
- **Solutions**
- **Strategies**
- **Techniques**
- **Assistive
Technology**

MYTH: PED/A can't express “real sexuality”.

SEXUALITY ≡

- not limited to genitals or genital-oriented activities
- involves biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual variables of life
- affects personality development and interpersonal relations
- includes self-perception, self-esteem, personal history, personality, concept of love and intimacy, body image etc.



MYTH: PED/A aren't sexual.

- All People Are Sexual in One Way or Another – Basic Components of Human Nature
- Disability/Aging May...
 - Alter Personal Expression
 - Create Learning, Change, and Growth
 - Alter Activities
- Disability/Aging Does Not Eliminate Sexuality



Individual Challenges

- Visible versus "Invisible"
- Functional Area
 - Biological
 - Cognitive
 - Communication
 - Emotional
 - Mobility



External Challenges

- Societal Expectations
- Effects of Disability and/or Aging Are Extremely Individualized
- Fact versus Myth
- Stereotypes



Why Address Challenges?

■ Impacts

- Self-Perception
- Body-Image
- Self-Esteem
- Self-Confidence
- Concept of Love and Intimacy
- Personality Development
- Interpersonal Relations

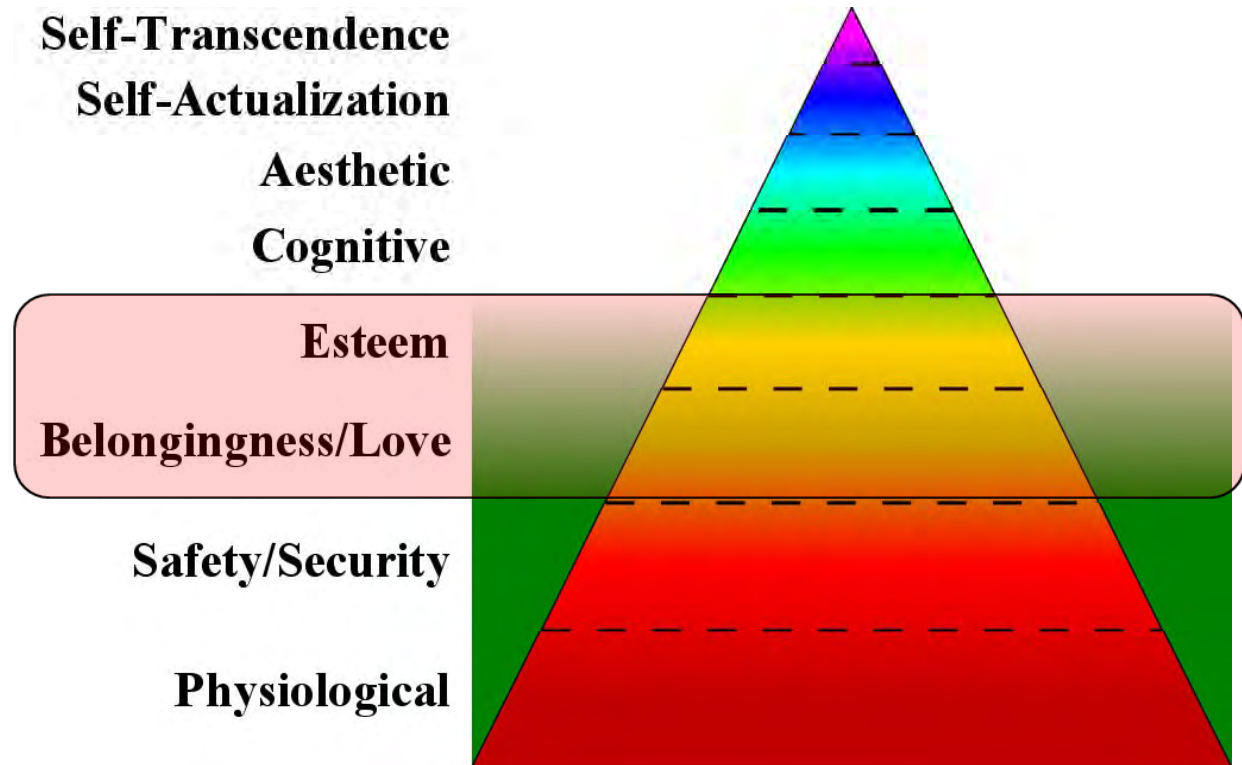
MYTH: Talking about sexuality isn't natural, proper, necessary.

If not discussed we cannot...

- identify/confront myths;
- transfer knowledge/facts;
- challenge stereotypes;
- reduce prejudice;
- discuss opinions;
- exchange preferences;
- promote diversity; or,
- grow as individuals or communities.

MYTH: PED/A have more important things to worry about than sexuality.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs





What If We Don't Address?

■ Increased Risks

- Depression and Anxiety
- Social Isolation
- Less Education about Appropriate and Inappropriate Sexuality
- “Learned Helplessness”
- Emotional, Spiritual, Sexual, and Physical Abuse
- Self-Perpetuating Cycle



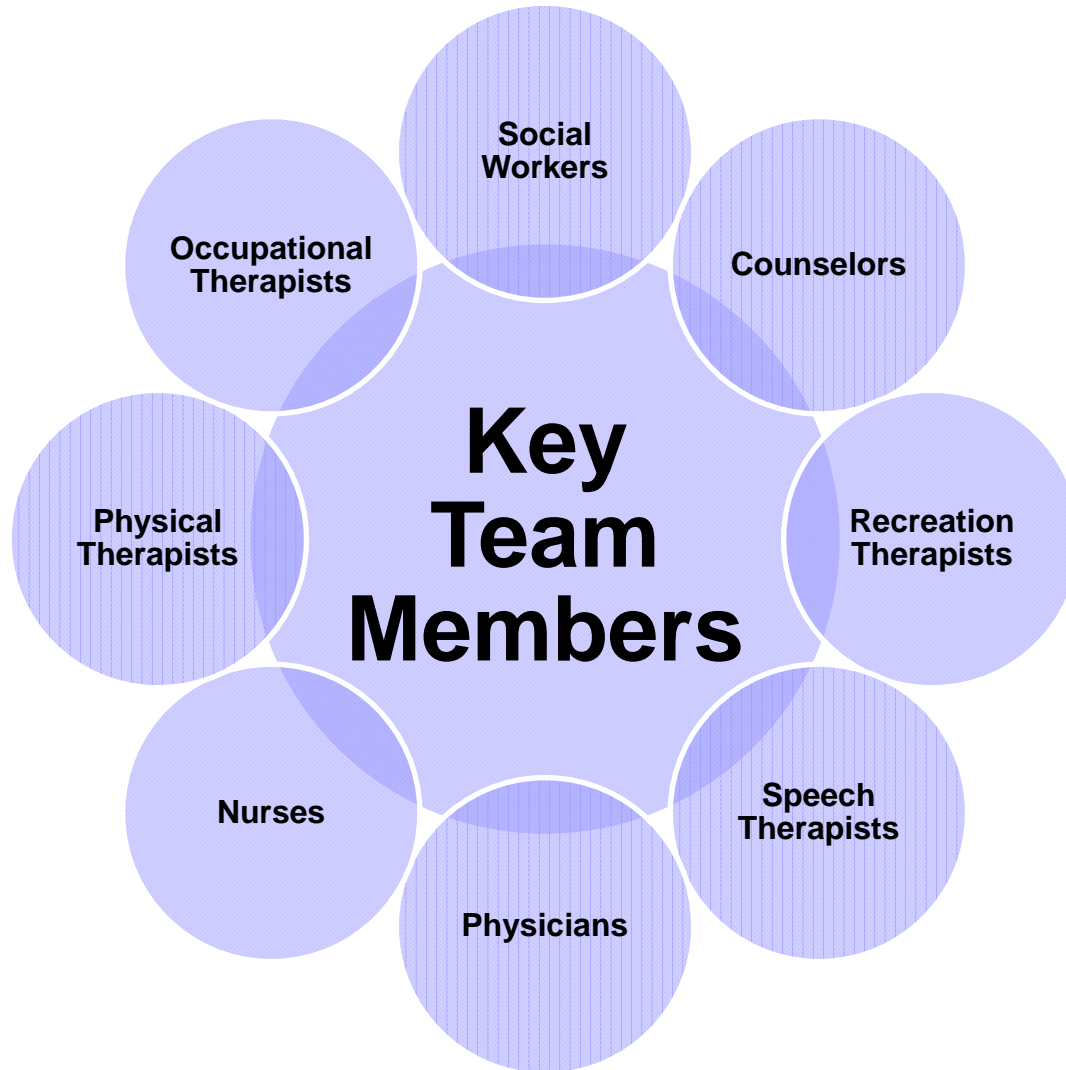
General Strategy to Address

- Ease of Access to Information and Integration
- Accurate Delivery of Information and Tools
- More Knowledgeable Participants
- More Empowered Participants

Key Participants



Key Team Members





Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Each person shares a few examples of activities that someone in their professional role could perform to assist an individual experiencing the effects of disability and/or aging with respect to dating, romance, relationships, and sexuality.



Activities

■ Social Workers

- Identify Needs, Desires, Dreams, & Resources
- Identify Associated Service Needs

■ Counselors

- Assess/Improve Cognitive Skills
- Assess/Improve Emotional Skills
- Assess/Improve Social Skills

■ Recreation Therapists

- Assess/Improve Socialization



Activities

- **Speech Therapists**

- Assess/Improve Communication and Socialization Abilities

- **Physicians/Nurses**

- Assess/Improve Physiological Functioning

- **Physical Therapists**

- Assess/Improve Mobility Functioning


- **Occupational Therapists**

- Assess/Satisfy Adaptive Equipment Needs



Professional Awareness

- Affect of Disability/Aging May Not Be Possible to Easily Discern
- Understanding the Impact of Stigma on Individuals and Social Interactions Is Critical
- Recognize and Remain Aware of Own Potential Biases Which May Impact Services Delivered



MYTH: PED/A are undesirable /
bad choices for partners.

Assumption: unable to be recreationally, intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, sexually, parentally, etc. supportive or satisfying.

ANYTHING Is Possible with...

- **Assistive Technology**
- **Direct Support Professional Services**
- **Willingness, Desire, Open-mind, Creativity, and Flexibility**

MYTH: PED/A can't have
“real sex”

“Real Sex” > biological intercourse

ANYTHING Is Possible with...

- **Pharmaceutical Technology**
- **Assistive Technology**
- **Direct Support Professional Services**
- **Desire, Willingness, Open-mind, Creativity, and Flexibility**



OTHER SEX-RELATED MYTHS

- Sex should be spontaneous.
- Satisfying sex requires a firm penis.
- Quality sex ends with an orgasm.



OTHER DISABILITY/AGING MYTHS

- PED/A are not sexually adventurous.
- PED/A are “perverts”.
- PED/A don’t get sexually assaulted.



Resources

- Nosek, Margaret A., et al. “Vulnerabilities for Abuse Among Women with Disabilities.” Sexuality & Disability 19.3 (2001 Sept): 177-189. EBSCO MegaFILE. EBSCO. University of Saint Thomas, Saint Paul, MN. 2009 Jan 5.
- Gordon, Phyllis A., Molly K. Tschopp, and David Feldman. “Addressing Issues of Sexuality with Adolescents with Disabilities.” Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal 21.5 (2004 Oct): 513-527. EBSCO MegaFILE. EBSCO. University of Saint Thomas, Saint Paul, MN. 2009 Jan 5.



Additional Resources

- **Web:** <http://www.precisainc.com/events/skri200902/>
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THANK
YOU