Learning disabilities – Let’s talk about sex.

For many people, talking about sex and relationships can be difficult, and even embarrassing.

Sexual health has historically been ignored for people with learning disabilities and only discussed when there is a problem. People with a disability have the same sexual needs, feelings and desires as any other person. Disability does not prevent sexual maturity, or remove sexual feelings, desires or curiosity and they have the right to access information. Information should be provided in a format suitable to their needs and should help them to make informed choices.

Education needs to be consistent in the various settings someone might be, and consistent between different people who might carry out a support role – family and carers, care workers, supported education or employment workers, and counsellors.

Without good education and support, children, young people and adults with a learning disability can be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation. Understanding our bodies, what we want from intimate relationships and learning to say no to unwanted contact are essential for us all to be able to protect ourselves.

There are still young people with a learning disability living in Scotland today

who have received no sex and relationship education, despite the recommendations of the Report on the Working Group on Sex Education in Scottish Schools.

There is a general impression that to provide young people with learning disabilities with information about sex only encourages inappropriate sexual behaviour. This is not true! Sex and relationships education is a key way in which young people learn about sexuality, emotions, relationships and sexual health. The evidence indicates that it is often the lack of appropriate sex and relationships education, or of information on sexual health being inadequately provided, that may lead to some young people being overly sexualised in their behaviour or experiencing poor sexual health.

Relationships can bring pleasure, boost self-esteem and confidence, but they also involve risks such as being hurt, pregnancy and STI. It can be difficult to strike a balance between protecting people with learning disabilities from risks and allowing them to explore and develop wider personal and social relationships.

If you would like further information or to book an appointment phone 03457023687 or email susan.hall2@nhs.net or dgsexualhealth@nhs.net

Resource links:

Sexual Health D&G easy read sexual & reproduction health services

<http://www.fpa.org.uk/specialist-sexual-health-services-people-learning-disabilities/sexual-health-and-relationships-training>

<http://www.lifesupportproductions.co.uk/index.php>

[https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/friendships-and-relationships/sex-and-relationships](https://web.nhs.net/OWA/redir.aspx?SURL=ilHOhYFBSRp6Dva8LHftESN1XjYbDjUY9KjaPiJXFGtVowwbX2_TCGgAdAB0AHAAcwA6AC8ALwB3AHcAdwAuAG0AZQBuAGMAYQBwAC4AbwByAGcALgB1AGsALwBhAGIAbwB1AHQALQBsAGUAYQByAG4AaQBuAGcALQBkAGkAcwBhAGIAaQBsAGkAdAB5AC8AZgByAGkAZQBuAGQAcwBoAGkAcABzAC0AYQBuAGQALQByAGUAbABhAHQAaQBvAG4AcwBoAGkAcABzAC8AcwBlAHgALQBhAG4AZAAtAHIAZQBsAGEAdABpAG8AbgBzAGgAaQBwAHMA&URL=https%3a%2f%2fwww.mencap.org.uk%2fabout-learning-disability%2ffriendships-and-relationships%2fsex-and-relationships)

[https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/friendships-and-relationships/sex-and-relationships](https://web.nhs.net/OWA/redir.aspx?SURL=ilHOhYFBSRp6Dva8LHftESN1XjYbDjUY9KjaPiJXFGtVowwbX2_TCGgAdAB0AHAAcwA6AC8ALwB3AHcAdwAuAG0AZQBuAGMAYQBwAC4AbwByAGcALgB1AGsALwBhAGIAbwB1AHQALQBsAGUAYQByAG4AaQBuAGcALQBkAGkAcwBhAGIAaQBsAGkAdAB5AC8AZgByAGkAZQBuAGQAcwBoAGkAcABzAC0AYQBuAGQALQByAGUAbABhAHQAaQBvAG4AcwBoAGkAcABzAC8AcwBlAHgALQBhAG4AZAAtAHIAZQBsAGEAdABpAG8AbgBzAGgAaQBwAHMA&URL=https%3a%2f%2fwww.mencap.org.uk%2fabout-learning-disability%2ffriendships-and-relationships%2fsex-and-relationships)