

# **Let's Talk About Sex: The Importance of Sex and Disability Discussions in Higher Education**

**Jessica Guess (she/her), University of Cincinnati**  
**Cole Eskridge (they/them), University of Arizona**

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

**Access and Inclusion**

and

**Civility and Respect**

...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

# Objectives

- Participants will be able to:
- Identify resources and potential campus partnerships to promote space for discussions about sex, sexuality, consent, and relationships
- Recognize opportunities for developing safe spaces for conversations and education around the intersection of sex and disability
- Identify strategies for inclusive, non-judgmental facilitation that encourage a positive, affirming space for discussing disability and sex.

# Session Roadmap

- Temp Check: Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down
- Part 1: Why we should prepare.
  - Making the Case(s)
- Part 2: How we can prepare.
  - Tips, Tricks, and Resources
  - Questions and Discussion

# Thumbs up/Thumbs down

Let's get a temperature check before we get too deep! The following slides have a series of statements we will read aloud. Thumbs up if you feel the statement applies to you and vice versa.

You have had colleagues reach out to discuss access features in student engagement programming.

You have had colleagues reach out to discuss access features for a student program centering on sex or sexuality.

You have collaborated on  
a sexual education  
program generally.



You have collaborated on a sexual education program specifically designed to be inclusive of disability communities.

You participated in a  
sexual education program  
designed to be inclusive of  
disability communities (in content  
and in access)

You participated in a sexual education program designed to be inclusive of disability communities (in content and in access)

I feel prepared to assist a disabled student and connect them to resources if they were to discuss relationships or sexuality in a meeting with me.

# Let's Unpack!

# What programming exists?

- TOPICS: Sexual healthcare and practices, violence prevention, relationship/consent workshops, speed dating events, etc.
- Occur through many venues:
  - Campus Health and Counseling Services
  - Residence Life/Education
  - Greek Life
  - Cultural and Resource Centers
  - First Year Orientations

# 1. Why we should prepare.

# **A: Society generally desexualizes Disability communities**

“Traditionally, the sexual lives of people with disabilities have been actively disregarded and socially stigmatized. The topic was constantly avoided because of its taboo nature and the fact that it was difficult to address. In addition, sexuality as a form of pleasure and an expression of love is still not recognized for individuals with disabilities.” (Esmail et al. 2010)



## **B: Disabled folks aren't provided the same access to this information/programming**

“young people with physical disabilities frequently receive their sex education from friends and the media, usually they and their parents would talk about sexuality issues only if the discussions were initiated by their doctor. Schools provide sex education that is unrelated to sexuality and disability, and even when sexuality is discussed with a health professional, frequently it is not applied to the specific disability” (Porat, 2012)

## **C: Lack of appropriate sexual health information leads to victimization.**

- Professionals are not being adequately trained- particularly in social work, rehab counseling, student affairs, etc.

## C: Lack of appropriate sexual health information leads to victimization.

- "In general, little information is available on the risks for people living with disabilities. The studies that have been conducted make it clear that there is a much higher than average risk of sexual abuse for people living with disabilities. The numbers from different studies vary, but **the risk for women with disabilities (internationally) is anywhere from two to ten times greater than that found in the general population.**"

*-"Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability"*

# And YET!

- Only time sex and disability are mentioned is when we talk about negative experiences.
- Without **positive, non-judgemental, and accessible conversations** about consent, sexual health, modification options, contraceptive use/adaptive contraceptive use, sex toys/adaptive sex toys, other options when physical ability impacts sexual performance, sexual orientation and disability, etc...**this information gap will persist.**

# "But why us?"

- We know Disability communities on our campuses and position ourselves to be resources to them.
- We position ourselves as access experts on our campuses generally.
- We already work at the nexus between campus engagement and access.

# We AREN'T saying

- "we all need to become sex educators"
- "we all need to ask unsolicited questions to our students about their sexual desires and practices"

# We ARE saying

- we need to know campus resources and spaces that are having these conversations.
- We need to be prepared if (and when) students bring their sexuality up in conversation with us.

# 2: How can we prepare.



**A: Model consent in  
our meetings with students.**

**B: Know your local resources  
and partner with people on  
campus.**

## **C: Challenge yourself to learn more and normalize these experiences**

- Motivate yourself to find resources that answer questions you have!
- Read/watch/listen to narratives that address sexuality and disability
- Let's Talk about Sex – Sex & Disability Resource Guide
  - Consider emailing us if you find things that aren't included in the resource list too!

# Questions and Discussion

Lingering thoughts and burning inquiries?

# Session Evaluation

- Your feedback helps shape future programming.
- Thank you for attending!