

## *Intimacy/Dating/Marriage*

While family and friends are very important to our sense of meaning and well-being, there is no substitute for finding our soul mate — that one person we feel most comfortable with and who loves us for being who we are and whom we love for being who her or she is. Many people with disabilities never get the opportunity to search for or maintain such a relationship.

### Quality in Practice

- Understand and believe that disability has nothing to do with our ability to love and be loved. We are capable of loving relationships because we are human.
- Understand that there are no competency standards to pass before we begin to date, experience intimacy or marry. Age may be an issue, but once we are adults there are no constraints on our behavior from authority figures (other than for criminal behavior). We may choose to subscribe to religious teachings about intimacy before marriage or we may choose not to, the decision is ours alone to make.
- Only apply those laws to people with disability that are applied to the rest of us. There are still many states that have laws on the books prohibiting all sexual acts but those between married heterosexuals. These laws are never applied to anyone. They should not be used as an excuse to prohibit people with disability from expressing their sexuality.
- Encourage people to think and talk about their intimacy needs and desires. Respect and honor those needs and desires.
- Support people to understand and respect issues of reciprocity in dating and intimacy.
- Support people to engage in safe and acceptable expressions of their sexuality. Safety and acceptability have to do with both the physical and emotional aspects of intimacy and dating.
- Understand that everyone is not heterosexual and that some people with disability will be homosexual.
- Support people to meet other people who share their interests and may develop a loving relationship.
- Support people to develop loving relationships by giving them the time, space and privacy to get to know someone well.
- Remember that many people search for a long time for their perfect partner and may need to meet and date a lot of people before they settle down.
- Understand that intimacy needs are different for each of us. Support staff not to judge other people's needs and desires in this area.
- Support people to marry if they want to.
- Support people to divorce if they want to; all marriages do not last life-long.
- Be especially respectful of people's intimacy, dating and marriage issues – none of us likes to have others share this kind of information.