

A TOOL FOR DISCUSSING SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

Posted 2/11/20 via Capstone e-Newsletter

By Mary Kay Rizzolo | CQL President & CEO

mkrizzolo@thecouncil.org

Intimate relationships can involve the emotional, physical, sexual, and even spiritual bonds that we form with others. Through Personal Outcome Measures[®] data, we find that 42.6% of people with disabilities do not have intimate relationships present in their lives. A factor that is contributing to this, is that only 58.7% of organizations know and understand people's preferences for intimate relationships.

When organizations can devote the time and resources to support people in developing and maintaining intimate relationships, it can make a significant difference in people's lives. CQL data shows us that people with disabilities are 20 times more likely to have intimate relationships when organizational supports are in place.

We understand that, for some, this can be a sensitive topic. Tackling issues that are so personal may make organizations uncomfortable. Where do you start? How can you initiate conversations? What role does a provider have in supporting intimate relationships?

INSIDE SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Capstone is all about taking an in-depth look at pressing issues, and sharing the very best approaches, practices, and resources to confront these issues in the human services field. In previous Capstone e-Newsletter editions and research articles, we've addressed these topics extensively.

CQL has shared outcomes data about intimacy, where we discovered that nearly one-third (27.8%) of people were not satisfied with the type or scope of their intimate relationships. By exploring the barriers to sexuality, CQL identified issues like a lack of knowledge among people with disabilities about sexuality, limited supports to help people in this area, and years of systemic rejection of the sexual rights of people with disabilities. In an edition from 2017, we described some tactics for starting discussions with the people you support, including the creation of a respectful environment, attentiveness to body language and non-visual cues, and the importance of listening to and learning from the person.

Through these articles, and especially CQL's decades of experience in advancing outcomes involving intimate relationships, we've identified a need among providers for a practical tool to facilitate conversations about sexuality, intimacy, and relationships. When organizations help educate people about these topics and learn about their opinions, experiences, and desires, organizations are better equipped design and implement effective supports.



SPARKING SENSITIVE CONVERSATIONS

After covering these topics so comprehensively in previous editions – by understanding both the lack of supports as well as the gaps in knowledge – we felt the next logical step was to develop a tool to help organizations navigate issues like sex and relationships. While it's extremely rare that Capstone e-Newsletter is devoted to showcasing a paid resource, this edition is an exception, as the tool directly addresses some of the most substantial obstacles that organizations face in providing supports involving sex and relationships.

At the 2019 CQL Conference last October, we previewed our new Sex & Relationships Conversation Cards and are now excited to officially release them! These cards help support staff and people receiving services initiate conversations about sex and relationships. Those who participated in the conference session were able to play the interactive card games and experience how they could help prompt discussion about potentially uneasy topics.



The Sex & Relationships Conversation Cards cover 18 different topic areas, such as dating, rape, consent, masturbation, gender roles/identities, online safety, and more. Along with playing cards sharing information about the topics, there are also cards focused on the rights and responsibilities, as well as various supports, that are associated with each topic area. To provide additional details and direction, each set includes a 40-page facilitator's guide, which takes a deeper dive into the topic areas.

5 Anatomy and Reproduction

- Sexual and reproductive anatomy are sex organs on the inside or outside of your body, sometimes called private parts or genitalia
- Examples include: breasts, vagina, buttocks, and penis
- Pregnancy is when semen from a penis is inserted into an egg inside a vagina to create an embryo. After about 10 months this can result in the birth of a baby
- Periods are when blood comes out of a person's vagina and usually happen every month, lasting 1 week



5 Anatomy and Reproduction

- You can (and should) educate yourself about private parts, sex, and reproduction
- You should visit the doctor to ensure you are safe and healthy
- People with periods have the right to have and use sanitary products of their choosing
- People have the right to use birth control of their choosing
- You have the right to not be sterilized against your will



5 Anatomy and Reproduction

- Provide people with education and resources about anatomy, bodies, and reproduction
- Support people in doctor appointments related to anatomy, reproduction, and/or sex
- Support people to access and use sanitary products of their choosing
- Support people to access and use birth control of their choosing



For example, in the 'Topics' card for 'Anatomy and Reproduction,' it provides an overview of sexual organs, body parts, pregnancy, etc. There is also a 'Rights and Responsibilities' card for this topic, describing the importance of education, the role of doctor's visits, and rights involving birth control. In the 'Supports' card for the topic, it offers advice like providing resources about reproduction, offering assistance in accessing birth control, and helping people in setting up doctor's appointments.

The facilitator's guide also lists 11 card game options, offering fun and engaging ways to prompt conversation, by playing variations of games like Go Fish, Rummy, and Poker. For those looking to better understand topics unique to the people receiving supports, there are also 6 blank cards included in the set so participants can customize the cards.

It's our hope that the Sex & Relationships Conversation Cards can help organizations to initiate important discussions, empower people receiving services to achieve their outcomes in sexuality and relationships, and equip support staff to help make it happen!

SEX & RELATIONSHIPS CONVERSATION CARDS - EACH SET INCLUDES:

- 60 over-sized playing cards
- 6 blank cards included for customization
- 3 categories - topics, rights and responsibilities, and supports
- 40-page facilitator's guide with game instructions
- 18 different topic areas affecting people's lives
- 11 different game options for prompting conversation