

U Choose to Know

10 ways to support students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD) in sex education



It can be challenging to deliver sex education in the general education classroom while meeting the needs of students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (ID/DD), even if you are accustomed to doing this for other topics you teach. Sometimes it's assumed that students with ID/DD don't really need sex education, but here are a few reasons why that's false:

- » They are more likely to be victims of sexual assault and need tools to advocate for themselves, including basic knowledge about body parts and communication strategies.
- » They are biologically the same as their peers, even though some might seem too "young" to be interested in sex. Some studies find that they are actually more likely to engage in early sexual activity. They deserve to learn about ways to express themselves appropriately and learn how to develop healthy relationships.
- » They are often socially isolated and don't get a chance to practice communication with friends or potential romantic partners. Sex education might be one of their only opportunities to do so.

Read the 10 ways to support ID/DD students in your classroom on the next page...

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



[Teaching Sexual Health: Lesson Plans for Differing Abilities](#)

[Resource Center on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention: teaching sexuality to developmentally disabled youth](#)

[Sexuality across the Lifespan for Children and Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities](#)

The most important way to support these students is to keep them in class. Here are some specific ways you can support them in your classroom:

- 1 Create and reinforce group agreements. The whole class benefits from group agreements that include the “right to pass” and the need to not share personal information. You can use these as a gentle way to remind students with ID/DD that they have a choice about participating, and as a way to remind them not to share their own stories or ask people personal questions.
- 2 Share the lesson plan at the start of every day. Students with ID/DD benefit greatly from knowing exactly what to expect. Sharing this plan will help them feel less anxious and can help them stay focused.
- 3 Allow clear and easy access into and out of the room. Students with ID/DD can also suffer from anxiety and may be comforted by knowing that they can leave the room easily if needed. Be sure to arrange for another adult to supervise the student if they need to leave the room.
- 4 Acknowledge that not all sexual activity occurs by choice. When you are discussing refusal skills or consent, be sure to remind students that sometimes sexual activity can happen without their consent, and that if it does, it is not their fault. Students with ID/DD are often taught to be compliant, and they need to be taught that they should have a choice about sexual activity. Have ideas ready about who they can talk to if they want help.
- 5 Use concrete visual aids. When teaching about reproductive anatomy, show the location of body parts relative to the whole person, versus pictures that only include close-ups of genitalia. Abstract pictures can be confusing to students with ID/DD.
- 6 Simplify language and explain terms as they come up. To help ensure understanding, you can ask them to restate what you just said in simpler terms or to define a term for you.
- 7 Identify potentially challenging activities ahead of time and have a Plan B ready. In addition to students with ID/DD, there may be others who are unable or unwilling to participate in activities such as role-plays involving couples negotiating sex. One way to manage this is to allow these students to do a role-play that involves a lower stakes topic, like going out for ice cream.
- 8 Give tangible examples of consent. Students with ID/DD may need extra support learning about boundaries, how to accept a “no,” how to ask for a “yes,” and how to read body language. Use role-plays or ask students to demonstrate examples during classroom discussions.
- 9 Make use of peer support. Students with ID/DD can team up with a buddy to help them complete worksheets or process ideas. This helps them build social skills and also benefits the buddy by building empathy and compassion.
- 10 Use paraprofessionals. If a student has a designated paraprofessional, require them to stay with the student for the entire lesson. This will help the paraprofessional secure follow up support if needed. Check with your administrative staff about requesting additional support on a temporary basis as well.

As you read these tips, it has probably occurred to you that they actually help all students—and you are right! All students benefit from clear, concrete information, as well as a focus on the main “takeaways” they can put to direct use. Want to know more about how to focus on the “takeaways”?

Log in to [Blackboard](#) and click on the U Choose logo to get started.



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