

Guideline 28: Supporting People Showing Sexually Inappropriate Behaviour

Sexuality is an area that developmental services agencies need to learn more about. The right to a fulfilling sexual life is not always recognized as a right for this population. We are often uncomfortable with supporting people in leading a healthy sexual life. By neglecting support in this area, we do not treat them as adults. Some individuals with a developmental disability sometimes show inappropriate sexualized behaviour, or more rarely, commit sexual offences. It is important to explore the factors that could have led to such behaviours or offenses. Some of these factors could include a lack of education, lack of adapted supports for sexual fulfillment, and at times, a caregiver's refusal to acknowledge that sexuality is a basic human need.

Agencies should make sure a person showing inappropriate sexual behaviour receives the right expert help.

We recommend that psychologists or sexologists conduct sexual knowledge and risk assessments when necessary. Remember that the specialists you choose must have the appropriate skills and experience to work effectively with people with a developmental disability.

A good reference for such challenging behaviour is Dr. Dorothy Griffiths from Brock University.



Joel was 23 years old when he was charged with soliciting a minor. The girl was 15 and the age of consent in Canada is 16.

His parents were desperate to help him through the justice system. However, the group home that supported him had little knowledge about this area, and as one of the staff members said: "We don't know how to treat a pedophile. We are not a treatment home".

The parents had never seen evidence that Joel was interested in children in a sexual way. Joel's family was uncomfortable discussing sexual things and had never talked to Joel about sex or intimate relationships. In school he had been excluded from health class because of his disability, (mild intellectual disability and autism) so Joel attempted to learn more about sex on the Internet. The Internet was also where he met Carole, the girl he eventually became involved with. Carole had posed as a girl of 18 and Joel believed her.

The parents looked for someone who was experienced in dual diagnosis and who had knowledge about people with intellectual disabilities who have sexually offended. They found a consultant at that their local clinical developmental services/mental health services.

The consultant conducted a sexual knowledge assessment and found that Joel was naïve about sexual matters. When exploring his sexual preferences through a card sort, the consultant found no evidence that he had any interest in children and that he was interested in adult females. The consultant found this measure sufficient to determine that Joel did not intend to solicit a child. In combination with the emails that showed that Carole had lied about her age, there was enough evidence to have the charges against Joel dropped. Joel was freed under recommendation that he receive proper sexual education and instruction, as well as how to be cautious on the Internet.

Griffiths, D. (2002). Sexual aggression. In W. I. Gardner (Ed.), *Aggression and other disruptive behavioral challenges: Biomedical and psychosocial assessment and treatment* (pp. 325–397). Kingston, NY: NADD.