



Disability & Healthy Relationships ECHO Summary

Date: 8/10/2026

Topic: Consent & Boundaries: Tools for Empowerment

Presenter: Nova McGiffert

Presentation Summary: Nova McGiffert from Temple University presented information about educating consent and boundaries to people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) and why it is important. Depending on how these topics are addressed, they can be empowering for people with IDD, especially as they engage in creating relationships of any kind. She shared a tool that she and her team created for discussing consent and boundaries with people with IDD called Boundaries Dice, and discussed how making the conversation fun can help students open up and understand better.

Community Questions & Responses:

1. What experiences or examples of talking about consent & boundaries with individuals with disabilities have you had? Things that helped or were barriers?
 - **Cultural clash of values:**
 - ***In a program for FASD, caregivers were less aware of the topic of consent broadly. Especially in cases of foster families, kinship/grandfamily caregivers. Older grandparent caregivers (especially those that had strict religions), were much more opposed to learning about consent and conversation around bodily autonomy and sexuality.***
 - ***During an assessment with a client who lives with a family who was religious, and this client enjoyed masturbating. Had to have a conversation with the family about adult choices.***
 - ***In provider organizations, day programs/group homes, for staff training around ADLs and personal care, there are systemic gaps in training for staff about continual consent and communication when providing care. Medical professionals, DSPs, and family members just want to get the tasks done, rather than letting the person know that they have a choice/consent and treatment with respect.***
 - ***Visiting clients who just want to go up and hug you but placing very clear boundaries around touching during visits. There are also self-advocates who do ask and do already understand how to ask for consent.***
 - ***Responding to rejection and knowing how to emotionally regulate after hearing a no.***
 - ***One case involved a client with a long history of domestic abuse who felt***



she couldn't say no, and had come to see mutual domestic violence as normal.

- ***People with IDD are often taught to "go along with things" rather than assert their own choices.***
2. How can we navigate and have conversation about consent, boundaries, and sexuality in the context of restrictions and legal barriers? (for example, restrictions on sex-ed, state legislative changes, restrictions tied to funding sources)
- ***Consent is not only about sex, it's about safety and abuse prevention. Giving options and teaching autonomy. Teaching communication tools around being in charge of your body and the ability to say yes or no.***
 - i. ***Educating through sometimes difficult conversations can provide support that is needed for systemic issues.***
 - ***In some states sex-ed is not mandatory, focus is on protection and safety, less focus on empowerment and self-determination.***
 - i. ***Legal/school restrictions limit what can be taught in some states***
 - ii. ***In Utah there are so many topics we are legally not allowed to talk about, but remember in high school there was a class that "sex" was not allowed to be discussed. The teacher did find a loop hole that if the student asks the question then they can discuss the topic. This created a safe environment and allowed the students to feel heard and feel safe.***
 - iii. ***We want the self-advocates we work with to feel safe to talk about whatever they want to talk about. Especially if they have families who don't allow these kinds of curiosities at home. We can also talk about consent in such simple ways that doesn't have to center sex. It is useful to feel empowered in all aspects of life and can be applied to relationships and sexuality.***
 - iv. ***Using the media to help teach, including pg-13 rom-com's to introduce the topics of consent, dating, crushes and healthy relationships, etc.***
 - ***Open question: how to deliver this education for free without running into restrictions?***
 - i. ***People facing poverty tend to have fewer choices/less voice — goal should be leveling the playing field***
3. How could we introduce talking about consent & boundaries in ways that feel approachable and less overwhelming for people that are uncomfortable with the topic or unsure where to start?
- ***Make it fun!***
 - i. ***Use the media, puppets, dice games, role plays***



ii. Don't focus on scary statistics

- ***Have one-on-one conversations.***
- ***Integrate it into everyday situations, not just major topics — e.g., practicing group agreement/consent through something like deciding on pizza toppings together, versus one-off asks like borrowing money or moving in together, to illustrate the difference between agreement and consent.***