

## Handout 3—Myths about sexuality and developmental disorders

### Myth

*Individuals with developmental disorders are not sexual or have no interest in sex.*

- **Truth:**

Individuals with developmental disorders are sexual. All children are social and sexual beings from the day they are born.

### Myth

*Individuals with developmental disorders do not mature physically or sexually at the same rate as their typical peers.*

- **Truth:** Individuals with developmental disorders mature physically and sexually according to normal development. Their development in other areas, such as social understanding and interactions, can be impaired or delayed.

### Myth

*Teaching individuals with developmental disorders about sexuality can create problems.*

- **Truth:** Educating children with developmental disorders about sexuality will provide them with the correct information, resources, and skills necessary to be safe, respectful, and mature adults.

### Myth

*Individuals with developmental disorders cannot/do not want relationships.*

- **Truth:** Individuals with developmental disorders can and do want relationships. They desire friendships as well as sexual relationships.

### Myth

*Individuals with developmental disorders often display “deviant” sexual behavior.*

- **Truth:** Some behaviors may be misunderstood as being “deviant” because individuals with developmental disorders have the potential for fixating on certain aspects of sexual drive. They may develop ritualized behaviors associated with their sexuality. With proper education and skills training, these individuals can express their sexuality in appropriate ways.

### Myth

*Individuals with developmental disorders cannot understand sexuality or sexual development.*

- **Truth:** While the social components of sexuality may be more difficult for them to understand, all individuals with developmental disorders can be taught about sexual development, albeit on their own level. It is important to use the appropriate language and teaching methods in order to effectively communicate this information.

## Myth

*Social interactions are so difficult for individuals with developmental disorders that sexuality education is not important.*

- **Truth:** While social interactions can be difficult for individuals with developmental disorders, sexuality education encompasses all aspects of sexual development, including physical, emotional, and social issues. As part of sexuality education for individuals with developmental disorders, perspective taking, understanding relationship boundaries, and other social interpersonal skills should be focused on.

## Myth

*Sexual development education should be taught at school.*

- **Truth:** The first and best place for children with developmental disorders to learn about sexual development is at home with their family. They can learn their family's values about sexuality, in addition to being able to learn and communicate in a safe environment. School teachers and others (e.g., counselors) can provide information and education secondarily.