With the increasing commitment to providing functional and age-appropriate instruction to students with disabilities, the Family Life Curriculum Committee included additional activities throughout the curriculum that are appropriate to the exceptional education population. Many of the concepts that are presented throughout the curriculum are applicable to every student, regardless of their level of intellectual functioning. The adaptations are required in presenting the concepts in a more concrete manner, (as through role-play) and in the natural environment with a variety of situations, both social and vocational.

Important to the success of any course is the presence of a qualified instructor. The following guidelines are suggested in determining such qualified people:

1. Person should have successfully taught disabled students and be well liked by parents and administrators.
2. Person should be comfortable discussing the topic of sexuality.
3. Person should serve as a good model in personal grooming and manners.
4. Person should be a creative teacher with an ability to use socio-drama, role playing and audiovisual approaches as techniques for curriculum development and teaching.
5. Person should display an openness, acceptance and sensitivity to religious and social beliefs different than his/her own.

The special education adaptations have been made on the premise that early and lifelong social/sexual training will allow students with disabilities to enjoy the kind of relationships that make life meaningful. These may include the following needs. (1)

1. A friend-someone to talk to, to share important things.
2. Some warmth-someone to touch us, to put their hand on our shoulder in a way that says, “I like you.”
3. Approval-some message from others that tells us, “I am ok.”
4. Dignity-some communications from others that we are of worth.
5. Social outlets-to avoid loneliness.
6. Affection-love; feeling and knowing we are loved. That is not necessarily sex.
7. Sexual satisfaction- purely biological need for sex and sexual stimulation, so small in comparison to other real human needs, but nevertheless a very genuine need.
Another aspect of sex education must be to teach personal safety and self-protection techniques. Students with disabilities may be more vulnerable than others to sexual abuse for several reasons. (2)

1. Offenders may think it is “safer” to assault someone with a disability. They may believe that physically disabled persons will not be able to defend themselves against assault, that blind persons will not be able to identify the attacker, that hearing impaired persons will not be able to call for help or talk to anyone about the assault, or that persons who are mentally disabled will not understand what is happening or will not be believed. Although these beliefs are not accurate, the fact that these misconceptions prevail may make offenders more likely to victimize individuals with disabilities.

2. Generally, children and adolescents with disabilities do not receive the same information that non-disabled persons of the same age group receive about sexual abuse. Disabled students do not receive this information if they are segregated in a special classroom where sexual abuse prevention information is not provided. If the students are mainstreamed, they may not be fully comprehending the information being presented in the regular classroom, because of the mode of presentation. Additionally, information available to the general public may not be accessible to persons with certain disabilities. For example, there is very little printed information about sexual abuse available in a form that blind persons can use easily. Information presented on radio and television may not be accessible to the hearing impaired persons. There is very limited information about sexual abuse which has been adapted for mentally disabled persons. This lack of information makes persons with disabilities more likely to believe myths about sexual abuse and less likely to understand the crime. Thus, they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

3. Persons with disabilities are often dependent upon professionals and others who provide services and care specific to the person’s disability. This dependence can increase a persons’ vulnerability to sexual abuse.

4. Sometimes, disabled persons request assistance from strangers who may take advantage of the situation and become abusive. Or, a stranger may offer assistance to disabled persons solely for the purpose of putting them in situations where they can be assaulted.

5. Some people feel that the best method of decreasing the vulnerability of individuals with disabilities is to severely limit life activities; deny opportunities to live independently, participate in community activities, attend evening classes. Shielding disabled persons from the outside world may lower self-confidence and foster an attitude of helplessness and dependence. While this protectiveness may limit the individual’s contact with strangers, it does not protect the individual from assaults by acquaintances, such as friends, family members and caretakers. Statistics show that in at least 60% of
reported sexual assault cases, the offender was known to the victim before the assault. Data from the Seattle Rape Relief Developmental Disabilities Project indicates that the incidence of acquaintance rape as opposed to sexual assault by strangers is substantially higher among disabled victims. (3)

6. Obtaining knowledge about sexual abuse is the first step toward its prevention. Thus, persons with disabilities should receive information about sexual abuse and its prevention. In addition, persons with disabilities should be made more aware of situations where they face increased vulnerability to sexual assault because of a disability, and should receive positive education and training about preventing sexual assault in these situations. It is only through such efforts that sexual abuse of persons with disabilities will be decreased.

7. Finally, it should be emphasized that addressing sexual behavior and intimacy for the special education population is closely related to teaching social skills in the broader sense. Intimacy, in this case, is not meant to be equated with physical pleasures derived from close contact. Rather, it is meant to include communicating, caring, responding and understanding the social implications of one’s behavior. The main emphasis should, therefore, be on developing social skills for school, work and home setting and maximizing opportunities for friendship development.

1. Edwards and Wapnick, Being Me. Ednick Communications, Inc.

*This supplement is designed for the self-contained exceptional education classroom. Additional inclusion activities are included with the individual lessons.