

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: DISABILITY, SEXUALITY, AND SUPPORTING TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES



About Us



Natalya Mason (she/her) is a registered social worker who was born and raised in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Natalya is a Black first-generation Canadian and a settler on Treaty Six Territory. She has a background in psychology and social work, and holds a Master of Arts in Women's, Gender, and Sexualities Studies. Natalya is dedicated to social justice, anti-oppressive education, and reproductive rights. She is a queer feminist living in contradiction, committed to continuous learning and unlearning.

About Us



Kristyn White (she/her) was born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan, and is a settler on Treaty 4 Territory. She works as the Literacy Facilitator at Creative Options Regina, and holds a Master of Science in Kinesiology, with thesis research focused on her lived experience supporting the sexuality of people with disabilities. Kristyn is passionate about accessible education for people with disabilities and supporting caregivers to feel more confident and comfortable when navigating conversations related to sexuality.

www.creativeoptionsregina.ca

BEFORE WE BEGIN...

- **Confidentiality**

- Stories shared are for education and perspective only.

- **Language**

- Person-first language will be used, acknowledging identity-first preferences.

- **Sensitive Content**

- Topics include sexuality, body experiences, and abuse. Take care of yourself!

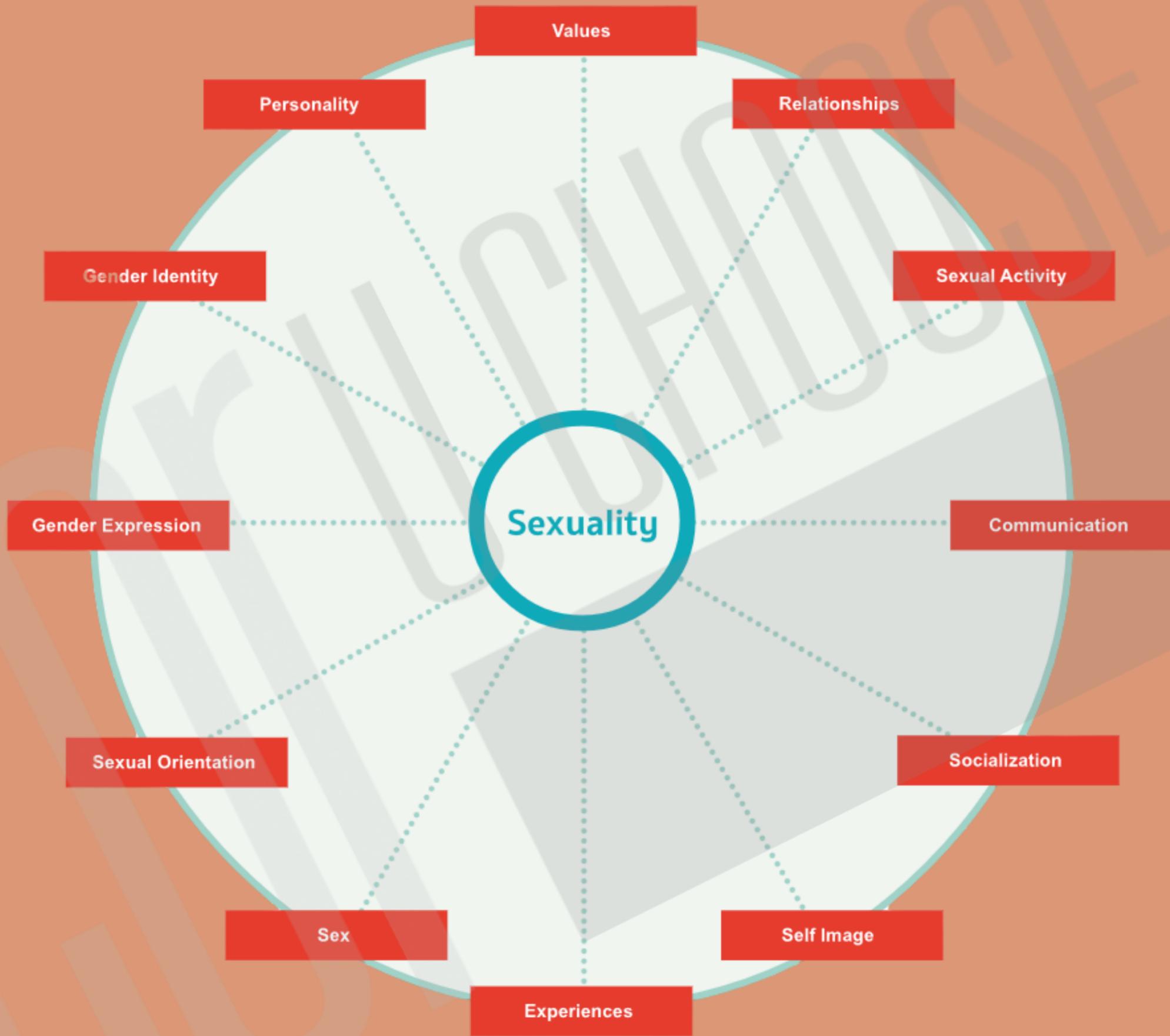
**WHAT DOES THE WORD
“SEXUALITY” MEAN?**

SEXUALITY EXPLAINED

Sexuality is how we understand our bodies, identities, and relationships with others. It includes our **feelings, beliefs, attractions, gender, and experiences**, and it is unique to each person and can change over time.

(Sexuality Education Resource Centre MB, n.d.)





SEXUAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Sexual rights support people's ability to express their sexuality in ways that feel safe, positive, and affirming. They also involve respecting others' rights to do the same.

For sexual rights to be upheld, a person's basic human rights must be respected, including the right to:

- Equality
- Privacy
- Freedom from violence
- Make their own choices
- Access information and education
- Access health services



SEXUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARENESS

Research shows that people with disabilities face a significantly higher risk of sexual abuse than those without disabilities.

Key points to know:

- Up to 83% of women and 32% of men with developmental disabilities have experienced sexual assault (Johnson & Sigler, 2000).
- Children with disabilities are abused at **more than twice** the rate of children without disabilities (Murphy & Elias, 2006).
- People with disabilities may experience victimization at rates up to **ten times higher** than those without disabilities (Modell & Mak, 2008).
- Despite high abuse rates, few perpetrators face legal consequences; only about 3% of attackers of youth with disabilities go to jail (Hingsburger, 2002).

(Government of Ontario, 2021)



DENIED SEXUAL RIGHTS

- Throughout history and continuing today, people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities have been denied the right to express their sexuality.
- Education, conversations, and experiences of sexuality are often denied or restricted due to stereotypes, fears, or attitudes held by society and those who support people with disabilities.

**WHAT IDEAS DO YOU THINK PEOPLE HAVE
ABOUT DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY?**

MYTHS AND ASSUMPTIONS

- People with disabilities are asexual and do not have any sexual desires
- People with disabilities are unable to consent to sexual activity
- People with disabilities are 'perpetual children' and need to be protected
- People with disabilities will be more sexually aggressive, promiscuous, and/or commit sexual offences if they are given information about sex



People with intellectual disabilities have the same rights as anyone else in society.

Can my girlfriend stay over tonight?

er... no.

BARRIERS TO SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

There are significant barriers to accessing sexual health information for people living with disabilities:

- Reliance upon spoken and written materials
- Limited peer and family support
- Lack of professional training
- No community spaces for discussion
- Negative societal perceptions of autonomy and citizenship

TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Sexual Health + Wellness Education

'Tell It Like It Is' is ten week sexual health and wellness curriculum. Consisting of 9 modules, the curriculum covers a range of topics and concepts pertaining to relationships, dating, gender identity, sexual identity, personal hygiene, safer sex practices, and more.

Using a compassionate approach and taking into account the diversity of participants, each module offers simple and interactive learning activities.

www.nevertmi.ca



THE EDUCATION WE PROVIDE IS...

- Sex-positive
- Comprehensive
- Inclusive
- Person-centred
- Interactive
- Intersectional
- Evidence measured



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvqOwuUfJSQ>



DO NOT DISTURB

"KNOCKING" MY SOCKS OFF

TELL IT LIKE IT IS
Sexual Health + Wellness Education



DO NOT DISTURB

HAVING SOME "ME" TIME

TELL IT LIKE IT IS
Sexual Health + Wellness Education

SIGNS OF A **HEALTHY** RELATIONSHIP

- Being honest and building trust
- Listening to what the other person has to say
- Being open-minded
- Love and care for each other
- Respecting each other's decisions
- Enjoying doing things together
- Being able to open up and share personal feelings
- Being able to build each other up and encourage each other
- Being able to be yourself
- Being able to respect each other's need to spend time alone
- Being able to communicate concerns of problems

NEVERTMI.CA



TIPS TO KEEP YOURSELF **SAFE ONLINE**

- Don't give out or post any personal or contact information, such as your full name, birthday, banking information, address, phone number, passwords, or emails. This can be used to find you.
- Choose a random username and ensure that it doesn't reveal your name, age, location, or interests.
- Think carefully about information and photographs before posting them online. Once something is posted online many people can see it, save it, and share it.

TELL IT LIKE IT IS
Sexual Health + Wellness Education

SIGNS OF AN **UNHEALTHY** RELATIONSHIP

- Not being honest with your partner
- Being physically, mentally, or emotionally hurtful
- Not being able to communicate concerns
- Being pressured to do things that you don't like, or don't want to do
- Being selfish and only thinking about ourselves
- Not respecting each other's decisions
- Being jealous when the other person spends time with other people
- Feeling that you need to be with that person all the time to be happy

TELL IT LIKE IT IS
Sexual Health + Wellness Education



TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Sexual Health + Wellness Education

HELPFUL STRATEGIES

- **Use repetition:** Reinforce concepts through multiple opportunities in daily routines, such as dressing, bathing, and other everyday activities.
- **Clarify public vs. private:** Teach which parts of the body are private and what activities are appropriate in private spaces. Set limits for discussing sexuality in public, while being open to questions at home or with trusted adults.
- **React calmly but clearly:** Respond to curiosity about genitals or other sexual health topics without shame or anger. Use moments in private spaces to teach about self-exploration and reinforce the distinction between public and private.
- **Teach personal boundaries:** Help children understand that their body belongs to them and that they have the right to say “no” to unwanted touch. Encourage independence in personal care when possible, and role-model respect for privacy in the home.

HELPFUL STRATEGIES

- **Model appropriate behaviour:** Children learn from observing interactions. Demonstrate healthy affection, respect, and boundaries in everyday life.
- **Answer questions openly:** Respond calmly, using correct terms for body parts, and treat questions as valid learning opportunities.
- **Use educational resources:** Books, visual aids, and other materials suited to the child's comprehension level can support learning.
- **Start early:** Begin discussions about private parts, puberty, and sexual health as soon as the child can understand (or asks questions). Early teaching is more effective than waiting until later.
- **Cover more than sex:** Healthy sexuality includes relationships, peer pressure, body image, consent, and responsibility, not just sexual activity.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Normalize your feelings

- Feeling awkward or uncomfortable about this topic is normal. Most people feel uncertain rather than confident when discussing it. The more we talk, the easier it gets!

Check for biases

- Notice any assumptions you might have about disability and sexuality. Pause and ask yourself: *"Would I react this way if the person didn't have a disability?"*

Responding when unsure

It's okay to be honest if you don't know the answer. You can say:

- *"That's a good question! I don't know the answer, but I can find out, and we can talk about it next time I see you."*
- *"I'm glad you felt comfortable asking me. I don't have the answer, but I can check with [NAME,] who knows more about this topic."*

RESOURCES



This website offers a 9-module sexual health curriculum for people with disabilities. The curriculum aims to support learners in making informed decisions and receiving accurate sexuality education.



This website includes general information, animated videos, and handouts for all teens and emerging adults, including resources specific to disability.



This website offers tools, videos, checklists, and downloadable resources to support youth with disabilities.



This website offers downloadable resources, including research reports, policy briefs, and fact sheets, for youth with disabilities.



This website was co-designed with people with disabilities and offers fact sheets, books, videos, flashcards, games, and more.

RESOURCES



The Sexuality Wheel shows how broad the idea of sexuality really is. Each part of the wheel represents one part of who we are and how these parts are all connected and influence one another.



Canada's tipline for reporting online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

QUESTIONS!?! REACH OUT

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