



# Sexuality and Cerebral Palsy



# **Sexuality and Cerebral Palsy**

This publication includes images from CorelDraw 9 which are protected by the copyright laws of the U.S., Canada and elsewhere. Used under license.

Cover art & colour insert (page 18) painted by Anne Abbott.  
Design & Layout by Steven Beith & Mark Lindenberg.

Written and compiled by  
Mark Lindenberg,

who wishes to gratefully acknowledge the many ways in which many people  
contributed to the production of this booklet for the

Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy  
2003

About this Booklet .....	1
Cerebral Palsy: The Basics .....	1
Body Image .....	2
Want Sex? Not Getting Any? .....	3
“Don't do that, you might get hurt!” (Half-Truths our Parents Told Us) .....	3
For (Potential) Lovers and Friends .....	5
Talking About Sex .....	6
Communication Issues .....	7
Common Questions and Misconceptions about CP .....	8
Are you Gay, Lesbian, Bi(sexual) or Transsexual? .....	9
Sexual Fantasies .....	10
Pornography/Erotica .....	10
Dating .....	11
What is Sex? .....	13
Are You Ready for Sex? .....	13
Masturbation .....	14
Birth Control .....	15
Preparation for Sex .....	15
Boundaries .....	16
Where to Have Sex? .....	17
Assisted Sex .....	17
After Sex: Information for Assistants .....	18
During Sex .....	19
Prostitution .....	20
Sexual Abuse and Victimization .....	21
Rape .....	22
A Final Note .....	23
References .....	24



## About this Booklet

**If you have cerebral palsy (CP)**, you may be asking yourself:

- “How can I be sexual?”
- “What does it mean, to be sexual?”
- “Where do I start?”

**If you're able-bodied**, stick around don't go anywhere! There's information here on:

- Getting to know people with CP. They're not scary at all.
- Misconceptions about CP
- Getting naked with a lover who has CP. What you'll need to know.

Sexuality isn't necessarily just about having sex. Emotions, past experiences, and things like personal value systems are part of the mix. Everyone needs to feel loved and to be touched, including people with CP.

## Cerebral Palsy: The Basics

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a hard condition to pin down. No two people are affected in the same ways, but there are some common issues:

- CP is usually diagnosed within the first few years of life.
- Motor function and muscle coordination are affected, often leading to involuntary movement of arms, legs and head.
- Balance and posture are affected, often leading to an unsteady walk, or the need to use a wheelchair or other mobility aid to get around.

People with CP may also have varying degrees of hearing impairment, visual impairment, difficulty in learning or other sensory deficits (e.g. no depth perception). These may or may not be caused by CP.

A small percentage of people may have an intellectual delay of one kind or another. Generally, people with CP are of average, or above average intelligence, capable of holding jobs, having families and leading active lives. The desire to express and explore sexuality and intimacy with others doesn't disappear with disability.



## Body Image

Early in life, people with CP learn that they don't have "normal" bodies. A world of doctors, surgeons and physiotherapists surrounds them, pokes and prods them. They grow up knowing that Joey can climb the monkey bars, but they can't.

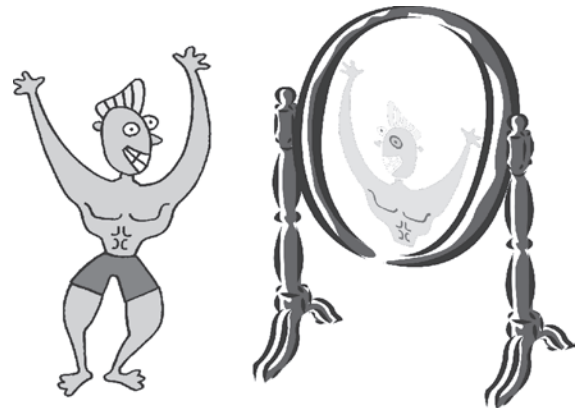
People with CP may say to themselves "It's not fair." They may begin to dislike their bodies and envy people who take their bodies for granted - who seem to be able to do whatever they want, when they want to do it. These feelings are normal, and can be expected when growing up with a disability.

So, how do you start to like and enjoy your body?

- Describe your body clearly and accurately: height, weight, hair colour, eyes, etc. Don't make judgments. Instead of saying "I'm ugly." say "I have a mole on my right cheek."
- Touch your body: Get to know the feelings you have when you do, and what kinds of touch produce what kinds of physical sensations. Enjoy the exploration.

- Confidence is a big turn-on: find ways to show off the talents and abilities that you already have.
- Look yourself in the mirror every day and smile!
- Appreciate your body: make a list of the things you like, or things other people have said they liked.

*Remember: Our bodies make up only part of who we are, and they come in different shapes and sizes. Many things make a person attractive, to someone else. Don't underestimate the sexiness of things like a sharp mind, a good sense of humour and sensitivity to others.*





## Want Sex? Not Getting Any?

You may wonder “Is it because of my disability?”

Maybe, but more often than not, it's for a number of reasons, not one reason alone. You may

- not like your body.
- believe that people find you ugly.
- not feel pride about being sexual.
- have trouble figuring out how to be sexual.
- not think of yourself as sexy.
- not have a girlfriend/boyfriend.

Maybe you

- have been told that sexuality is dirty, shameful and something to be ashamed of.
- are in a shared living environment and don't have a lot of privacy.

*Remember: Sex can be a joyful, fulfilling experience. Sexual feelings are a healthy part of life!*

## “Don't do that, you might get hurt!” (Half-Truths our Parents Told Us)

Every parent's tendency is to want to protect their children, and there's nothing wrong with that. But as they get older, kids learn to deal with the good and the bad of life, often by making mistakes, and by emotional, physical and psychological realities, such as

- raging hormones.
- making friends at school.
- playing with friends after school.
- playing team sports.
- having a girlfriend/boyfriend.
- getting dumped.

No matter who you are, EVERYONE gets hurt in life, whether it's scraping their knees, feeling different, or being rejected in some way.

But because of their CP, rather than learning to interact with the world around them and their peers, many people deal instead with things like attendant care, transportation issues, physiotherapy, and surgeries. Able-bodied helpers may treat people with CP as if they were fragile and breakable, and try to protect them from realities of life.

But you're an adult, and you deserve to experience the joys and sorrows of life in the real world. The emotional and physical ups and downs may be difficult. The more risks you take, the easier it will be to face challenges and deal with them appropriately.

*Remember: Rejection may not be disability-related: it may be for reasons that have nothing to do with you, and more to do with the other person.*

#### Feel good about yourself:

- Plan for trips, down the street to the corner-store or downtown for a show! Follow through, even if you don't feel like it.
- Feel confident in who you are. Know yourself, not just as a person with CP, but with other interests as well.
- Take a sincere interest in others. Reach out and start a conversation. It might not always work, but you never know 'til you try!
- Don't worry about "What are other people going to think when I do/feel/say something?" What YOU think and feel, matters.

- Look your best all the time. Wear clothes that you feel good in, and are comfortable for you.
- Make mistakes. It's OK to feel embarrassed and silly when they happen: that's normal. Remember to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and try again. No one's perfect.
- Let bad days happen. Everyone has them. Acknowledge your feelings, and move on.
- Enjoy the good days however you like!
- If someone doesn't accept you for who you are, do you really want them as a friend?





### **For (Potential) Lovers and Friends**

People with CP are active on the street, in their homes, or at work, and may use a variety of mobility aids to get around, such as

- canes.
- walkers.
- wheelchairs.
- leg braces.
- crutches.
- scooters.

Some may drool, walk differently (or not at all), talk differently (or not at all), and have little control over their arms or legs. This is not their fault.

Looks of disgust or fear on someone's face, or having someone turn away from physical or verbal contact, is one of the fears of people with CP. Such behaviour reinforces the false notion that people with cerebral palsy aren't likable, attractive, or intelligent.

*What should you do?*

- Approach us as you would anyone else in a social setting. Look us in the eye and smile.
- Acknowledge our disability: we know it's there! Ask a few questions. If we don't feel like answering them, we'll tell you so.
- Don't focus on the CP. Find out who we are, what we like, dislike. Ask us what kinds of things we do for fun, where we work, etc.
- Do give us compliments. It helps to have someone reinforce our attractive qualities.

## Talking About Sex.

Chances are, if people with CP haven't had the opportunity to engage in too many friendships and social activities, they're not quite sure how to express sexual ideas and thoughts.

Sex may even take on an exaggerated importance in the lives of people with CP. First expressions of sexual feeling may be extreme, as they find their sexual bearings. People with CP may deny sexuality one day and feel overwhelmingly sexual the next. It helps to talk to others, and figure out where sexuality fits into their lives.

Talking about sexual feelings and asking questions helps people learn about sex, intimacy and their own bodies.

- In conversation, use language that is comfortable for you, when describing sexual body parts.
- Talk to someone you trust, and ask them how they deal with their feelings. It might give you ideas for dealing with your own.
- Realize that slang terms exist for sexual body parts. People will find them out, and

use them, maybe to get a reaction from people. It's part of the learning process.

- Point out the inappropriate nature of slang in specific situations, if needed.
- Make sexual materials available and encourage curiosity. Erotic stories, pictures, and 'how-to' books all encourage questions and exploration of sexual topics in conversation.



## Communication Issues

Many people with CP are non-verbal. They may make vocal sounds, but not form words. They talk with the help of

- communication boards or books, containing symbols, letters and whole words, which help them express themselves.
- talkers (speech synthesizers that talk.)
- speech.
- sign language.
- other devices.

Take the time to learn someone's "system" of communicating. It may also include

- eye-blinks: how many for "yes"/"no", etc.
- head movements: up/down, side-to-side.
- speech: it may be slower than usual.
- facial expressions: eye movements, and mouth movements may all provide clues to what we're saying.
- arm or hand movements: may mean different things at different times.
- other devices/means.
- a combination of the above.

It'll take some time to get used to a different way of communicating, but it won't be any less rewarding! How else will you learn about your partner and their sexual likes, dislikes, wants and abilities?

Don't guess what we're trying to say, before we're finished saying it, wait for us to finish our sentences or thoughts.

If you can't understand what we're saying, ask us to repeat ourselves. We'd rather do that, than have you misunderstand what we're trying to say.





### **Common Questions and Misconceptions about CP**

He's in a wheelchair, can he have an erection?

Yes, he can. Both men and women with CP can and do masturbate and have an orgasm.

She's in a wheelchair, can she have a baby?

Women with CP are biologically and physically able to have children, love them and care for them as anyone else. CP cannot be passed from mother to child in any way.

Arrangements may have to be made to make pregnancy and the birthing process easier and safer for someone with CP. Building a team of compassionate health care providers who are aware of (and responsive to) specific disability- and pregnancy-related needs is a good start. Equipment such as adapted strollers, cribs and changing tables (among other things) are often available.

Some people also think that people with CP want to be with a disabled partner. Some do, some don't. It's a matter of personal preference and choice, not an obvious conclusion.

"My partner has a disability. Will I end up being their 'nurse' rather than their lover?"

No. Personal care attendants can do all of the personal care tasks that someone with CP requires. The only exception to this rule is regarding sexual expression. A personal care attendant is unlikely to feel comfortable helping you masturbate. Personal care attendants may be willing to help position the person with CP before the sex fun starts.

## **If you're Gay, Lesbian, Bi(sexual) or Transsexual**

People with CP are just as likely to be **gay**, (men attracted to men) **lesbian** (women attracted to women), **bisexual** (attracted to both men and women) as anyone else.

People who are **transsexual** feel that they want to be a woman (if they're a man) or a man (if they're a woman.) Whether they are heterosexual (attracted to the opposite sex) gay, lesbian, or bisexual, people may feel they are transgendered.

Coming out of the closet may be harder for people with CP, and a little more risky. If you have CP and you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and want to “come out of the closet”, take it in safe steps.

**Admit your sexuality to yourself first:** be comfortable with that part of yourself. Join activist or social groups for learning or friendship opportunities with other gays, lesbians, and people who are bisexual and transgendered. You can also seek to be around people who have a gay-positive outlook on life: people who will accept your sexuality as a part of who you are.



**Come out to others gradually:** preferably to supportive people you trust. Not everyone will be comfortable with your “coming out”. You'll need encouragement and help from people who care about you.



For people with CP, the ideas of dating and sex may seem like mazes to get lost in, or games that they have no chance of winning. After all, their bodies “aren't normal” and they may feel embarrassed or anxious about sexual feelings.

There are many approaches people with CP can take to discovering their sexuality. Here are some examples.

### **Sexual Fantasies**

Fantasies can be fun, exciting and fulfilling, in or out of a relationship. They can be erotic and sensual, playful, even frightening in their intensity. Some may even think: “I'm not allowed to think that, that's bad!”

*Remember: a fantasy isn't real. Just because you fantasize about something, doesn't mean it's true, or that it has to (or will) happen.*

Sharing your sexual fantasies with a partner takes trust. If your partner shares a fantasy with you, don't talk about it to others. It may be embarrassing and hurtful to them if you do.

### **Pornography/Erotica**

There are dozens of magazines that show naked men and women posing for the camera, or having sex. The Internet is also full of pornography. These kinds of pictures are often considered taboo in our culture, for their depictions of women and men solely as collections of body parts to be used for sexual pleasure, rather than as complete human beings.

But pictures can help you

- get turned on.
- learn about the body parts involved in sex.
- figure out whether you're attracted to men or women.
- develop fantasies of your own.

This booklet assumes that a good sexual relationship will be open, caring, and enjoyable for all involved, unlike some pornography that portrays violence in relationships. Physical pain (disability-related or otherwise) during sex should be minimized as much as possible, if not completely absent.

**Erotica** can be pictures, stories and films that emphasize men and women as individuals (or partners) discovering and exploring their sexuality in a sensual way that satisfies both partners.

## Dating

One step we can take towards having sex and getting used to thinking about it, is to date people.

The idea of dating may be scary for people with disabilities: where to go, what to talk about, how to act, making a good impression, and whether they look sexy or not are some of the concerns that may come up. Everyone deals with these feelings, but they may become a focus because of your CP.

**Attracted to someone?** Engage him/her in conversation for awhile. Find out if you have similar interests and opinions. Pay them a compliment. Ask them out for coffee if you want to know them better. You can't control people's responses to an advance, but putting yourself "out there," and being social is half the battle.

*Remember: On average, people get rejected 99 times for every acceptance, even without a disability!*

## Before the Date

- Decide together where you'll meet. Make sure it meets any needs you may have for accessibility (e.g. washrooms.)
- If you need to, get help to have a bath or shower before your date. Feeling clean feels sexy!
- Think of some current events to talk about. Turn on the TV, read a book or magazine to get some ideas.
- Take a deep breath, and try to relax.
- Admit your nervousness during the date: your date may be nervous too!

## During the date

- If your date asks you for your opinions, thoughts or feelings on an issue, don't brush them aside. What you think (or want, or feel) is important. Express your ideas: it's how conversations start, and relationships develop.
- Make regular eye contact with your date: it lets them know you're listening.
- Use your date's name in conversation once in a while: it indicates your attentive to them.

On a first date, it might be less stressful to go for coffee than a five-course meal. Take the pressure off: see each date as an opportunity to get to know a new friend.

- Showing an interest in someone else's life can make you very attractive to someone.

### **What if CP gets in the way?**

If you have adapted eating utensils to make it easier for you to eat, consider bringing them along on the date! Ask for a straw for your drink: do what you can to focus on your date, rather than your dinner plate!

Lasting relationships (including sexual ones) are based on a foundation of respect, understanding and friendship. Take the time to know a person, and to let them get to know you. If it happens, it happens. If not on to the next one.

If you are able-bodied and are dating someone who has CP, remember:

- In choosing a place to meet, think about physical accessibility. Are there steps at the entrance, or narrow spaces between tables? Is the washroom on the first floor, or in the basement.

- If you're at a restaurant, and wait-staff come around, don't speak for the person with CP (order their meal etc.) unless they ask for help. Inform the waiter/waitress of their needs, if you know what they are.
- It may be hard for people with CP to feel attractive if they need help with eating on a date. There's often a crowd, so a personal attendant isn't necessarily welcome. If they do request help, don't make little airplane noises, or draw too much attention to the fact. Ask what kind of assistance is needed and give it, when and where possible.
- People with CP may be interested in getting physically intimate at some point. If you're not interested, let them know, respectfully.

*Remember: Just because people with CP don't have movie-star bodies doesn't mean they don't want, or can't have a satisfying sex life.*

Whether you've found a partner you're comfortable with, and you both agree to have sex, or you're without a partner, what do you do?

## What is Sex?

Different things to different people, that's what! It's important to be flexible in any definition of the word, especially for people who have a somewhat limited range of movement or dexterity. **Sex** can include

- touching someone's naked body.
- holding hands or hugging someone close.
- having someone undress you/undressing them.
- putting a dildo in a vagina.
- kissing.
- masturbating.
- putting a penis in a vagina.
- helping/watching each other get undressed.
- using different body parts to bring someone to orgasm.
- Write your definition here!

---

(There are many ways to be sexual with someone else, or by yourself.)

## Are You Ready for Sex?

Ask yourself some of these questions:

- Am I comfortable with my body and my feelings of desire?
- What (if anything) about sex scares me? What do I want to know?
- Do I know my body?
- Have I bought condoms or other protection? Is there an agreement about how and when to use protection?
- Do I care about the well-being of my partner? Am I able to talk about my sexual likes and dislikes, and those of my partner?
- Am I in a physically safe place?
- Do I know my options if I become pregnant?
- Do I know what to do if I'm infected with a sexually transmitted disease (STD)?
- Am I comfortable with saying "no" to sex at any time?

### Some reasons not to have sex:

- You're not turned on by the person you're with.
- Something "doesn't feel right" to you.
- You (or your partner) forgot to bring protection.
- You're feeling sick.
- You don't like the person enough.



- You don't trust the person.
- You feel too much pressure.
- You want to wait.

### **Masturbation**

Whether or not someone has a partner, masturbation is an enjoyable and normal part of sexuality. There's a saying about masturbation: 90% of people say they do it as part of their sex life, and the other 10% are lying! It's no different for people with CP. Touching their own bodies and genitals is a pleasurable thing to do. Achieving this physical release may be more difficult because of

- an inability to stimulate your own genitals; or
- an environment, such as a shared living situation, that may discourage exploration of your body.

**Need help masturbating?** Ask your sexual partner if they are willing to help; it may even be a turn-on for them.

Don't have a sexual partner? Visit a sex shop. They'll have sex toys that might be adaptable to your specific needs. Dildos and vibrators strapped to your arm, hand or thigh may make it easier for you to bring yourself (or a partner) to orgasm. Take a trusted friend shopping, if you want or need help.

**Can't find an adapted sex toy?** Tell someone what you need. They might have some ideas on making things work for you.

*Remember: there are other sexy parts on your body, besides the genitals. Take pleasure in all kinds of touch, anywhere on your body.*

## **Birth Control**

There are a number of birth control methods, such as the pill, the Intra-uterine device (which prevents a woman's egg from implanting in the wall of her uterus) and diaphragms, among others. Condoms are widely available, relatively cheap and will help protect against unwanted pregnancy and AIDS.

Embarrassed when looking for condoms? That's normal, even for able-bodied people. But it'll get easier, the more you do it. Not able to get out and around to buy condoms? Get a friend (or your partner) to go out and get them for you!

Don't know how to put them on? Practice a little, and figure out what works. Can't do it by yourself? Consider it part of your sex-play, and have your partner do it.



## **Preparation for Sex**

People talk about spontaneous sex ("C'mon, let's go do it in the kitchen, right now!") but they're really talking about a myth. Every sexual act between two or more partners requires communication.

Ask your partner(s) if they have been tested for sexually transmitted diseases. Find out when they were tested, and for what diseases. You might even consider going for tests together.

When the results of your tests come back have sex and have fun! But remember: unless you're willing to risk (unwanted) pregnancy, or sexually transmitted diseases it's safer to use condoms!

## Boundaries

Where to do it, when to do it, and how to do it are all questions that people consider before having sex.

If you haven't had a lot of sexual experiences, your first time(s) may be uncomfortable. Tell your partner what you're feeling. Set limits what you want to do, and stick to them.

Some examples of boundaries:

- "Let's touch each other's (fully-clothed) bodies."
- "Let's kiss and touch each other's naked bodies."
- "Let's just kiss (or hug.)"
- "Let's take our shirts off, but keep our pants on."
- "Let's take off all our clothes, except our underwear."

Boundaries can change quickly; if you feel uncomfortable at any time, say so. If your boundaries aren't being respected, you can say "No." and pull back. Being with someone should be a comfortable, enjoyable experience, not a stressful one.

If your partner doesn't respect your limits, (sexual or otherwise) you might want to talk to him or her about your concerns. No matter how close you and your partner are to each other, some boundaries are healthy to have.





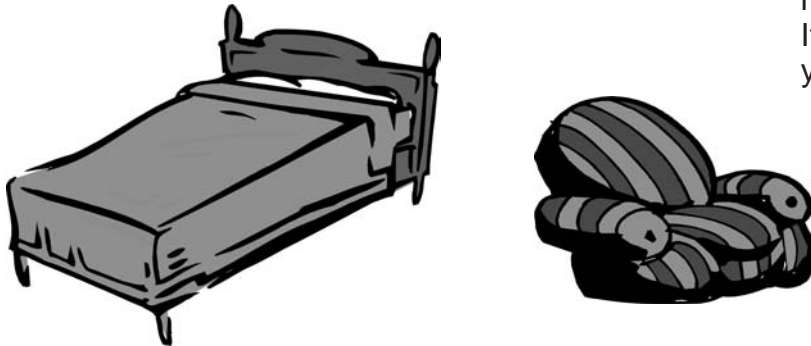
## Where to Have Sex?

Anywhere that feels comfortable!

There's not necessarily a "best place" to have sex. Chairs, sofas, recliners, beds and even the floor might all be good places to have fun, depending on how physically flexible people with CP are (or aren't) and what their physical needs and comfort zones are.

Sex is nicer if it's a relatively pain-free activity. Do certain sexual positions cause pain normally not felt during any other activity? It's probably best to find a more comfortable alternative and avoid further discomfort.

Pillows, hard or soft cushions and blankets will help make things comfortable and warm, wherever you decide to be.



## Assisted Sex

If you're a personal support worker, you already know that people with CP may need help dressing, using the bathroom or eating. Sometimes they need help getting ready for sex too, with

- undressing.
- positioning in bed.
- bathing.
- going to the washroom before sex.

These are normal life tasks, and it's your job to help people with CP with such tasks.

Assisted sex doesn't mean asking a personal support worker to engage in prostitution. It might include helping with hand or body positioning, to make it easier for people with CP to masturbate. If you feel uncomfortable doing this, make sure you tell the person with CP, so they can ask someone else for help in this matter.

## After Sex: Information for Assistants

You might be asked (or be required) to clean up sex fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions. Approach these situations with the same gentleness, care and consideration you'd use to wipe someone's mouth after a meal.

If you're worried about sexually-transmitted diseases, use a glove (keeping in mind the possibility of latex allergies) and an easily-disposable wipe. Be safe, and treat people with CP with dignity and respect. They have a right to express sexuality, as you do.

People with disabilities often struggle to view their bodies as the source of pleasant feelings, and sex can help them do that.

Acknowledging that bodies are wonderful and that sex feels good won't get you arrested for abuse of any kind. It **will** reinforce a person's sexual growth and learning.

People **may** get turned on when you clean their bodies after masturbation or sex. Remember: this is a reaction of the physical body, to physical touch; they're not expecting you to jump naked into bed: that's not expected, or appropriate.

Expressing sexual desire **to** a caregiver is different than expressing it **for** a caregiver. Unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) those with CP can be sheltered from the real world by others. It's natural to be curious about sex, and for people with CP, it's no different.

What is different is that sex (or sexuality) can become a source of worry and preoccupation. If a caregiver is reluctant to talk about sexuality, any feelings of fear or inadequacy around sexuality may be reinforced.

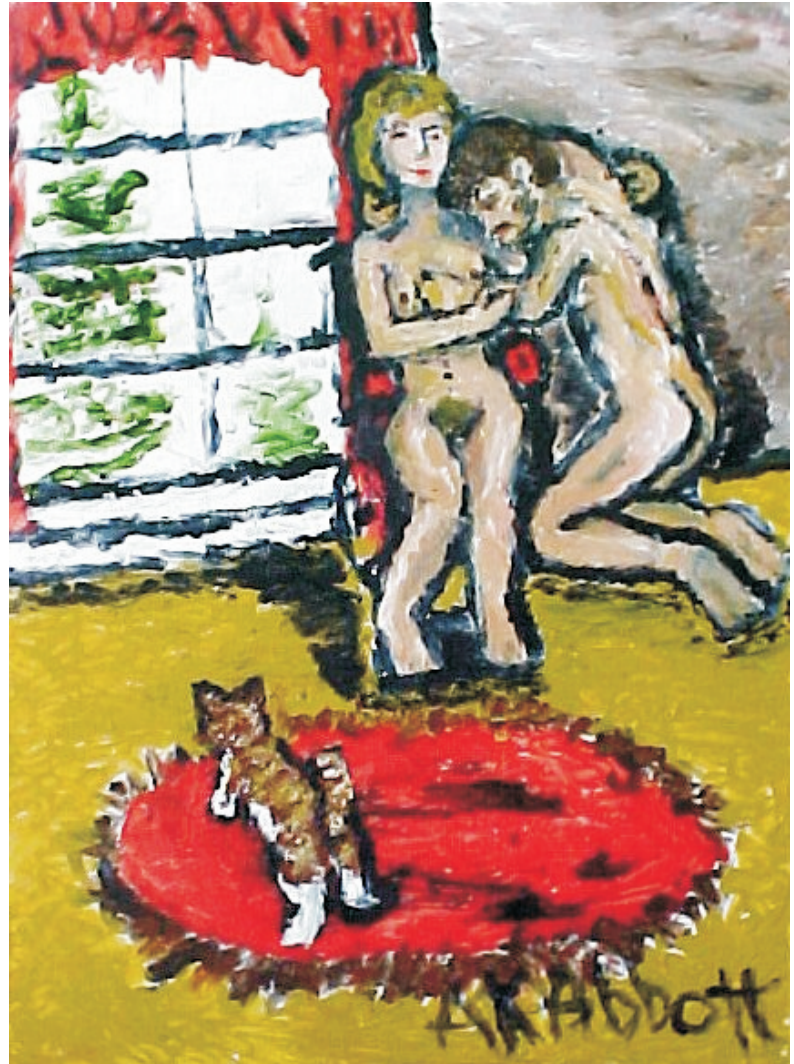
People with CP may express a sexual desire for a caregiver, the caregiver has a right to respond respectfully and honestly according to his/her professional and ethical boundaries. The caregiver can continue to provide respectful care, and still be clear. If the relationship becomes strained, it may be time to re-evaluate the professional relationship.

## During Sex (If You Have CP)

- Be honest with your lover about what you can and can't do, and also what kinds of positions you'd like to try, or not.
- Make and take the time to relax and feel comfortable with your partner. You'll have more fun if you do.
- If your CP involves muscle twitches, shouts, sudden arm, leg, or head movements tell your lover what to expect, and whether they need to react or move in a certain way to make things more comfortable for you.

## During Sex (For Your Partner)

- Don't make assumptions about what we can and can't do, sexually. Explore the possibilities with us.
- Enjoy our bodies!
- Don't rush sex: while lust may be immediate, we may not be capable of moving quickly, but we're just as passionate and sensual as you.
- Don't assume our disabilities make us bad lovers.
- Tell us what feels good to you, and what doesn't. Your needs matter too!



## Prostitution

Prostitution exists: we may not like or agree with what goes on, but both female and male prostitutes can provide a valuable service to people with disabilities who may feel left out of all the “relationship” fun. In a world where physical grace and ability are highly-prized, people with CP often lack the ability to attract a mate in the way that others do. With few opportunities for sexual release and closeness with a loved one, prostitutes give people an opportunity to touch and be touched.

A prostitute can provide a safe and less judgmental atmosphere in which to feel comfortable expressing sexuality.

Prostitution in the age of sexually transmitted diseases (**STDs**) can feel scary and dangerous, for both the service provider and service seeker, but risks can be minimized, by using

- condoms during sex.
- gloves and proper lubrication(for anal sex).
- safe sex activities.
- dams/condoms (for oral sex).

Minimize risk again, by seeking out a reputable escort agency. If you're embarrassed to call one, get a friend to do it for you, or use email if you can.

### **People with CP may not be able to move quickly or defend themselves if attacked.**

Be careful who you go with, and protect yourself. Tell a trusted friend: 1. where you are, 2. who you're with, and 3. approximately how long you'll be gone.

Worried about catching STDs? Keep the broad definition of sex (offered earlier) in mind, and limit yourself to safe-sex activities, such as

- dry kissing (no tongue!) on the face and skin.
- massage.
- rubbing up against each other's bodies.
- masturbation with a partner.
- watching sexy videos.

Prostitutes are paid to perform physical sex acts. They are not necessarily going to invest emotion into it, as you might, but they should be sympathetic to your physical limitations, as well as to your need to feel attractive and wanted.

## Sexual Abuse and Victimization

People with disabilities may not have had opportunities for sexual exploration, talking and touching when growing up. They may feel especially desperate for intimacy and affection which can make them easy targets for abuse and exploitation.

The most important tool people with disabilities have for preventing abuse and exploitation is self-esteem. Ask yourself some hard questions, including:

- What do I want in this relationship?
- How do I feel when I'm around this person?
- Does this person hit me/yell at me/make fun of me?
- Am I being constantly criticized, or humiliated?
- Does my partner have emotional outbursts for no reason, or unpredictable emotional responses?

The hardest step to take is to get out of an abusive relationship. Because of your physical vulnerabilities it may be difficult or dangerous on both an emotional and physical level.

Enlist the help of friends who can support and aid you in your escape. They may be able to offer a temporary place to stay, or lend you money in an emergency. Emergency shelters may be able to provide you with food, clothing, counseling, housing service and legal advice services.

Make up a code word to use with friends and family, to let them know you need help. Leave money, copies of important documents (such as bank books, credit cards, passports etc) an extra set of clothes, and any other medical necessities with a trusted friend. Open your own bank account, so that you alone have access to your money. Take time to plan the safest, quickest way to leave your abusive partner. Rehearse the safety plan as much as you can. Borrow a cell-phone if you need to, and make sure any new phone number you eventually get is an unlisted one. Give the new number **ONLY** to people you trust.

*Remember: There are people who will love you, as you want to be loved. You deserve respect and understanding.*

## Rape

People with disabilities (particularly women) may be less able to protect themselves against violent attack, more dependent on others for their care, and less able to get out of a bad relationship than able-bodied women.

If you feel you are being forced to have sex with someone (raped) or that you are being touched in a way you don't like - say NO and say it LOUD. Rape is abusive, and is against the law.

You are also being raped if someone demands sexual favours of you and otherwise withholds any personal care you may need, or if someone offers to “educate you about your sexuality” against your wishes.

If you are being raped, remember:

- Get help, as soon as possible. Call 911 or get someone to do so for you.
- The attack IS NOT and NEVER WILL BE your fault. Blame the attacker, not yourself.
- You will feel fearfulness and shame (among other things) after being attacked. That's normal. Seek help from any available,

accessible victim services organizations. If those are unavailable, call a friend, no matter the time of day.

- Rape is a terrifying event: seek support and advice from counsellors, and people you trust.

Your sexuality and your sex life is something you have a right to feel proud about. Sexuality deserves celebration and appreciation, by ourselves and others. If you are asked to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or something doesn't “feel right,” don't do it.



### ***A Final Note***

*The information provided in this booklet provides guidelines and ideas for care and living; by no means does it cover every possible situation you may encounter in the course of daily life.*

*References used in compiling and writing this booklet have been noted at the back.*



## References

### Books

1. Anderson, O.H. 2000. **Doing What Comes Naturally: Dispelling Myths and Fallacies About Sexuality and People with Disabilities.** High Tide Press.

2. Engel, Beverly. 1995. **Raising Your Sexual Self-Esteem: How to Feel Better About Your Sexuality and Yourself.** Ballantine Books. New York, NY.

A good book for understanding where our feelings about sex come from, how they develop, and what we can do to feel better about our sexual selves. Includes a variety of exercises.

3. McKay, Matthew and Fanning, P. 1992. **Self-Esteem: A Proven Program of Cognitive Techniques for Assessing, Improving, and Maintaining Your Self-Esteem.** (Second Edition.) New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Oakland CA

Good overview of self-esteem, identifies many barriers to good self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth. Provides step-by-step exercises to

overcoming such things as the inner critic, making accurate assessments of the self, dealing with mistakes, and having compassion for the self.

4. Joannides, Paul. 2001. **Guide to Getting It On! The Universe's Coolest and Most Informative Book about Sex.** Goofy Foot Press. Waldport, OR.

Most informative about heterosexual sex, at any rate. There may be things of interest to gay and lesbian readers, but the focus is on sex for breeders. What's a breeder? Check out the extensive glossary of terms (slang and otherwise) for the answer.

5. Kroll, Ken, and Erica Levy Klein. (1992.) **Enabling Romance: A guide to Love, Sex, and Relationships for the Disabled (and the People Who Care About Them).**

Covers the many aspects of sex, love and relationships with a disability focus

6. Kuriansky, Judy. 1996. **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dating**. Alpha Books. New York NY.

A really good book for both the inexperienced and experienced dater. Every thing from self-esteem, to finding Mr./Ms Right, handling rejection and the art of flirting, to communication styles.

7. Gabor, Don. (2001). **How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends**.

A practical and fun guide to the basics of making conversation.

### Websites

8. **Project Blue Sky** <[projectbluesky.ca](http://projectbluesky.ca)> a good site for information on dealing with (and extracting yourself from) relationship violence. Culturally-sensitive information available in Japanese, Chinese and Korean languages.

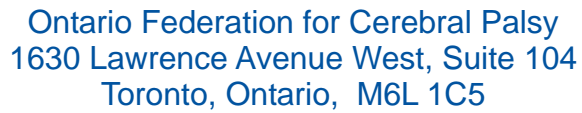
9. **Sexuality and U** <[sexualityandu.ca](http://sexualityandu.ca)> a good site for information about sex, sexually-transmitted diseases, birth control, and more. Info for all sexual orientations, adults and teens.

10. **EnableLink** <[enablelink.org](http://enablelink.org)> excellent source of information brought to you by the Canadian Abilities Foundation, publishers of Abilities magazine. Articles and discussion forums on sexuality, relationships and disability issues.

### Other References

11. Day, Trish (1996.) **A Journey to Motherhood: My Pregnancy and Childbirth Experience**.  
Magazine Article

12. Education Wife Assault pamphlet (1998.) **Women with Disabilities, Deaf Women and the Domestic Violence Courts**. Also available in French.



Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy  
1630 Lawrence Avenue West, Suite 104  
Toronto, Ontario, M6L 1C5

Toll free: 1 - 877 - 244 - 9686

E-mail: [info@ofcp.on.ca](mailto:info@ofcp.on.ca)

[www.ofcp.on.ca](http://www.ofcp.on.ca)