



# Intimate Relationships

Interim Policy Guideline

**LIFE  
WITHOUT  
BARRIERS**

[lwb.org.au](http://lwb.org.au)

## Policy Statement

The purpose in developing this policy is to recognise the undeniable right of people with disabilities to make and maintain intimate relationships and to develop and explore their sexuality consistent with options available to the broader community, and to assist Life Without Barriers (LWB) staff to provide the appropriate level of guidance and assistance to enable the people we support to engage in positive intimate relationships according to their needs and wants, if, and when, they choose.

## Who needs to know about this Policy?

- People LWB support
- Families and authorised decision makers
- LWB Staff
- Advocates and supporters
- Subject Matter Experts

## Safeguarding and LWB Values

Everyone has the right to be respected and safe, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age. These rights, and others, are captured in LWB's Rights Statement, Nothing About Me Without Me.

LWB empowers people with disabilities to engage in positive intimate relationships regardless of a person's sexual orientation, sexual preference, or sexual identity. Intimate relationships are important to our physical and emotional wellbeing. LWB acknowledges that for many people with a disability, they do not need support to form or engage in intimate relationships. People with disabilities have the **right** to develop, explore and enjoy personal intimate relationships of their choice.

These rights include:

- The right to have the same choices, freedoms and life opportunities and experiences as other people without a disability
- The right to love and be loved and to explore and engage in intimate relationships
- The right to education and information to learn about sexual pleasure and our bodies
- The right to education and information to learn about intimate relationships and sexuality
- The right to be free from sexual harassment, abuse, or exploitation
- The right to opportunities to develop, explore and enjoy relationships
- The right to education, information and help with contraception and the maintenance of sexual health
- The right to identify and define their own needs for intimate relationships
- The right to privacy
- The right to develop and explore their sexuality.

## LWB supporting people's intimate relationships

LWB staff are expected to provide people with a disability with opportunities to make their own choices, based on their own values, attitudes and needs, with respect and without judgement. This also means LWB staff are required to assist in reducing obstacles for people with a disability so that they may have the opportunity to develop intimate and rewarding relationships and explore and express their sexuality. While people's values differ, all LWB staff are open to and respect, uphold and promote a person's right to engage in sexual expression by:

- Listening and allowing person-led opportunities for people to explore their values, feelings, desires, and choices about intimate relationships and their sexuality,
- Supporting people with a disability to understand that they need to ask for and give consent, and that it is okay to change their mind before or during any sexual activity, even if previously agreeing
- Respectfully listening and being open to the views of family members while recognising that the views of the person with a disability is of the highest priority
- Being open to discussing flexible arrangements for visitors to stay over and how and when this might happen in consideration of other residents
- Supporting people's safety and wellbeing and providing all people involved (where possible) with access to education, information, services and resources to support their knowledge of intimate relationships and their sexuality, and present them with options for support,
- Facilitate ongoing engagement of sexual and reproductive health information, including contraceptives and safe sex practices, as well as access to health professionals,
- Enabling the people we support to form, pursue, and maintain intimate relationships with the person/s of their choice,
- Listening to the needs of a person about the type of support they need when planning for sexual relations or expression,
- Facilitating access to a safe and private space where people can engage in sexual activities where they do not feel pressured by staff or other household members,
- Facilitating professional support and assistance from specialist service providers for the person to better explore and understand their sexuality and engage in sexual activity or expression in a way that is comfortable for them as directed and with their consent
- Facilitate appropriate assistance for the person to access aids for self-pleasure, based on their requirements
- Identifying through discussion with the person strategies to aid if needed when they are participating in sexual expression or activities
- Maintaining the person's privacy, unless it is a duty of care issue, or the activity is not legal and then only telling the people that need to know.

LWB staff will uphold the rights of people with a disability to engage in intimate relationships and to be safe from the risk of harm, abuse, and neglect, while maximising the choice and control they have over their lives. Overly protective measures that prevent people taking risks to explore their sexuality, or to engage in intimate or physical

relationships can deny them the opportunity to learn decision-making skills, aspire to achieve their own relationship and sexual goals, and enjoy the dignity of exercising choice, including the right to make poor choices.

Staff must prevent 'Abuse, neglect or exploitation' in all forms including physical and psychological abuse, financial abuse & exploitation, coercion, or ill-treatment. Examples of abuse include:

- Sexual criminal offences and serious sexual criminal offences.
- Threats of, or actual violence, verbal, emotional or social abuse.
- Cultural or identity abuse, such as racial, sexual or gender-based discrimination or hate crime.
- Coercion and exploitation.
- Abuse of power.

While all people must be protected from harm, there are added legislative and ethical considerations for protecting people most at risk, such as:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework (2016)
- NDIS Act 2013
- National Disability Service Standards
- Australian State and Territory Criminal Codes and/or Acts
- Disability Discrimination Act (1992)

### **Staff Guidance**

In the event that staff need assistance to support or facilitate a person we support's right to sexual expression or an intimate relationship, the following steps will be taken:

- Seek support from direct supervisor or line manager
- Contact LWB's Disability Staff Support Centre or Practice Support Leads for guidance and direction
- Seek the support and engagement of external professional education and therapeutic specialists
- Engage the person with disabilities and with their consent, their Support Coordinator to source funding for counselling and professional support
- LWB staff are not to provide physical support for people with disabilities to engage in sexual acts, however, at their consent/direction will engage with specialist service providers of these supports.