

Using a Person-Centered Approach to Support Sexuality

Joan

Joan lived with her mother until age 25, when upon her mother's death, moved into her own apartment which she shares with a roommate who also has an intellectual disability. Joan receives about 20 hours of staff support in her home to help her plan and organize daily and weekly home/community activities. She is independent, responsible, and works at Dunkin Donuts via supported employment. She looks older than her age, dresses very plainly, and is described as quiet and meek. About one year after Joan moved into her new apartment, she showed a very strong interest in having a boyfriend. She frequently attended dances hosted by a disability organization. At her supported employment agency, Joan met a man, 10 years younger than she, that she immediately called her boyfriend. Without the knowledge of her support staff, or her brother who felt responsible for her care, or her roommate, Joan began to spend time with Eric. At first, she met him for coffee after work, but then later skipped work (on several occasions) and took the bus to his home to spend the afternoon (people were shocked that she could figure this out on her own). One night, around 10:00, her older brother called to speak with her. When her roommate didn't know of her whereabouts, he immediately called the agency director in a panic. To make a long story short, when Joan's brother discovered that Joan had been seeing Eric and spending time alone with him, he voiced strong concerns about his sister's safety, her relationship with Eric, and the agency's lack of appropriate supervision of Joan. Within one week after the incident, Joan was served with legal papers indicating that he was seeking full guardianship of Joan.

Questions for discussion—

1. What are Joan's preferences and dreams? Her desires for personal relationships, now and in the future?
2. What does Joan need to know or what skills are needed to pursue healthy relationships or express sexuality?
3. What are her barriers to achieving personal goals and healthy sexual development?
4. What is the role of health professionals in supporting sexual health for Joan?
5. What supports (e.g., education, adaptations) are needed to support Joan's preferences and interests?
6. What ongoing supports are needed to eliminate barriers and support healthy development?

Jack

Jack, 26 years old, currently lives in his own apartment with another gentleman. He has a mild/moderate intellectual disability and requires minimal staff support to manage his daily and weekly activities. He is able to travel in his local community by himself and is quite skilled at making friends in the neighborhood. Jack's support staff noticed that he was befriending several men and it was reported that these men were visiting Jack at his home on a regular basis. He often talked affectionately about his men friends and it became apparent that his feelings might go beyond friendship. Jack's support staff noticed that he would often pay for things or that some of his personal possessions would "disappear" after a visit from one of his new friends, raising some serious concerns about the nature of these relationships. Concerned, his support staff began to pay close attention to the nature of the relationship that Jack had with his men friends, keeping an eye out for any signs of sexual or financial abuse. Recognizing his desire for companionship, his support staff encouraged him to meet and spend time with women in the area. In addition, they voiced their concerns to Jack about the nature of the relationships with his men friends explaining to him that they were concerned for his safety. All seemed to be going smoothly. Jack was spending time with a woman who was supported by the same program and it appeared that he was spending less time with his men friends. One day the supervisor of Jack's program received a call from the support staff who reported that several used condoms had been found on the floor in the apartment and Jack's roommate reported that he was frightened of a man who had spent the night in the apartment. His roommate stated that it was not the first time and he wanted to know what we were going to do about it—he didn't want strange men in his home at night.

Questions for discussion—

1. What are Jack's preferences and dreams? His desires for personal relationships, now and in the future?
2. What does Jack need to know, or what skills are needed to pursue healthy relationships or express sexuality?
3. What are his barriers to achieving personal goals and healthy sexual development?
4. What is the role of health professionals in supporting sexual health for Jack?
5. What supports (e.g., education, adaptations) are needed to support Jack's preferences and interests?
6. What ongoing supports are needed to eliminate barriers and support healthy development?