

# Family Life Education (FLE) and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

*You can make it happen.*



## Why is FLE important for youth with IDD?

Everyone deserves safe and accurate access to sexual health education. Research indicates that over half of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are interested in romantic relationships, marriage, and becoming a parent.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, barriers to sexual health education result in people with IDD experiencing significantly higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and increased risk for physical and sexual violence.

Learning about topics like consent, boundaries, reproduction, and contraception can help students with IDD have healthy relationships and help keep themselves safe now and in the future.

**Abuse.** In 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice reported the rate of violence against persons with disabilities was nearly *four times* the rate of persons without disabilities.<sup>2</sup> People with IDD are *seven times* more likely to be sexually assaulted.<sup>6</sup> Despite persons with disabilities experiencing higher rates of sexual abuse, only 19% of these cases are reported to law enforcement compared to 36% of those against persons without disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

**7x**

Persons with IDD are seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted.<sup>6</sup>

**2x**

Persons with IDD are nearly twice as likely to have unprotected sex 50% ≥ of the time.<sup>3</sup>

**73%**

of males surveyed with IDD reported having had sex before age 18.<sup>5</sup>

**69%**

of women with severe IDD have been sexually assaulted.<sup>7</sup>

**72%**

of females surveyed with IDD reported having had sex before age 18.<sup>5</sup>

**STIs and Pregnancy.** Lack of access to sexual health information puts youth with disabilities at an increased risk for contracting STIs and having unprotected sexual intercourse. In a study of middle and high school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, students with IDD were nearly three times more likely to have an STI than students without IDD. Additionally, the same study found that nearly 40% of females with IDD had become pregnant compared to 18% of females without IDD.<sup>3</sup>

## FLE in Virginia

Family Life Education (FLE), or sexual health education, is not required in Virginia public schools. However, the majority of school districts do provide some FLE instruction.

If a school district offers FLE, they must meet certain Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) requirements, but largely it is up to each school district to decide how FLE instruction is provided. This means that how often FLE instruction occurs, who teaches FLE, what curriculum is used, etc. varies across school districts.

Virginia also has an "opt-out" policy that allows parents and/or guardians to remove their student from any class.

**Accessibility.** Youth with IDD are significantly less likely to receive sexual health education at school compared to their peers. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 reported that only 53.1% of youth in the special education system aged 14 and older had received sexual health education.<sup>4</sup>

## IEPs and Sexual Health Education

In March of 2020, [Virginia House Bill 134](#) and Virginia Senate Bill 186 were signed into law. HB 134 and SB 186 require "Individualized education program teams to consider the need for certain age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate instruction related to sexual health...." <sup>8</sup>

As of July 2023, guidelines for considering and addressing a student's need for FLE have not yet been released by the VDOE. Parents and guardians remain the best advocates for these topics to be included on their student's IEP.

**Value of Education.** Sexual health education has valuable long-term impacts for students.

- **Consent** - Understanding and practicing asking for and giving consent teaches your student to advocate for themselves and can help protect against sexual abuse.
- **Boundaries** - Setting appropriate physical and emotional boundaries gives your student the skills they need to maintain healthy relationships at home, school, work, and in the community.
- **Reproduction** - Understanding the body and how it works allows your student to communicate their needs with medical providers and protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and STIs.

**Goals.** The Disability-inclusive Sexual Health Network has created a [Sexual Health Concepts](#) guide to help parents/guardians and IEP teams create individualized goals for Family Life Education. IEP teams can create goals that center around sexual health so students receive this valuable education in a way that is accessible to them.

## References

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