

How do support workers of people with learning disabilities negotiate the tension between their protection and empowerment as sexual beings?

The Scottish context.

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## The Scottish Context

- Education
- Culture
- Law
- National Guidelines
- Local Guidelines

## Support Workers Context

- Knowledge?
- Training?
- Proactive Role?

## Health Professionals Advise

“I would argue that even where a service user has had a good sex education there is a need to repeat and reinforce”

“We need a flow-through of information not a cut off point at 16 but a build up”

“Sex and relationship education is a life-long process”

## Aspects of Positive Outcomes

- Definition
- Staff acceptance/ Service user's trust
- Parent's relationship with Support Worker
- Networking and liaising

## Aspects of Bad Experiences

- Remembering
- Information kept from workers
- Information not available to all services
- Information not adequate

## Reflections on Practice

### Signs of success

- Service user can talk more openly
- Self-identity
- Parent's acceptance of child's sexuality
- Appropriateness
- No adverse attention from others
- Forms successful relationship

## Reflections on Practice

### With Hindsight

- Quicker intervention
- Parent's backing
- Pre-empting situation
- More confident

## Reflections on Practice

### Management – what can they do?

- Workers with good support – training and development within the job.
- Workers with poor support – training and better communication.

## Relationships and Limits to Empowerment

“Sexual health seems a bit of a joke when people don't even get a chance (to have sex). In giving all this information and saying what's possible and then that it's fine but what are we going to do about it? So are we doing the right thing or the wrong thing?”

- 24/7 1:1 care?
- Legal restraints – and getting past these.

## Burden of Care

“People do respect his wishes but there's concern about his slightly unpredictable behaviour”

“It's a situation whereby she's been offering sexual favours for money... it's quite difficult being a support worker because I support her in her life and if she chooses to live her life this way ...”

“What made me worry was the negative thoughts I had about his freedom. The last thing I wanted to do was promote somebody going out into the community with the potential to target another member of society.. I think innocent until proven guilty but there was times of doubt as well”

## Conclusions

### Good practice depends on:

- Trust/openness
- Staff confidence
- Networking
- Communication

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