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## Exploring Relationships and Intimacy with Adults with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

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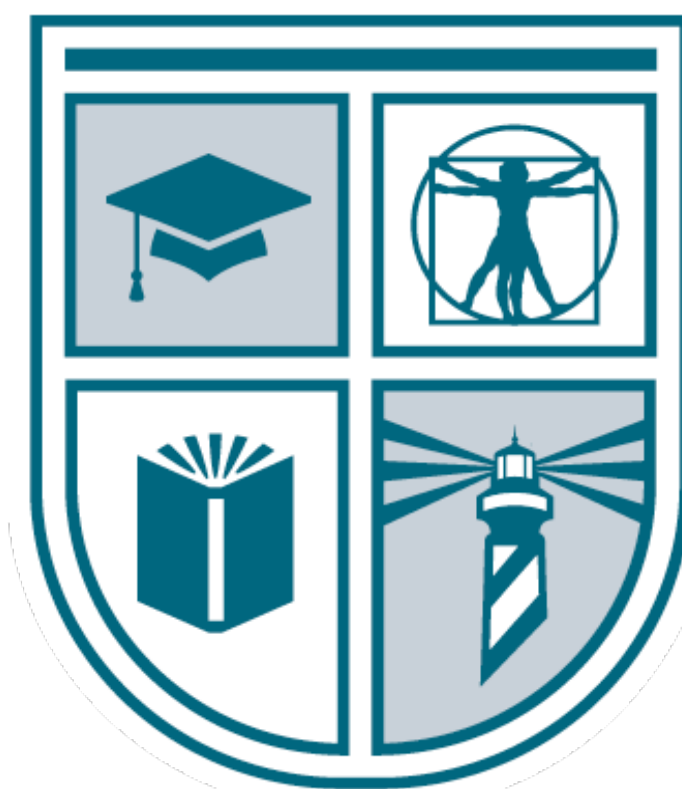
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# Exploring Relationships and Intimacy with Adults with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)



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## BACKGROUND

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) defines **intimate partner relationships** as “engaging in activities to initiate & maintain a close relationship, including giving & receiving affection & interacting in desired roles...” (AOTA, 2020, p. 33).

**Intimacy** is associated with familiarity, privileged knowledge, emotional attachments, trust, & *sometimes* physical proximity or sexual activity.

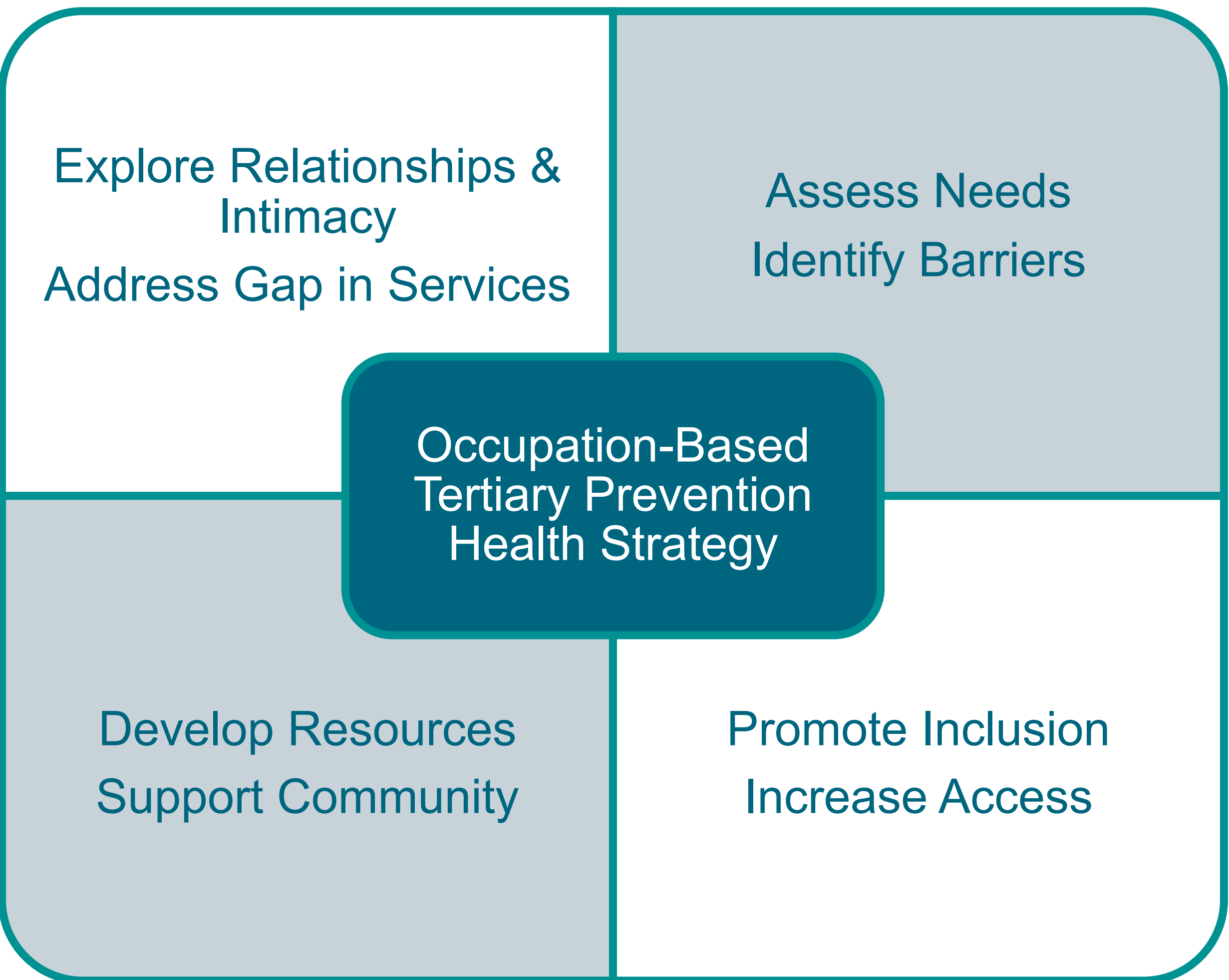
- Intimacy is **not limited** to romantic partnerships & can be expressed emotionally, intellectually, experientially, creatively, spiritually, & physically (Klausen, 2021).

**Intimate partner relationships** are regarded as a component of the occupation of **social participation** (AOTA, 2020).

## PROBLEM

Adults with I/DD’s **access** to occupations related to intimacy, intimate partner relationships, & opportunities for sexual expression has been **significantly limited** due to various societal, cultural, institutional, & familial **barriers** (Bathje et al., 2021).

## PURPOSE



## METHODS

### 1. Community Partnership

### 2. Needs Assessment:

- Observations & record reviews
- Informal interviews
- Staff surveys
- Literature review

### 3. Develop Resources:

- Staff member training videos
- Community-centered resource guide
- Internal needs assessment infographic
- OT student presentation
- Client assessment session



(Iwama et al., 2009)

## DISCUSSION

### Project Scope:

- Explored OT role in adult day programming
- Explored community readiness for relationship & intimacy curriculum & programming
- Assessed site-specific needs for relationship & intimacy training
- Developed resources for current and future use
- Presented on community-centered collaboration to OT students

### Analysis of Project:

#### Strengths:

- Modified resources to site desires & needs
- Built rapport with staff members & site supervisors
- Resources aligned with Person-Centered Thinking methods & Bill of Rights (SDRC, n.d.-a; SDRC, n.d.-b)

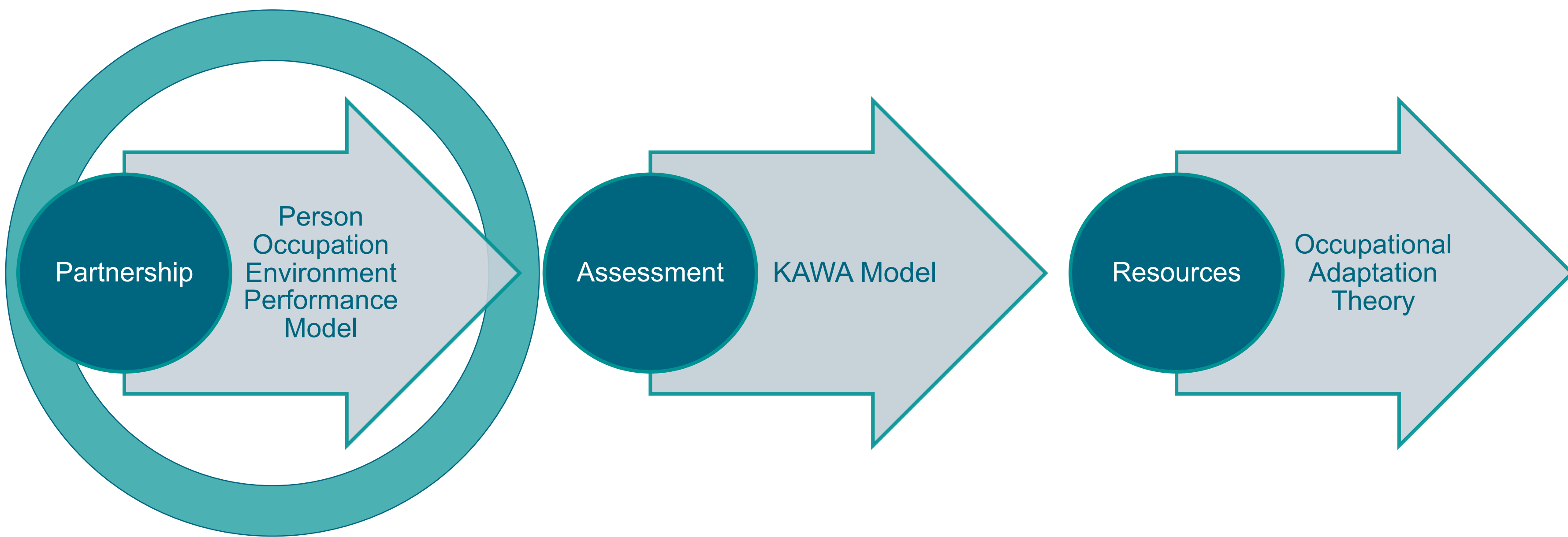
#### Limitations:

- Community readiness & organizational protocols
- Limited time to implement project
- Absence of caregiver & participant input

### Implications for Practice & Research:

- Contributes to professional discourse regarding the relationship & intimacy training needs of adults diagnosed with I/DD
- Further conceptualizes the contextual landscape population members navigate
- Promotes interprofessional collaboration
- Introduces OT methodology to adapt common practices (AOTA, 2020)
- Supports future OT students to develop skills for community-centered collaboration

## CLINICAL APPLICATION



### Community Day Programming Advocacy Goals:

- Advocating for Population Members:**
  - Communicate contextual impacts of occupational deprivation
  - Provide knowledge translation of needs assessment
  - Utilize & highlight Bill of Rights (San Diego Regional Center [SDRC], n.d.-b)
- Advocating for Community-Centered Collaboration:**
  - Train staff members on methods for structured activities & groups
  - Include stakeholders’ perspectives in data collection for needs assessment
  - Support use of Person-Centered Thinking methods (SDRC, n.d.-a)
- Advocating for Occupational Therapy:**
  - Education on scope of practice
  - Review of current curriculums/programs
  - Detail benefits of utilizing OT methods to explore relationships & intimacy

## REFERENCES



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# KAWA MODEL

## A PICTURE STORY OF MY LOVE LIFE

### Parts of the Kawa & What They Mean:



#### Water

the natural flow of my love life



#### River Wall (Mud)

the people & places in my love life  
**examples:** romantic partners, TERI



#### Rocks

the problems making my love life harder  
**examples:** busy schedule, no partner



#### Driftwood (Logs)

personality traits that affect my love life  
**examples:** being considerate, being shy

Name:

Date:





# Exploring Relationships & Intimacy with Adults with I/DD



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## INTRODUCTION

# Definition of Key Terms



### Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

A group of lifelong conditions that impact cognitive functioning, adaptive behaviors, development, nervous system, sensory system, and/or metabolism. Autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, & cerebral palsy are common types of I/DD (National Institute of Health, 2021)



### Intimacy

The feeling of being close, emotionally connected, & supported (State of Victoria, 2021). Intimacy is not limited to romantic partnerships & can be expressed emotionally, intellectually, experientially, creatively, spiritually, physically, etc. (Klausen, 2021).



### Intimate Partner Relationships

"Engaging in activities to initiate & maintain a close relationship, including giving & receiving affection & interacting in desired roles. Intimate partners may or may not engage in sexual activity" (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020, p. 34).



### Conservatorships

"When a judge appoints another person to act or make decisions for the person who needs help. ...Must be the least restrictive type of assistance needed to help a person lead a life of their choice" (Judicial Branch of California, 2023).

## INTRODUCTION

# Let's Talk About Relationships & Intimacy

### Summary of the Problem:

The *Persons with Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights* grants adults who have been diagnosed with I/DD the right to make their own choices in their relationships (San Diego Regional Center [SDRC], n.d.-b). This bill of rights also outlines population members' rights to dignity, social interaction, & community participation (SDRC, n.d.-b).

Unfortunately, adults with I/DD encounter notable inequity when attempting to exercise these rights (Schmidt et al., 2020). This is because the population's access to activities related to intimacy, intimate partner relationships, & opportunities for sexual expression has been significantly limited due to various societal, cultural, organizational, & familial barriers (Bathje et al., 2021).



"I think lots of people have stories about all of the barriers & how difficult & challenging it is.... it doesn't have to be challenging or hard. It can just be two people that love each other & that want to be together & have the supports to be together."

- Nicole

(SITTER ET AL., 2019)