3. Relationships
Key Concept 1

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1 - INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the previous thematic unit, we will use as a reference the key principles outlined in the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education developed by UNESCO. These guidelines are scientifically supported and internationally recognized as an appropriate framework for the development of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programs.

UNESCO published this guidance as a tool for countries to implement comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programs. The guidance is structured around eight key concepts.
In each thematic unit, we will explore each of these key concepts, adapted for people with disabilities–especially young people with intellectual disabilities–as they are the primary target group of the ISAWP project.

1.1 Human Rights Perspective

These UNESCO guidelines are grounded in human rights. They promote an inclusive, evidence-based approach with a focus on human rights, ensuring that children and young people–including those with disabilities–receive education and tools that enable them to develop their sexuality fully and make informed, safe decisions.

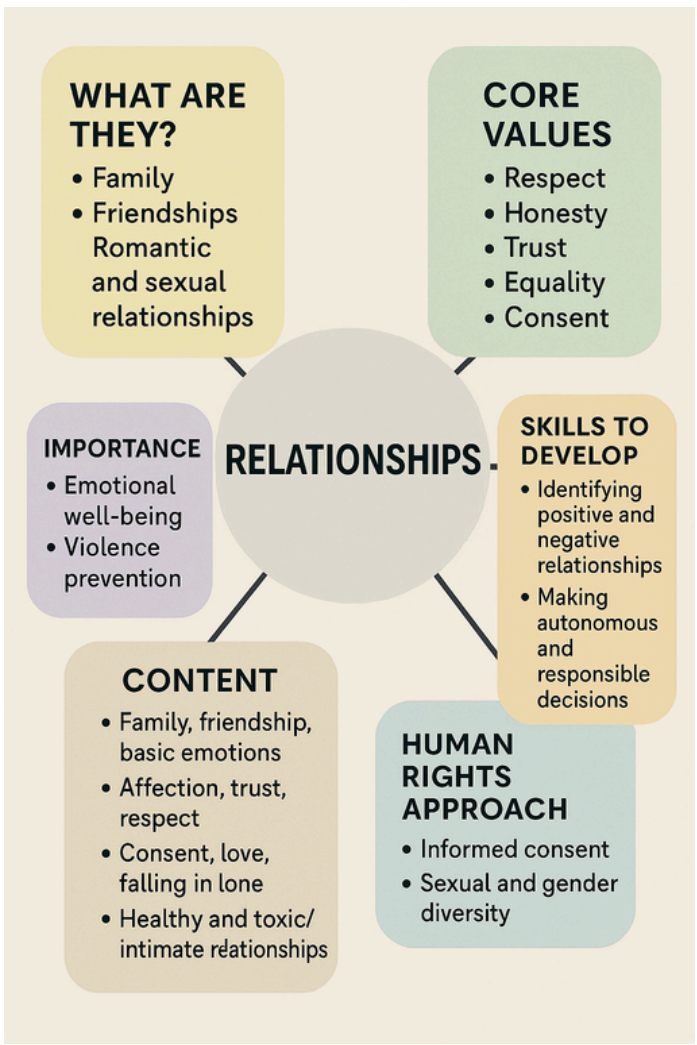
- Every person has the right to relationships free from violence and coercion.
- Relationships must be based on free and informed consent.
- Diversity of sexual identities and orientations is recognized and respected.

2 RELATIONSHIPS. KEY CONCEPT 1

In this thematic unit, we will begin with Key Concept 1: Relationships. It focuses on developing the skills and knowledge that enable young people to understand and manage their relationships in a healthy, respectful, and equitable way.

<u>It is divided into the following topics:</u>

- **Families**
- **Friendship, love, and romantic relationships**
- **Tolerance, inclusion, and respect**
- **Long-term commitments and parenting**



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2.1 SKILLS TO DEVELOP

- Understand the importance of healthy relationships in people's lives
- Identify types of relationships and their characteristics (family, friendship, romantic, sexual)
- Analyze power dynamics and how they affect relationships
- Communicate boundaries and needs assertively
- Make informed, autonomous, and responsible decisions
- Promote respect for diversity and for different ways of experiencing relationships

2.2 What is meant by relationships

→ Relationships are emotional and social bonds that people form throughout their lives–with family, friends, trusted adults, and potential partners.

These relationships are essential for the emotional, social, and sexual development of children and adolescents.

It refers to all types of interactions between people: from friendships and family ties to romantic and sexual relationships.

2.3 Emotional Development and Social Skills

Key Concept 1 not only addresses types of relationships, but also focuses on the development of social and emotional competencies such as:

Empathy:
The ability to put oneself in another person's shoes.

Self-awareness:
Recognizing one's own emotions.

Conflict resolution:
Using dialogue to reach agreements.

Emotional self-regulation:
Managing frustration and conflict without resorting to violence.

Communication skills:
Expressing thoughts and feelings clearly and assertively.

These skills are especially important for young people with disabilities, as they are often infantilized or overprotected, which can hinder their emotional autonomy and their ability to set boundaries or ask for help.

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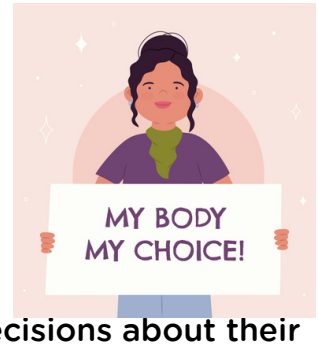
2.4 CONSENT AND BODILY AUTONOMY



An essential teaching of this key concept is that:

- Every person has the right to make decisions about their own body.
- Consent must be free, informed, clear, enthusiastic, and reversible.
- We must teach how to recognize abusive or uncomfortable situations and provide tools to say "NO" or ask for help.

IMPORTANT

Young people with disabilities often have fewer opportunities to learn about consent, which makes them more vulnerable to situations of abuse or manipulation.
That is why explicitly and adaptively teaching the concept of consent is a priority.

2.5 VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN RELATIONSHIPS

Emotional bonds can also be a space where dynamics of violence are reproduced. It is vital to teach how to identify:

- Controlling or jealous behaviors as signs of toxic relationships.
- The difference between an argument and aggression.
- The right to live in relationships where there is respect, mutual care, and well-being.

2.6 INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

→ Aspects to Consider:

- Adapting content to the age and developmental stage of the individuals receiving the training.
- Applying an approach that promotes equal relationships, free from violence and discrimination.
- Not forgetting the perspective of cultural, gender, sexual orientation, and ability diversity.

For the pilot workshops, it is essential to consider each participant's individual characteristics.

→ Possible adaptations

- Use visual and auditory materials (simple-language images, pictograms, audio recordings).
- Include role plays to practice saying "yes" and "no."
- Adapt content according to the type of disability:
- Intellectual: short sentences, repetition, everyday examples.
- Hearing: use sign language, subtitles, or written text.
- Visual: provide clear verbal descriptions and real objects.
- Motor: ensure physical accessibility to materials and participation.

→ Recommendations for Educators

- Promote safe, non-judgmental spaces–environments that are kind, respectful, affectionate, based on consent, and free.
- Validate the emotional and relational experiences, feelings, and questions of young people without minimizing them because of their disability
- Use concrete, everyday examples that are adapted to the reality of the target population.
- Work in coordination with other professionals in the person's environment and with their families.
- Continuously assess whether the content is being understood and meaningfully experienced.

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3. FAMILY

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The family is the first space where we learn to relate to others, to give and receive affection, to communicate, and to understand rules.
Families can take many different forms (a single mother or father, two fathers, two mothers, grandparents, uncles or aunts, adoptive families, etc.).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	INCLUSIVE APPROACH
• Recognize the diversity of family structures. • Value the importance of care, love, and respect within the family environment. • Develop communication skills with family members.	• Use images of different types of families (drawings, pictograms, or real photos). • Tell simple stories about family life with common situations (having breakfast together, asking for help, resolving a conflict). • Ensure that students are not forced to talk about their own families if they do not feel comfortable (emotionally protect them).

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4. Friendship, Love, and Romantic Relationship

Having friendships and feeling affection or attraction towards others is part of human development. It is important to understand what a healthy relationship is, how to express feelings, and how to respect one's own boundaries as well as those of others.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	TO CONSIDER	INCLUSIVE APPROACH
• Distinguish between friendship, and romantic relationships. • Recognize emotions such as affection, attraction, jealousy, and joy. • Understand what a relationship based on respect, equality, and consent is.	**Healthy Relationships vs. Toxic Relationships:** • Healthy Relationships: There is respect, trust, mutual support. • Toxic Relationships: There are insults, control, fear. **Consent and respect** • No one can touch you if you don't want them to. • You must also respect other people's "no." • Consent should always be clear, free, and enthusiastic.	• Offer everyday scenarios to discuss feelings and appropriate behaviors. • Use role-playing activities to practice how to say "I like someone," how to respond to rejection, or how to say "no." • Ensure that young people with disabilities are not treated as "asexual" or "like children."

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: "CONSENT"

During a school party, Marcos approaches Julia and asks if she wants to dance with him. Julia smiles and says:
– "Thank you, but I prefer to stay seated."
Marcos insists:
– "Come on, it's just a dance! Don't be boring."
Julia firmly repeats:
– "I said no, thank you."

Key Aspects to Work On:

- Julia has clearly expressed that she does not want to dance.
- Marcos does not respect her decision and insists, which invalidates the consent.
- Saying "no" is a right, and it should be respected without pressure.
- Consent is not valid if obtained through pressure, guilt, or insistence.

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5. TOLERANCE, INCLUSION, AND RESPECT

It is essential to teach the importance of tolerance to help people with intellectual disabilities understand and respect differences among individuals, especially regarding gender diversity and sexual orientations.

Healthy relationships are based on respect for differences – in gender, abilities, ways of thinking, feeling, or living. Inclusion means that all people are valued for who they are.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	TO CONSIDER	INCLUSIVE APPROACH
• Promote empathy and respect for differences. • Reflect on the value of diversity (cultural, gender, functional). • Encourage an inclusive attitude toward peers and members of the community.	**Important Social Skills:** • Empathy: ¨How would I feel if that happened to me?¨ • Active listening: looking, paying attention, not interrupting. • Expressing feelings and emotions **Tolerance** • Acceptance of Diversity, especially related to gender diversity and sexual orientations. **Inclusion** • Access to Information and Participation: Young people have the right to receive the same education as those without disabilities, adapted to their needs and learning pace. **Respect:** • Promoting dignity and autonomy. Teaching respect for oneself and for others. This includes understanding their right to autonomy and to make decisions about their own body, emotions, and relationships.	• Speak explicitly about respecting people with disabilities and how they, too, should respect others. • Use stories, videos, or narratives that show how inclusion is experienced in school, family, or the community. • Work on respectful language, avoiding discriminatory terms or offensive nicknames.

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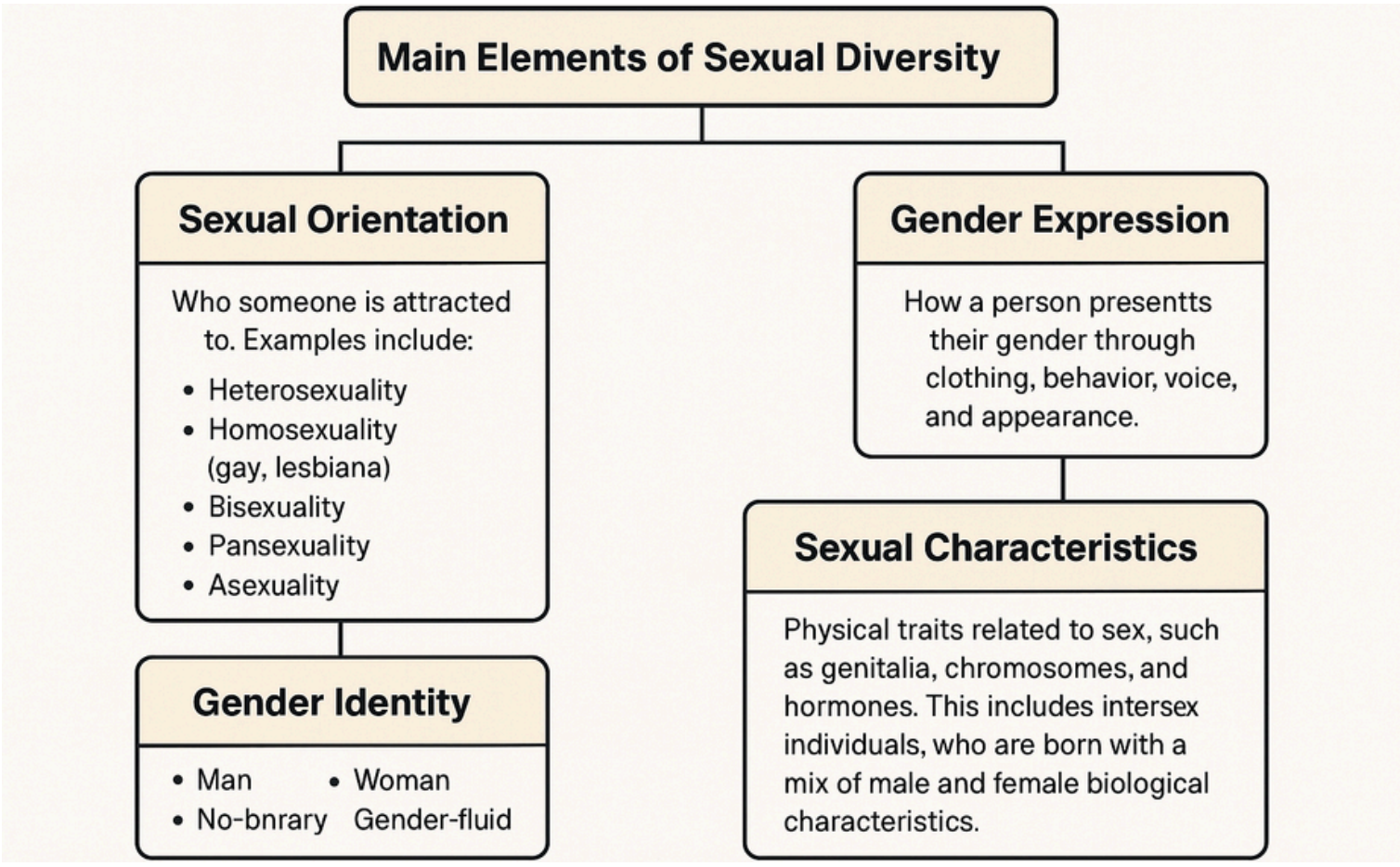
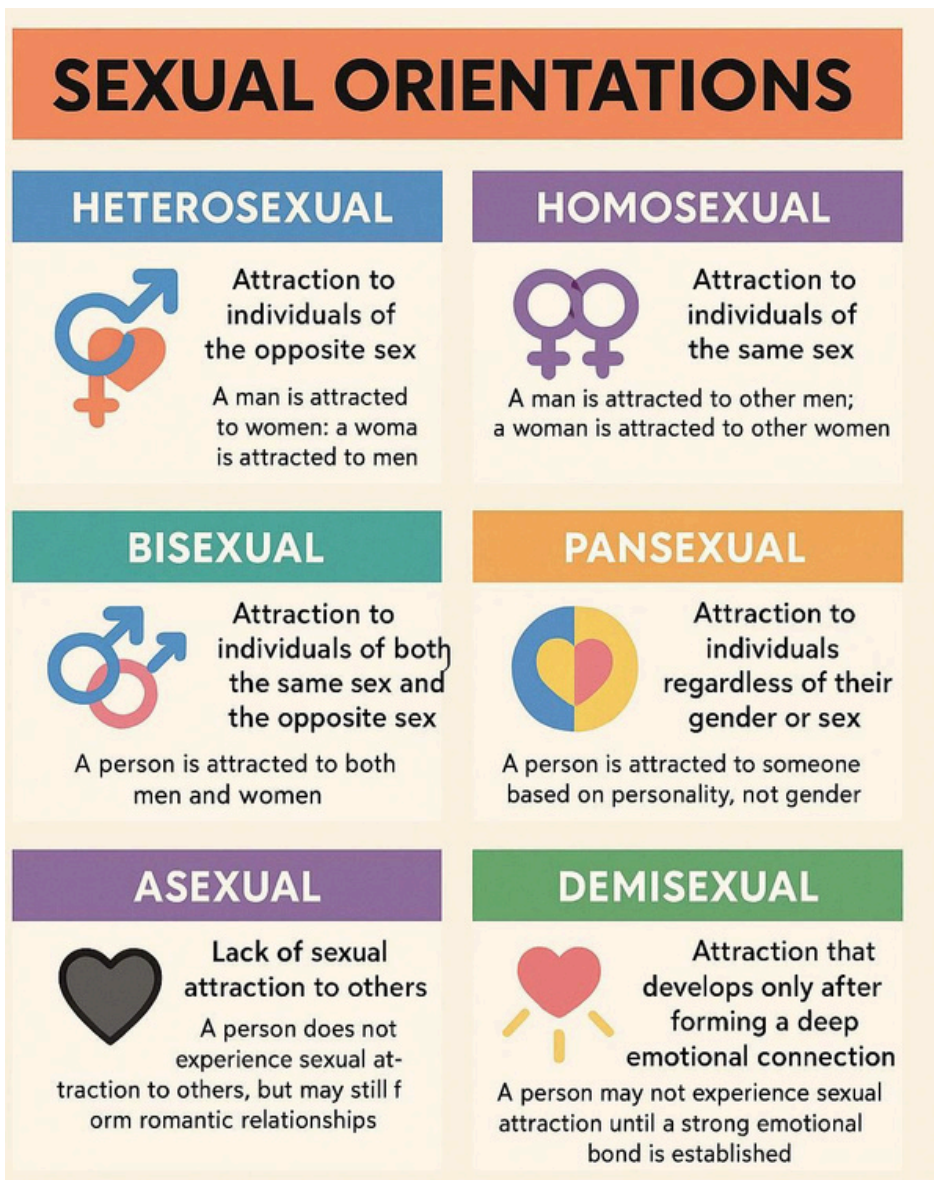
5.1 SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Sexual diversity is a broad term that refers to the variety of sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual characteristics among people. It acknowledges that not everyone fits into traditional norms of heterosexuality or the male/female gender binary.



Talking about sexual diversity promotes inclusion, respect, equal rights, and helps fight against discrimination. It also gives visibility and protection to historically marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQ+ community.



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6. LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS AND PARENTING

Some people choose to live as a couple, get married, or have children. These are personal decisions that involve responsibility, love, and commitment. It is important to understand that not everyone wants the same things, and that's okay.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	INCLUSIVE APPROACH
• Recognize what it means to live as a couple and to start a family. • Reflect on the emotional commitment and responsibility involved in raising children. • Promote autonomy in deciding whether or not to have children in the future.	• Clearly and accessibly explain what emotional commitment involves (caring, supporting, respecting). • Clarify that people with disabilities can also be mothers, fathers, or form families, if they wish to and have the appropriate support. • Break down prejudices about the supposed "inability" to form families.

7. ISAWP PROJECT TEACHING MATERIALS : Inclusive Sexuality: A World of Possibilities

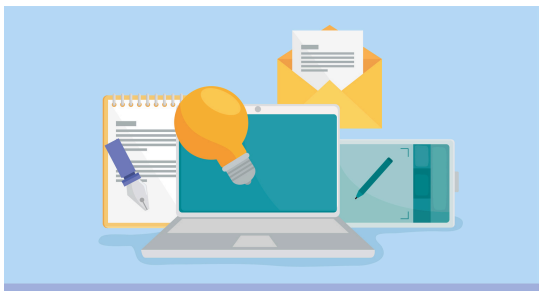
After the theoretical explanations, we now present the teaching materials developed within the framework of the ISAWP project: Inclusive Sexuality: A World of Possibilities. These materials will serve as the foundation for delivering the workshop.

Affective-Sexual Education for Young People with Disabilities which will be held in each of the project's partner countries.

These materials have been created specifically for the ISAWP project, following the key concepts recommended by UNESCO, and taking into account the necessary adaptations to ensure accessibility and suitability for the target group.

The teaching materials for Key Concept 1 have been developed by FAJUB, a partner in the ISAWP project.

You can find the materials in "Unit 3 in Classroom".



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