

# WOMEN BE HEALTHY

Historically, women with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have been considered asexual and their reproductive healthcare needs have been largely overlooked. Special education programs typically omit courses on basic health, and preventive healthcare. Often parents and support staff members are uncomfortable discussing, much less explaining, issues relevant to women's health such as menstruation, gynecological exams, breast self-exams and mammograms. As a result, many women with IDD neither understand nor feel comfortable with their bodies and they tend to take a passive role in their healthcare. Women with IDD have the same risk of cancer as the rest of the population but they do not participate in preventive or early detection screenings because they do not have the information they need. *The Women Be Healthy* curriculum was developed to teach women with IDD about health and breast and cervical cancer screenings to promote active participation in their healthcare.

## Curriculum Goal

This curriculum is designed to increase women's knowledge and use of cancer screening services. This goal is met in three ways:

- 1) First, reproductive health education is taught. Women learn about general health concerns, their bodies, hygiene, breast self-examinations, clinical breast exams, the gynecological exam, and mammograms.
- 2) Secondly, fear and anxiety associated with medical procedures is reduced. This is accomplished through progressive exposure to medical instruments, procedures, and settings. Women learn effective techniques for coping with mild discomfort or pain that they might experience during a medical visit.
- 3) Finally, women learn to be assertive in medical situations through role-play situations. In this manner, they gain confidence and learn to identify health-related problems and solutions.

Following this curriculum, participants will be familiar with the risks and steps to get screened for breast and cervical cancer and they will be empowered to take care of this aspect of their healthcare.

## Structure of Groups

- ❖ **Schedule:** Groups meet two days per week for over 11 weeks.
- ❖ **Participants:** Participants are women with mild to moderate IDD, with good expressive language skills. It is important that the women have some abstract reasoning ability in order to understand that role-play activities are just pretend. Of course, women should be interested in participating in a group of women who are learning to take care of their bodies.
- ❖ **Size:** The minimum group size is 5 women; maximum is 10.

## CURRICULUM OUTLINE

Class 1: Welcome and Orientation to group

Class 2: Health

Class 3: The Breast

Class 4: Mammograms

Class 5: Preparing for a mammogram

Class 6: A visit with a mammography technologist

Class 7: Clinical Breast Exam

Class 8: Know what is normal for you

Class 9: Live a healthy lifestyle

Class 10: Breast Health review

Class 11: Healthy lifestyle review

Class 12: The Pelvic Parts

Class 13: Cervical Cancer Screening

Class 14: Cervical Cancer Screening

Class 15: Preparing for cervical cancer screening

Class 16: Cancer screening barriers

Class 17: Talking with your doctor

Class 18: Field trip to a doctor's office

Class 19: Pelvic parts review

Class 20: Review and screening plan

Class 21: Review and Screening Plan

Class 22: Graduation