

7 KEYS TO CITIZENSHIP- LOVE



Summary

Love and relationships: The topic of partnership, intimacy, and sexuality is often taboo. Clear rules, methodologies, and systematic training for both staff and service users are missing (boundaries, consent, working with risk). Understandable materials (Easy-to-Read / ETR) and accessible counselling are needed.

The roundtable discussion was facilitated by and the conclusions were written up by:

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Key findings from the roundtable:

The most frequently mentioned areas were partnership, parenthood, intimacy, and sexuality.

Participants repeatedly pointed to insufficient support and a lack of appropriate education. The discussions showed that these topics are still strongly taboo in Slovakia; at the same time, they resonate deeply with participants and are of crucial importance for their everyday lives and for how they experience relationships.

Participants with lived experience described the opportunity to build and maintain a high-quality romantic relationship as an important personal need; social workers confirmed this need among the clients of their services.

Participants also expressed the need for meaningful counselling and support on topics such as marriage for people with disabilities, the significance and risks of sex in a partnership, and opportunities for meeting potential partners.

Among the main barriers in these areas, they mentioned—besides the lack of education and awareness—ongoing puritanism in society, expectations and attitudes of parents and other authorities, and restrictions on legal capacity.

A few specific examples

One of the participants expressed a wish to have a child. She described that she often encounters prejudice and condemnation from people who do not really know her and base their judgments only on fragmented ideas about her diagnosis. The discussion showed that, instead, she lacks systematic support to clearly identify the options and responsibilities that parenthood would involve in her case, so that she can—on her own or with support—consider whether she would be able to manage the demanding and financially costly care of a child.

A participant who is a social worker said she is not sure how to respond appropriately to the behaviour of one female client in social services who repeatedly enters into inappropriate relationships with strangers and thereby puts herself at risk.

During the discussion, a completely open question about masturbation was also raised. One participant asked whether he could become ill from this activity, as he had allegedly been told repeatedly.

Conclusions

The topic of partnerships and relationships is complex, and it would be appropriate to give it more attention in the future as well. Given the limited time available for discussion (approx. 20 minutes), it was not possible to map additional aspects related to high-quality support in these areas, such as coordination and the quality of services (healthcare, education, police, counselling/therapy services, etc.).

However, the need for clear rules, methodologies, and for strengthening staff competencies is evident. This means introducing systematic training for both employees and clients of social services on topics such as partnerships, sexuality, family life, boundaries, consent, and working with risk, together with providing suitable tools for communicating about these topics.

Understandable materials: creating accessible and Easy-to-Read (ETR) materials for clients and their close relatives.

An example of good practice from the Czech Republic may be the introduction of systematic support and counselling and the establishment of clear rules for working with sexuality in social services, as well as the creation of specialised counselling services focused on sexuality and relationships.

As a suitable contact organisation, we propose the Union of Sexual Confidants of the Czech Republic – Nebud' na nule, which provides counselling and has contributed to the development of many supportive measures.

Brief summary in Easy-to-Read language (ETR)



The topic of love, intimacy, and sexuality is difficult.

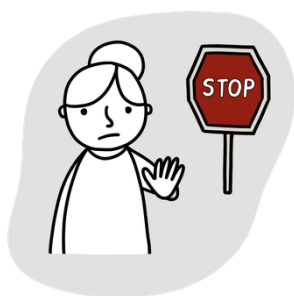
Many people feel ashamed of it.

It is often taboo.

This means that people do not talk about these things.

People need this information.

It affects everyday life and relationships.



That is why it is important that:

- there are simple rules about what is and is not okay
- I can say “no”
- I can say “yes” if I want to
- my body is mine

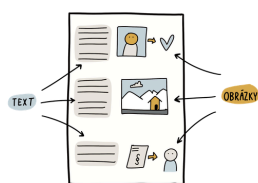


It is also important to have clear guidelines and procedures (methods).

And it is important that both staff and service users receive education about:

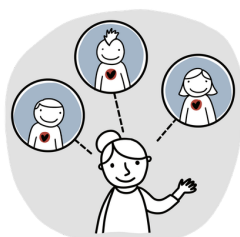


- boundaries
- consent
- risks



Important, too, are:

- easy-to-understand texts (Easy-to-Read / ETR)
- accessible counselling, where people can ask questions safely



Sometimes a person does not understand these things right away.

It is important to have someone you can talk to about it safely.