

# Ageing and disability

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Bereavement Counselling

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## **Introduction**

There was a time when elderly people was treated with respect and appreciated as the carriers of traditions. For the elderly this meant a decent status in the society. In today's society this have lost its meaning and elderly persons are neglected.

When we come to aged intellectual disabled persons the situation is more complicated traditionally speaking intellectual disabled have been seen as a burden in the society all their lives. Their is a belief that intellectual disabled persons age faster and this had consequences to their lives. Intellectual disabled persons was also seen as an eternal child, which had other consequences. The person with intellectual disability was not see as young, adult, old, as man, as woman or as a person. So, still there is a lot questions of when does the persons with intellectual disability grow old. This confusion creates a lot more confusion when people with intellectual disability are in the last period of their lives. Or put it in another way "if people cannot see the right problem its difficult to solve it". All these and a lot more notions have very little to do with the reality. But what it creates is negative and unrealistic mind pictures and reduce the possibilities for persons with intellectual disability to influence to own personal life. All this is actually a repeating, on going treatment and interaction of professionals and caretakers, which permeate the intellectual disabled persons whole life and also the last period in the life. Or how the person with intellectual disability can deal with the concept of death.

I have met intellectual disabled persons in institutions for ex. who have not been told that their mother died or had not been allowed to go to their funeral. A protection with high risks and unrespectable treatment, which have led to a lack of experiences of family, religious and cultural rituals and of bereavement led to a lack of emotional expressions and problems to deal with bereavement. In the group homes and community based settings the bereavement and death can not be smuggle out of the way like it was often earlier done in institutions. The concept of death, when that situation exist, it affects all in the group home. That put new demands of competencies on professionals.

## **Professionals and carers**

The grief process and bereavement affects all, but the professionals is in a position to support even if the topic is sensitive, filled with agony and is agitating. All respect for that, but it cannot be an obstacle to give support to the intellectual disabled person- to him or her self or to the persons who live with him or her. The professionals get this supporting role even more for persons with intellectual disabled persons, who do not

have any relatives, because they have lost the contact early to the family or they are not living any more.

The repeated losses and bereavement intellectual disabled persons face in their lives or the last period of the intellectual disabled persons life is a serious issue for professionals. The emotions are the most important tool in human work and it becomes even more important in this situation.

- how professionals deal and understand their own emotions,
- how aware they are of the meaning of their emotions and
- how professionals use emotions in a professional way in the support
- how do professionals express own emotions in this demanding situation
- and how does the situation associate to the professionals own emotional memory

All this to reach a qualitative reactive emotions as for ex empathic concerns, personal engagement, understanding, give safeness and trust in a awareness way. To f ex create an atmosphere of safeness. A professional who have lost the connection to the own emotions can be depressed, feel a emotional tiredness or stressed have difficulties to do consciousness emotional priorities in supporting situations like this to elderly intellectual disabled persons and to deal with terminal illness, dying and death.

The important question is that professionals

- support the human dignity for old intellectual disabled persons
  - o the devided humanity becomes to be stronger, when the old intellectual disabled persons become strongly depended of the persons around him or her. The responsibility for the elderly intellectual disabled persons wellness is strongly in this period in other peoples hands. To understand that we do not discontinue to be a human being even if we become old and are in the last part of our lives and is an intellectual disabled person

- support of a personal settings of life conditions for the last period of the person with intellectual disability life.
- And the intellectual disabled persons the last part of his life the importance of the quality of the concrete support increase. To combat the stress and find the calm state can be connected to
  - o Touch- the touch have connections to wellbeing, decrease stress and restlessness
  - o Communication- to adapt the communication and the intellectual disabled person can express his or hers wishes and personal needs
  - o Environment- to have the opportunity to stay as long time as possible in the own environment

### **Service providing**

To guarantee service for elderly persons with intellectual disability with above mentioned qualities we need :

- to create a clear structure so professionals, families etc can feel safeness in this changing and demanding situation (political involvement)
- education for the professionals capacity building

- professionals in group homes and community based settings must make preparations to deal with questions of the end of life, meet the family etc
- create routines to find out the persons own personal viewpoints
- create transfer systems, which fit best together with the persons own wishes
- built up cooperation and networks between units involved
- avoid to repeat the history and exclude the intellectual disabled persons