

Conference airs disabled persons' sexuality

Over 150 professional counselors and 50 parents yesterday attended a day-long conference on "The Developmentally Disabled as Sexual People" in the South Beach Psychiatric Center.

Staten Island social workers, psychiatric counselors and special education teachers heard a speech, saw films, and visited workshops covering topics that ranged from "Socialization and Appropriate Sexual Behavior" to "Sexual Rights of People Who Happen to be Handicapped" during a nine-hour session. Parents also attended a three-hour program last night.

Winifred Kempton, educational director of Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, addressed the professional group about the problems that persons with epilepsy, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, neurological disorders acquired during development, encounter with respect to sex-

ual expression.

"We have tried to make the developmentally handicapped asexual," she said. "Now we have to be cognizant of the responsibility we have toward the sexuality of the disabled and toward the community."

"While we are moving ahead in our attitudes toward the sexual needs of the developmentally handicapped, the community is not."

She told the professional assembly, "We have to try to educate the community that the handicapped people are human and sexual, too."

Miss Kempton, who for two years trained therapists to deal with the sexuality of the developmentally disabled under a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, pinpointed ways society further handicaps the disabled.

"We have been ignorant of their needs for information. They have not been given a good background in sexuality

and can't determine what is reality in sex. They are mixed up and need more information," she explained.

Noting that society is inconsiderate in its approach to the sexual needs of the handicapped, she attacked the inconsistent attitudes expressed toward the people and their treatment. "Some people regard the developmentally disabled as sex fiends while others think they are asexual. In treatment, some joke about a sexual problem, others pretend it doesn't occur at all instead of facing the matter head on."

"It is irrational to believe that we can get away with not giving these people any sexual knowledge. We even have apprehensions that our knowledge is inadequate," she said.

The conference also attempted to promote the notion that developmentally disabled persons also have needs for sex and sex education.



Winifred Kempton, left, chats with Linda Carelli, from the Willowbrook Developmental Center and George Feuer, a counseling supervisor.

S.I. Advance Photo by Barry Schwartz