

**STRATEGIES TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD
DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE
AND ADAPTABILITY**

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**SEX EDUCATION,
PUBERTY, AND
SEXUALITY**

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Typical Sex Talks

- Hand a book, hope for the best
- Vague references, information, “beating around the bush”
- And then, the confused kid picks up information from friends, TV, internet

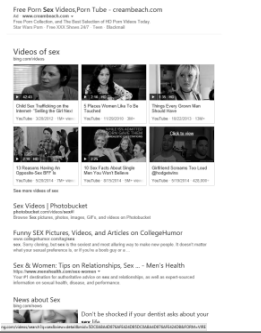
So People with ASD Will Understand

- Avoid euphemisms
- Avoid unfinished sentences
- Be clear, honest, and specific
- Be comfortable
- Check in for understanding, clarifications

Why Is This So Important

- Because people with ASD are human beings with sexuality and will most likely engage in sexual relationships in their lifetime and are entitled to accurate information
- Vulnerabilities
 - Increased risk for sexual abuse and assault
 - May go to internet for education and become very confused
 - May lack social skills to keep their behavior within the confines of the law and others' comfort level

When I typed
"sex" into search
bar...



Why Is This So Important

- May need instruction re: expression of sexual feelings
- Because sex is one component of adaptive functioning
- And sexual relationships, sexual behavior are components of social skills

Myths About ASD and Sexuality

- People with ASD are asexual
- People with ASD are oversexed
- People with ASD won't be able to handle sex education
- Talking about sex will "put ideas in their head"

Research About ASD and Sexuality

- Individuals with ASD display sexual needs similar to NT peers, along with a wide variety of sexual behaviors, wish to engage in intimate relationships, are neither hypersexual nor asexual
- Problematic sexual behaviors in individuals with ASD tend to be the result of deficits in social and communication skills
- There is a demonstrated need for sexuality and relationship education in the ASD community and a paucity of research

ASD At-Risk

- May not have knowledge about sex, reproduction, STDs
- May not understand what sex abuse is
- May be trained to comply with adults
- May be “rule followers”
- May have difficulty asking for help

ASD At-Risk

- May lack healthy social relationships
- May not know how to safely use social media, internet
- May have difficulty reading others’ intentions
- May not believe other people could lie, “use” them

Start Education Early

- Teach about body parts *and body functions*
- Teach proper terms then decide about introducing slang and the concept of other terms
- Teach about privacy in developmentally appropriate ways with learning needs of individual taken into consideration
- Teach the difference between public and private (thoughts, too!)

Consider the Following

- All areas of development – teach what is necessary in a way that is tailored towards cognitive development and maturity level
- What information does the child already have/understand?
- What is the child exposed to or has the child been exposed to?

Specific Concerns

- Teasing
- Culture of peer group
- Exploitation/prompting
- Masturbation
- Physical appearance and awareness of personal space, privacy
- Suspicion of sex abuse

For Older Children, Adolescents, Adults

- Assess what they “know”
- Conversation, open-ended questions, follow-up questions
- The Sexual Attitudes and Knowledge Assessment
- Sexual Abuse Risks Assessment

• S-T-A-R-S Guidebook

Prepare

- Get comfortable
- Gain knowledge
- Practice – we make kids role play, you should do the same!
- Be open
- Be straightforward
- Be sensitive
- Be proactive

As a Provider

- Clarify with caregivers family values and attitudes
- Be clear about your plan and recommendations

Resources and Support

- *How to Talk with Your Child About Sex: Help Your Children Develop a Positive Healthy Attitude Toward Sex and Relationships* – John Chirban, 2007
- Organizations, chat rooms – parents of other kids with ASD
- Your child's team: teachers, therapists, physician
 - Sex education, puberty education, self-care for menstruation can and often should be a part of the education plan

Resources and Support

- Relationship Building and Sexual Awareness for Kids with Autism – STARS 2 (Heighway & Webster, 2015)
 - Understanding relationships
 - Social interaction
 - Sexual Awareness
 - Assertiveness

Resources and Support

- Sexuality and Relationship Education for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Hartman, 2014)
 - Broad teaching curriculum that includes concepts such as identity, safety, love, intimacy, and relationships (which may or may not have a sexual component)
 - Primary goal to support children in developing a healthy sexuality
 - Understanding, Preventing, Supporting, and Responding

PUBERTY

Puberty in ASD

- Individuals with ASD begin puberty around the same time as NT peers
 - Precocious puberty noted in some females with ASD
- Greater levels of emotional and social loneliness than NT peers (Bauminger et al., 2003)
- Mixed findings re: exacerbated or improved symptoms during this developmental stage of life

Growing and Changing

- Difficulty with change and transitions
- Increased responsibilities and tasks related to hygiene
- Physical discomfort
- Moodiness
- New sensory experiences

In General

- Prepare in advance for changes (by age 9, at least and more detailed and repeated as they grow)
- Normalize and be matter-of-fact
- Think concrete
- Then think abstract
- Teach about their sex
- Then about the opposite sex
- Teach about moods and how to feel better
- When using videos, online material – review first!

Bras

- Introduce bras slowly and naturally – draw their attention to bras
- Sensory issues
- Practice

Menstruation

- Teach about menstruation early (average girl starts at age 12 or 13, but range is 9-17)
- Concerns that come up: am I dying? Did I poop my pants? Will everyone know? Will I feel the blood coming out? Will it be one big gush?
- Explain what it may look like, what it may feel like
- Privacy around menstruation

Menstruation

- Make a plan
 - Who will she talk to when she first menstruates?
 - Who will help her if she is at school?
 - Where will she keep pads? How will she access?
 - Will she need a prompt or assistance changing the pad?
 - If someone will need to assist her in the bathroom, explain the boundaries and limits of that help

Menstruation

- Teach how to use/change a pad
 - Visuals
 - Model with underwear
 - Have her practice
 - Trusted adult nearby to offer assistance or check

Pre-Menstrual Tension and Other Info

- Teach about symptoms of PMT
- Teach what can help take away discomfort
- Explain clues that she should be prepared with pads, wear darker pants
- Teach how to track periods and how often they will probably come
- Teach slang terms
- Teach for unexpected situations

For Caregivers

- Be clear on the school's policies
- Consider alternate underwear for daughters
- Support group and others parents as resources

Erections

- Boys begin to get erections as early on as infancy; from 2-5 may begin to notice erections – explain matter-of-fact, "yes, that happens to boys' penises. That's called an erection. It will go away after a minute or so and your penis will feel soft again."

Erections

- Means your body is working the right way, but it is private
- Don't tell people when you have an erection
- In fact, if it happens in school, you will try to hide it by _____
- Or, you might think about _____
- And you might wear clothes like jeans or longer shirts so people won't notice
- Don't mention it if you notice someone else has an erection

Wet Dreams

- Teach about wet dreams, what happens
- Explain ejaculation
- Explain the wetness is semen, not urine
- Normalize
- Teach how to clean up
- Reinforce privacy

Voice Changing

- Teach that men have deeper voices than boys
- When boys grown into men and their bodies change, their voices change, too
- Sometimes it sounds like the voice changes pitch or it might sound squeaky
- Explain that it might be embarrassing and that others might laugh
- Come up with a plan for what to do when it happens or how to respond when people laugh

Masturbation

- Both for males and females
- Normalize
- Privacy concepts – talking about it, doing it, seeing it

What is that *SMELL*?

- Showers
- Deodorant
- Teeth brushing
- Changing pads
- Be respectful, but be direct: You smell and people will notice it. They will not like it and will not want to be close to you.

General Appearance and Related

- Girls: If you're wearing a skirt, learn how to sit
- Keep your pants up
- Wear clothing that fits
- Make sure others can't see your underwear/bra

SEXUALITY

ASD, Sexual Identity, and Gender Identity

- No evidence of any causal link
- More that ASD is a heterogeneous group, which includes differences in sexuality as well

INTIMACY AND LOVE

Educate

- Levels of romantic relationships
- “Expected” behavior – be careful here!!
- How you know
- How to clarify with your partner status of relationship and “expectations”
- Disclosing ASD in relationship

Dating and Relationship Concepts

- Flirting
- Sexting and texting
- Dating readiness (Davies and Dubie, 2012)
 - Checklist categorized into topics "being available," "tolerance," and "openness"
 - I am willing to change my plans for a friend
 - I am willing to share my feelings
 - I am able to look at conflict from someone else's point of view

First Date

- Normalize feelings of awkwardness
- Conversation topics
- Anticipating questions
- Safety issues
- How to end the date
- Consider group date so a friend can be available to guide

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

What's Normal?

5-10	10-14	14-18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Masturbation for pleasure• Curiosity about bodies• Play involving touch (i.e., doctor)• Interest in how babies are made	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking, talking, dreaming about sex• Masturbating to orgasm• Feelings of attraction• Often romantic relationships established	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued masturbation• May begin having sex• Sexual wishes and fantasies develop

Functions of Behavior

- To get something (tangible or attention/interaction)
- To avoid something (including people, places, tasks, or sensory experiences)
- To feel something (including comfort, control, and sensory experiences)

Other Reasons

- Social rules, social skill deficits
- Someone is telling them to
- Difficulties with communication
- Behavior has become learned and serves a function
- Sensory issues
- Discomfort/Pain
- Boredom
- No opportunities to express sexuality in healthy way

SELF-PROTECTION

Education and Your Rights

- Healthy sexuality and relationships
- It is ok to refuse to be touched or to refuse to touch
- Even though sex is private, it does not have to be a *secret*
- You do not (and probably should not) compromise or make deals with friends, partners, or people about touching or being touched
- It is ok to ask for clarification and help from _____

Others Rights

- Teach what is against the law
 - Online activity
 - Masturbating in public
 - Invading someone's personal space
- Teach what will get you fired
 - Jokes about sex
 - Masturbating at work
 - Commenting on coworker's bodies, sexuality, etc

Self-Advocacy

- Help individual recognize what they like, dislike, what feels good, what is uncomfortable
- Help develop language for setting limits, talking about what feels good/uncomfortable
- Teach how to break up with someone

Self-Advocacy

- Teach conflict resolution
- Teach taking breaks
- Teach giving time
- Teach to use communication effectively
