Supporting Healthy Relationships and Sexuality for People with ASD

Maria Blanco, M. Ed.
LSU HSC Human Development Center
Sexuality Defined

Sexuality = Having sex
Or
Sexuality education = Learning to have sex
Sexuality is **a central aspect of being human** throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction.

*World Health Organization, 2004*
Sexual Development Defined

a “multidimensional process intimately linked to the basic human needs of being liked and accepted, displaying and receiving affection, feeling valued and attractive, and sharing thoughts and feelings”

(Murphy & Elias, 2006, p. 398)
Historically . . .

- Sexuality was for procreation within marriage.
- Eugenics movement (1880-1940) resulted in forced sterilization of people with I/DD.
- Sexual needs of people with I/DD have been largely ignored even with advances in employment, housing, and community integration.

Servais, L. 2006
People with developmental disabilities are asexual.

People with developmental disabilities are hyper-sexed.

People with developmental disabilities are solely heterosexual.

Murphy & Elias, 2006
Lack of Knowledge . . .

- People with ID have less sexual knowledge in all areas except
  - Menstruation
  - Body part identification

when compared to their peers.

Watson, Griffiths, Richards, & Dysktra, 2002
can be dangerous.

- Individuals with ASD are more likely to
  - Engage in inappropriate courting
  - Focus on celebrities, strangers, colleagues
  - Pursue targets for longer periods (stalking)

Stokes, Newton, & Kaur, 2007
Reasons to teach individuals with ASD about sexuality

Many individuals with ASD

- May not have basic knowledge about sexuality
- May not know when or whom to ask
- Internet and other media
- Same hormones and urges as peers
- May be easily influenced
- Sexual abuse
- Limited opportunities for socio-sexual experiences in addition to social deficits
Expressing Sexuality

- Relationships
- Body awareness
- Sexual acts
- Assertiveness
- Self-image
- Self-care
- Decision-making
- Personal ethics

“When sexual expression includes others, social awareness becomes relevant. A person’s ability to participate depends upon his or her functional social understanding (AAIDD, 2012).”
Sexual Behavior

Artificial environments produce artificial behaviors.

People with DD often commit 2 types of social errors:

- Stranger-friend error
- Public-private error

*Can you think of examples of these types of errors?*
Why is Sex Education Important?

Without sexuality education children and adults with DD are at a significantly higher risk of

- Sexual abuse
- Unplanned pregnancy
- STDs
- Poor relationships

Haight & Fachting, 1986; Committee on Children with Disability, 1996; Bambara & Brantlinger, 2002, Servais, 2006
3 Areas of Instruction

- Basic facts
- Individual values
- Social relationships
Basic Facts

- Adult Self-Care
- Anatomy and Physiology
  - Prevention of STDs
  - Pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood
  - Gynecological care
  - Masturbation
  - Sexual orientation

Individual Values

- Self-determination
  - Personal responsibility
- Family values
  - Culture, interaction styles
  - Public v private (dressing, knocking on closed doors)
- Reality v. Fantasy

Social Relationships

- Relationships
  - Talk, touch, trust
  - Dating

- Social Skills
  - Expressing affection
  - Accepting and rejecting affection (functional ‘no’)

- Social Opportunity
  - Sexual well being (pleasure, dysfunction)
  - Intimacy, consent
  - Avoiding dangerous situations

Sex Ed for Individuals DD

- Instruction should
  - be concrete, specific, brief, and repetitive
  - be taught in the context of social-communication skills

- CLASP Rules (Mayer & Pointdexter, 1998)
  - Consensual
  - Legal
  - Adult
  - Safer
  - Private
Strategies for Learners with ASD

- Materials: medical textbooks, patient education materials, sex ed books, Google images, Planned Parenthood; movies and videos (not pornography)
- Remember to provide multiple examples to help generalization
More Strategies . . .

- Be frank, explain slang
- Provide clear visuals and verbal examples

Some responses of adults with autism . . .

- Q: Tell me about this picture.
- A: “The people were sitting on the couch being friends”.

Gerhardt, 2010; Konstantares & Lunsky, 1997
Some examples . . .

I am getting older and I am growing up.

Part of growing older is having my body change. I get taller and I weigh more.

Another change is that hair is growing on my body in new places.

There is hair growing on my face, under my arms, and on my private parts.

Every adult has hair in these places. It might feel weird to have hair growing, but I should let the hair grow under my arms.

Men sometimes shave the hair that grows on their face like Dad and Uncle.

Some men don’t shave their face and they grow a beard, like .

My teachers and my family will help teach me how to shave my face so that I can do it safely.

It is exciting to grow up and become an adult.

Gerhardt, 2010
The Urinal Game: Which to Choose?
Safe Activity List

Chapter 10: Using Comic Strips to Understand Safe Social Behavior
Example 2: Safe Activities List in Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gym</th>
<th>52</th>
<th>53</th>
<th>54</th>
<th>55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Today, a girl I don’t know asked me to get a soda at the diner after class.

I never met her before. It’s a long walk to the diner.

I think she is really cute.

---

I remembered my Safe Activities List and asked her to meet me for lunch tomorrow in the college cafeteria instead. She said yes!

I’m so nervous I’ve been pacing around my room. I asked my Dorm Adviser what she thinks. She said I did a good job using my Safe Activities List, and that it’s normal to be a little nervous.

I’m really excited I have a date tomorrow!

Zaks, 2006
### Social Narratives

**Chapter 10: Using Comic Strips to Understand Safe Social Behavior**

**Example 1: Cat Calls on the Street**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Comic Strip 1" /></td>
<td>Walking home from work, a guy whistled at me and said, “Sexy Mamma!” I said, “Thank you!” He laughed at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Comic Strip 2" /></td>
<td>When I got home, I asked my brother why. He said sometimes guys on the street whistle, hoot, or make comments about women. This is called “making cat calls”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Comic Strip 3" /></td>
<td>My brother demonstrated different kinds of whistles and noises guys on the street like to make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Comic Strip 4" /></td>
<td>My brother explained that guys who make cat calls do not care about me the way my friends and family do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Comic Strip 5" /></td>
<td>Responding to cat calls is not a good way to have a conversation, make friends, or meet a boyfriend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Comic Strip 6" /></td>
<td>The proper response is to walk away. I can go into a store to get away, too. Next time, I will ignore cat calls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Think About It . . .

- Joy of Sex
- Thanksgiving
Resources

- AAP Policy (American Academy of Pediatrics) [http://aappolicy.aappublications.org](http://aappolicy.aappublications.org)
- University of Michigan Health System [www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/disabsex.htm#dis](http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/disabsex.htm#dis)
- NICHCY [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) National Information Center on Children and Youth with Disabilities
References


References


