

SEXUALITY IN STUDENTS WITH ASD

WHAT IS SEXUALITY?

- Sexuality encompasses a broad variety of physical, emotional, and social interactions in relation to oneself and others.
- In addition to topics such as sexual education and anatomy/physiology, conversations regarding sexuality should consider the development of one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, relationships, roles, identity, and personality.
- Sexuality begins in infancy and continues through adulthood until death.

SEXUALITY AND ASD

- Individuals experience sexual stages as they physically mature, just as neurotypical individuals do.
- Individuals with ASD or any disability diagnosis deserve the right to have a relationship, have children, and/or marry.
- Education and awareness (for individuals with ASD and the individuals they encounter) are crucial elements in ensuring individuals with ASD may flourish in their sexuality successfully and safely.

WHY ARE SEX EDUCATION AND CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY IMPORTANT?

- Several characteristics of those with ASD can interfere with the capacity to develop meaningful adult social relationships, which are necessary for developing sexual, intimate relationships.
 - Difficulty with social judgment, lack of experience with peer relationships, problematic decision-making skills, theory of mind inflexibility, emotional dysregulation, and sensory sensitivities.
- There is an increased risk of physical or sexual abuse for all individuals with disabilities, so it is vital for education concerning appropriate relationships and what to do in the event of inappropriate behavior.
- Individuals with ASD, like anyone, want to feel fulfilled in their identities and their relationships.

SOME TIPS:

- Encourage concrete, formal language when discussing anatomical parts, not “cute” language or slang.
- Use tactics to teach behaviors regarding sexuality that you would use to teach other behaviors (role-playing, visuals, if/then statements, etc.).
- Discuss giving and receiving consent, as well as the necessity to build boundaries.
- Talk clearly about relationship expectations, what is considered expected appropriate behaviors between (strangers vs. classmates/coworkers vs. friends vs. friends with benefits vs. girlfriends/boyfriends, etc.).
- Talk clearly about environmental expectations, what is considered expected appropriate behaviors in public, in private, in bathrooms, in locker rooms, etc.
- Discuss what abuse looks like and what to do if it happens (physical abuse, sexual abuse/harassment/exploitation, stalking).
- Empower them to advocate for themselves, their needs, and their safety.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

Here are some external resources regarding the sex education and sexuality:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/parent-buzz-newsletter/parent-buzz-e-newsletters/sexuality-education-youth-autism-spectrum>

<https://researchautism.org/sexuality-on-the-spectrum/>

<https://www.intechopen.com/books/recent-advances-in-autism-spectrum-disorders-volume-i/relationships-sexuality-and-intimacy-in-autism-spectrum-disorders>

<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/teach-sexuality-person-asd/>