LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX....EDUCATION!

Sexuality and Sex Education for Neurodivergent Individuals

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Supervising Psychologist - The Help Group
Where Did You Learn about Sex?
Where Did You Learn about Sex?

- Summer Camp
- Friends
- Parents
- Movies
Where Do Autistic People Learn about Sex?

Online Resources

Television/Movies

Providers

Peers

School

Parents

Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011; Pecora, Mesibov, & Stokes, 2016; Crehan, 2021
Problems with these Sources

• Television/Media/Internet
  • Often not realistic depictions of sex
  • Misinterpretations common
  • Invalid Sources

https://www.buzzfeed.com/lorynbrantz/sexpectation-vs-reality#.dwLyLQ4bB
Problems with these Sources

- Sex Education in Schools
  - Variable access to autistic population
  - Greater emphasis on abstinence
  - Little emphasis on social components
  - Fails to include LGBTQIA+ identities
Problems with these Sources

• Parents
  • It’s awkward!
  • How do I teach?
  • When do I teach?
  • Am I the right one to teach?
Core Impairments of Autism influence Sexual Behaviors and Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Communication</th>
<th>Atypical Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Social Emotional Reciprocity Difficulties</td>
<td>• Stereotyped Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Theory of Mind Deficits</td>
<td>• Routines, Rituals, Rigidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Reasoning Challenges</td>
<td>• Highly Restricted Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Atypical Sensory Processing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Behaviors that occur not because of deviancy, but lack of "knowing better"

Core Impairments of Autism influence Sexual Behaviors and Relationships

Core Impairments

Sexual Victimization
Sexual Perpetration

Counterfeit Deviance (e.g. “naïve curiosity”)
Core Impairments of Autism influence Sexual Behaviors and Relationships

• Risk of sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation
  • 78% of autistic adults reported at one occurrence of victimization
  • As children, higher incidence of sexual assault by peers
  • As adults, higher incidence of unwanted sexual contact
  • Autistic college students are twice as likely to experience unwanted sexual contact

• Risk of perpetration/being accused of sexual crimes
  • DD population 7x more likely to have contact with Criminal Justice System
  • Retained for 11 years longer than non-autistic peers in psychiatric settings

(Weiss; 2014) (Weiss & Fardella; 2018) (Debbaudt & Rothman, 2001)
Importance of Sex Education

Myths
- Autistic individuals do not have sexual drives or interest.
- Physical development differs in autistic adolescents.
- Teaching about sex and sexuality causes problems.
- Sexual behaviors in autistic individuals is aberrant or wrong.

Facts
- Most autistic individuals have typical sexual/romantic feelings and desires.
- Autistic individuals have the right to learn sexual education and engage in sexual activities.
- Without proper education, autistic individuals may engage in socially inappropriate or dangerous ways to fulfill sexual and intimacy desires.
- Sex Education is preventative and proactive.

(Hénault, 2006; Stokes & Kaur, 2005; Stokes et al., 2007; Cosukun et al., 2009; Gougen, 2010; Murrie et al., 2002)
# What to Teach and How to Teach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Facts</td>
<td>- Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Skills</td>
<td>- Break Down into More Manageable Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Terms (Proper and Slang)</td>
<td>- Use of Images and Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Aspects</td>
<td>- Visual Supports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Vignettes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Role Play*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Examples from Real Life*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Return to Topics Repeatedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Check for Comprehension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Identities

• Higher rates of LGBTQIA+ Identities.

• Higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns in autistic LGBTQIA+ individuals compared to heterosexual or cisgender autistic adults.

• Higher incidence of gender variance in autistic individuals.

Hillier et al., 2020; Van Der Miessen et al., 2016
Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Identities

• Explanation of body parts and intercourse; inclusion of Intersex.

• Monitoring absolute terms (e.g., “most individuals assigned female at birth” versus “all women”).

• Ask individuals their preferred language and remain open to new identities or terms.

• Do not assume someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity.
What to Teach and How to Teach

FACTS

- The Body
  - Anatomy
  - Masturbation
  - Puberty
  - Pregnancy
- Sex with Self & Others
- Personal Hygiene
- Legal Aspects
- Boundaries/Touch

Medical versus Slang Terms
Actual images
Normalization of variations in body parts
Explicit Laws
Public versus Private
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>I can touch what parts of my body?</th>
<th>Where can I do it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Genitals (privates)</td>
<td>Bedroom—door closed, Bathroom—at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Thighs, Bottom, Inside Nose</td>
<td>Bedroom or Bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bare Feet, Belly</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arms, Legs, Hair</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No touching</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sex in the States

California

Sex Ed Rights
- California state law requires that comprehensive sex ed is taught in grades 7 to 12. A school can choose to offer sex ed earlier than grade 7 as well.
- California public schools do not teach abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.
- Sex ed must include information about the effectiveness and safety of all U.S. Food and Administration (FDA)-approved contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception (EC).
- California requires that instruction and materials are appropriate for students with disabilities and students of all races, genders, sexual orientations and ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- California law also requires instruction about gender, gender expression, gender identity and gender stereotypes.
- California requires that students in grades 9 to 12 learn about sexual harassment and violence, consent and prevention and reporting of sexual harassment.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex ed classes. This is known as an “opt-out” policy.

Age of Minority
- In California as in most states, you are considered a minor (someone who is not an adult) if you are under 18 years old.
- Keep in mind that laws about whether you’re considered a minor may be different if you are pregnant or married or are a minor who has gained the right to live without a parent or guardian.

Age of Consent
- Legally, people can’t consent (or agree) to sex (with someone who is considered an adult) until they reach a specific age. This is called the “age of consent.” These laws are meant to protect minors from being manipulated or forced into sex with older people.
- So in California, you can legally consent to sex when you become 18 years old.

www.sexetc.org/action-center/sex-in-the-states/
### What to Teach and How to Teach

**SKILLS**

- Expressing Affection
- Preventing Exploitation
- Dating
- Consent and Self-Advocacy
- Online Safety

- Vignettes
- Role Play
- Group Discussions
- Peer Support
Exercise 2: Your own personal boundaries

Using a red stop card and a green ok card, show if the following situations overstep your boundaries (stop) or if the situation is acceptable (ok).

1. A professor gives you a pat on the back because you got a high grade on a test.
2. A therapist gives you a compliment and says “You look attractive today”.
3. While you are taking a test a professor leans over you to be able to read what you are writing.
4. An older man at a bus stop asks for your name.
5. An older man comes up to you at a bus stop and asks where the bus is taking you.
6. When you are in your room someone enters your room without knocking.
7. When you pass a few peers in the hall they make remarks about your appearance.
8. A good friend takes your mobile phone without asking and starts looking at your text messages.
9. In the movie theatre a stranger comes and sits directly next to you with his or her arms and legs touching yours.
10. Someone you have only met online asks for you to send them a picture of yourself.
11. Someone at a coffee shop asks if you would be interested in joining them for coffee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Dating</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going to the movies together</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking together hand in hand</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving compliments to one another</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to see each other every day</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having contact with each other every day by phone or computer</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugging</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforting each other when one of you is sad</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing each other at home</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest with one another</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing around with one another</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massaging each other</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a bath or shower together</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissing on the cheek</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissing on the mouth</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching genitals</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping in one bed together</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping over</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual intercourse with each other</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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Teaching Skills

Restricting Access

Monitoring

Online Safety

Lindsey Devries & Caitlin Middleton
Teaching Skills

- Credibility
- Etiquette
- Privacy
- Meeting Up
Consent

A “Safer Sex” protocol is intended to help you feel both emotionally and physically safe when engaging in sex and/or intercourse with a partner. These protocols are different for everyone and very often change depending on how you are feeling. This is not intended to be set in stone, but rather, you can modify it with time.

Below, you will find some examples to include in your “safer sex” protocol:

1. Asking my partner to test for STD/STI before sex with a partner
2. Testing myself for STD/STI before sex with a partner
3. Discussing consent beforehand
4. Discussing “safe words” beforehand (e.g., traffic light: red/yellow/green, saying a sentence of what you don’t like) to check in during sexual activities
5. Using condoms (internal or external)
6. Using birth control (pill, IUD, patch, etc.)
7. Being in a committed relationship
8. Only engaging in sexual behaviors both my partner and I feel comfortable with
9. Defining what is considered safe
10.
11.
12.
What to Teach and How to Teach

SOCIAL ASPECTS

• What to Do
• What Not to Do
• How to Do It
• And...WHY? (Big ideas!)

Vignettes
Role Play
Group Discussions
Peer Support
Social Aspects

- Coping with rejection
- Coping with “peer pressure”
- Normalization of sexual desires
- Being in a relationship
Considerations for Parents & Providers

• Providing a space free of judgment

• Helping your child or client identify *who* they can turn to

• Understanding your own comfort level and how cultural components may influence your beliefs

• Seeking support for yourself
Summary

• Sex education is important for the neurodivergent population.

• Parents and providers should consider sexual health as a core component of development.

• Sex education can and should be preventative and proactive.
Resources

• Dr. Eileen Crehan’s research lab: https://sites.tufts.edu/crehanlab/activities/resources/
• UCLA PEERS for Dating: https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/peers%C2%AE-dating
• Planned Parenthood: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn
• Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health: A Curriculum for Teaching Adolescents/Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Social Challenges by Catherine Davies & Melissa Dubie
• Sexuality and Relationship Education for Children and Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorders by Davida Hartman
• Girls Growing Up on the Autism Spectrum: What Parents and Professionals Should Know About the Pre-Teen and Teenage Years by Shana Nichols
• Girl Sex 101: A Queer Pleasure Guide For Women and Their Lovers by Allison Moon
• Autism Spectrum, Sexuality and the Law: What Every Parent and Professional Needs to Know by Tony Attwood, Isabelle Hénault, & Nick Dubin
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