

## MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS INCLUDING FRIENDS, GIRLFRIENDS AND BOYFRIENDS

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Social Signals

### NANCY NOWELL MPA MEd

- ◉ Sexuality Educator
- ◉ 35 years of experience working with people with disabilities of all ages
- ◉ Teach 25 relationship/human development classes to special education students twice a month

## OBJECTIVES

- Participants will be able to:
  - Describe why it is important for adolescents on the spectrum to learn how to negotiate middle and high school relationships
  - Explain why sex offending behavior and victimizations are a significant risk for adolescents on the spectrum and why understanding relationships reduces that risk

## OBJECTIVES

- Participants will be able to:
  - Describe four common issues that interfere with adolescents on the spectrums' ability to develop safe and healthy relationships
  - Identify four teaching tools/materials that will increase students with ASD ability to make good friends and/or have safer romantic relationships

## INTRODUCTION

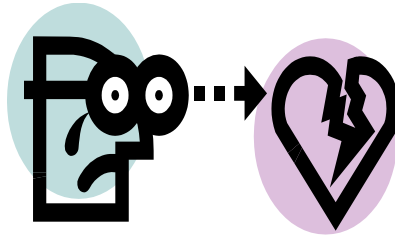
- ◉ Who liked going to Middle School?
- ◉ Who liked going to High School?
- ◉ What was the hardest thing you remember about adolescent relationships?

## INTRODUCTION

- ◉ Remember what it felt like when your body changed in ways that confused and embarrassed you?
- ◉ Remember the rollercoaster of teenage emotions?

## INTRODUCTION

- Guys what if everything you thought about the cute girl sitting next to you came out of your mouth?
- Adolescents with ASD want friends, boyfriends, and girlfriends just like anybody else



## INTRODUCTION

- Parents, teachers, therapists, schools, and agencies care but...
- There are ways to teach skills



## GENERAL ISSUES

- ◉ To talk about these issues we must use sexual language
- ◉ Support relationships in middle and high school when there is a safety net of teachers and families....

## GENERAL ISSUES

- ◉ Elementary school social skills do not meet middle and high school needs
- ◉ Social Thinking
- ◉ Gay and lesbian adolescents

## PARENTS

- Parents are nervous, afraid and unsure
- Parents want to protect their child



## SCHOOLS AND AGENCIES

- Are concerned about their role in these issues
- Families have a wide range of values about dating, romantic relationships, and sexuality
- Need to deal with behavioral issues that they are presented with

## SEXUAL ABUSE

- ◉ High risk for sexual abuse (male and female)
- ◉ Incidence of sexual abuse
- ◉ Who are the perpetrators
- ◉ Signs of sexual abuse

## PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

- ◉ Problems with physical, emotional, informational or relationship boundaries
- ◉ Stalking
- ◉ Touching themselves or others
- ◉ The Internet
- ◉ Sexual harassment

## ILLEGAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- ◉ The Internet - kiddy porn
- ◉ Indecent Exposure
- ◉ Extreme stalking
- ◉ Touching others
- ◉ The Laws....

## WHY IS THIS SO HARD?

- ◉ One word  
**HORMONES**
  - Puberty changes everything
  - Their bodies are doing unexpected things....
  - Their emotions are doing expected things....





## PRACTICAL APPROACHES

- ◉ There is no one curriculum
- ◉ There is no one way to teach this material
- ◉ There are general guidelines, but no one answer...

## PRACTICAL APPROACHES

- ◉ Boundaries
- ◉ Identify someone that the student trusts to be a person they can go to with questions and concerns... this is not always a parent

## PRACTICAL APPROACHES

- ◉ Consider age, cognitive ability, awareness of sexuality, and understanding of relationship issues
- ◉ Teach what they need to know considering their age and developmental abilities

## PRACTICAL APPROACHES

- ◉ Schools and families work together
- ◉ Teach friend, girlfriend, boyfriend relationships in the context of what is happening at school

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issues identified from personal experience working with adolescents with ASD
- ◉ Not for adults
- ◉ All tools listed were used or developed in the classroom
- ◉ Materials that were not helpful, not listed
- ◉ Resource list handout

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue - Fewer abilities /Autism / Intellectual Disabilities
  - Masturbation in public
  - Sexual sensory issues - smelling girls hair
  - Sexual touching of others
  - Unclear boundaries with parents / adults
- ◉ Tools - activities
  - Clearly enforced boundaries
  - Masturbate in their bedroom/ their bathroom
  - Substitute appropriate sensory items

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issues - Puberty
  - Touching themselves in public / hands in pants
  - Understanding body changes, wet dreams
  - Menstruation
  
- ◉ Tools - books / curriculum
  - Boy's/Girls Guide to Becoming a Teen
  - The Care and Keeping of YOU
  - Taking Care of Myself
  - Human Reproduction and Childbirth

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue - Appearance Matters
  - Poor grooming
  - Not dressing the way other students dress
  - Dirty clothes
  - Sensory sensitivity
  
- ◉ Tools - book / websites / curriculum
  - Taking Care of Myself
  - Social Thinking
  - Social Signals

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue - Boundaries
  - Personal Space
  - No Filter
  - Informational Boundaries
  - Public Private
  - Touching
  
- ◉ Tools - activities / curriculum / book
  - Consistent enforcement of sexual boundaries
  - Social Signals
  - Taking Care of Myself

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue- Relationships
  - Hugging
  - Relationship roles
  - Who is a friend, not everyone is their friend
  - What is a stranger, all strangers are not bad
  
- ◉ Tools - activities / curriculum
  - Teach basic relationship skills
  - Social Signals

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue- Finding a boy/girlfriend
  - Flirting
  - Touching / Consent
  - Starting a conversation
  - Getting someone's phone number
  - Arranging to go out with friends
  
- ◉ Tools - curriculum / activities
  - Flirting or Hurting
  - Social Signals
  - Script / practice / role play / video self modeling

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issue - Crushes and stalking
  - Crushes on neuro-typical students
  - Identifying when someone does not want to be your friend, girlfriend or boyfriend
  - Reading body language
  - Legal / illegal behavior
  
- ◉ Tools - curriculum / website / activities
  - Social Signals
  - Social Thinking
  - Video self modeling

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issues - Loneliness / Isolation
  - No social life
  - Dating, Prom
  - Friends, boyfriends and girlfriends
  
- ◉ Tools - activities / curriculum / website
  - Local socialization groups
  - Teenage experiences with safety net in place
  - Social Signals
  - Social Thinking

## ISSUES AND TOOLS

- ◉ Issues - Porn on the Internet
  - Access to porn - Play Station 3 / cell phones
  - Going to kiddy porn websites by accident
  - Sexting / Sexually graphic texting / phone sex
  
- ◉ Tools - activities
  - No unsupervised access to Internet
  - Monitor Facebook and other social media
  - Support social life and healthy relationships

## SUMMARY

- ◉ Difficult complex issues
- ◉ Limited information available for families
- ◉ Limited training, and materials for teachers and others
- ◉ Limited professional discussions or research

## SUMMARY

- ◉ Increased risk of sexual victimization
- ◉ Increased risk of contact with criminal justice system
- ◉ Absolutely teachable skills
- ◉ Life long needs that must be addressed



## SUMMARY

- ◉ *We must begin to talk about and address these issues even though they maybe embarrassing and difficult*
- ◉ *Adolescents and adults with ASD need us to work together so we can decrease loneliness and risk... while increasing access to healthy and happy relationships*

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