

Puberty, Sexuality, Relationships and Autism

.....and Safety

Learner Outcomes

- Participants will:
- List 3 ways to support adolescents on the spectrum to have healthy relationships.
- Identify 3 ways puberty is different for adolescents on the autism spectrum.
- Identify 3 way sexuality is different for adolescents and adults on the spectrum.



Why Talk About This?



- Quality of life
- Healthy relationship skills
- Sexual abuse risk reduction
- Problematic sexual behavior
- Safety

What Do Teens Want?

- Most want to be just like their peers in high school
 - Go to school dances and proms
 - Have friends on Facebook
 - Text their friends
 - Hang out with friends outside of school
 - Make new friends
 - Go on dates
 - Have a girlfriend or boyfriend

Schools and Families

- Schools and agencies can be hesitant about their role in teaching these skills.
- Families have a wide range of values about dating, romantic relationships, and sexuality.
- However, both professionals and families know that it is important to address the safety and relationship issues that their students are struggling with.

Why Aren't More People Doing This Work?

- Few people have the necessary training
- Many teachers and families are afraid they will make a serious mistake... with good reason
- There are very few quality materials to use with students over the age of 12
- Autism is very, very different
- It takes a long time to learn how to teach these skills

Research



- **There is limited research about autism and adolescents.**
- Less on puberty, sexuality, relationships and intimacy
- Almost none on problematic sexual behavior

Dr. Peter Gerhardt

- In a search of PsychINFO data-base using "autism" in the title and bounded by the year of publication the search resulted in:
 - Publication years 1990 – 126 "hits"
 - Publication year 2010 – 1,243 "hits"
- Using "adolescent or adult" in the title and bounded by the year of publication resulted in:
 - Publication years 1990- 4 "hits"
 - Publication year 2010 – 14 "hits"

National Autism Center's National Standards Project

Established Treatments

- Modeling (14+)
- Peer training
- Story based intervention package
- Naturalistic teaching strategies

Emerging Treatments

- Social skills package (14+)
- Scripting
- Theory of mind



Relationships and Theory of Mind

- *Theory of Mind* for teenagers means
 - Not understanding what is going on around them
 - Not understanding teenage relationships
 - Reading male / female situations incorrectly
 - Not knowing how to "hang out"
 - Can't tell when someone is NOT interested in a relationship with them

I went to church on ash Wednesday

Student Abilities

- Students from ages 11- 21 with a wide range of abilities
 - Teach topics that are appropriate for their age, abilities, and knowledge.
 - Most students are verbal and can read
 - Some speak using tablets / iPad
- Classes include students with
 - Autism and limited verbal skills
 - Aspergers and have normal or above normal intelligence
 - Intellectual Disabilities in Life Skills classes
 - Emotional and other learning problems

Adolescent Relationships

All adolescent relationships are complex and confusing



Student Relationships

- Teens on the autism spectrum are making some very serious social-sexual mistakes
- If they make the same mistakes when they are 25, 30, or 35 could result in criminal charges.

What do teens want to know?

- **ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING!**
- Ten years ago in my first class of students the first question I was asked was:
 - ❖ How do you keep a relationship fresh?
 - ❖ Explain breast milk?
- I teach anything and everything that they want to know in a context that they can understand with parents permission...

Teaching Friendship and Romantic Relationship Skills



- Teach what healthy relationships look like
- Teach and practice many small steps

Teaching Relationship Skills

- All Types of Relationships
 - Friends, Boyfriends, Girlfriends
 - Acquaintances, Strangers
 - Family, Community Helpers
 - When I teach a new class for the first time...
- Communication
 - Starting conversations
 - Getting to know someone
 - Maintaining a conversation
 - Flirting vs. Staring
 - You look nice today....

"Help get me a boyfriend (girlfriend).. tomorrow"

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- What is a romantic relationship?
- How to flirt?
- Dating "hotties?"
- Pick up lines?
- What do you do on a date?

Teach How to "Hang Out"

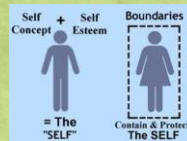


- To old for play dates
- Relationships outside of school are difficult for them
- Getting together in groups requires planning
- They don't know how to "hang out" with their friends and/or don't have many friends

Mixed Messages and White Lies

- Relationships are filled with mixed messages and white lies.....
 - Ask a girl out...she is always busy...
 - Will you go to the prom with me?
"I'll think about it"
- People do not always mean what they say.
- We must teach about white lies

Boundaries



- Teach all types of boundaries
 - Personal Space, Physical Boundaries, Public & Private
 - Touching, emotional and informational boundaries
 - Relationship and sexual boundaries
- They went into the elementary school bathroom.....

Touching Rules

- No hugging
- Making Friends Video



No Stalking

- Mike's Crush Video

Extreme Stalking



- Violating boundaries can involve
 - Smelling hair
 - Touching
 - Following people home
 - Excessive texting and calling
- These behaviors can result in disciplinary action, even arrest

Puberty



Was a difficult, upsetting and confusing time in most of our lives