



### Structure of the session

An overview of the importance of relationships for individuals with autism

Consider some of the difficulties in this area

Explore a few potential strategies

### Sex and sexuality

Sexuality does not have to be only about the physical act, but it is related to personal identity and social development.

### Autism and sexual behaviour

Sexual behaviour is displayed by a majority of people on the autism spectrum (Hellemans et al., 2007).

There is no proof of lack of need for intimate or sexual or romantic relationships (Tarnai and Wolfe, 2008; Hellemans et al., 2007; Ray et al., 2004).

Gender identity disorder, homosexuality and bisexuality have been reported in this population (Haracopos & Pedersen, 1992; Hellemans et al., 2007 ; Ray et al. 2004).

### Concerns

Around 25% of people with ASD have experienced sexual abuse (Koller, 2000; Mandell et al. 2005; Murphy and Young, 2005).

Some studies (Cambridge et al., 2003) suggest that sexual frustration can lead to challenging behaviour.

Higher instances of public sexual behaviour is observed in individuals on the spectrum.

### Issues

Difficulties in social understanding- although good factual knowledge

Communicational differences

Repetitive and restrictive interests (such as collecting sexual facts, magazines)

Sensory processing differences

Poor self-awareness

May not learn from peers or be exploited by others

### The affect of attitudes

Society's attitudes can create a barrier for people with autism and intellectual disabilities (Murphy and Young, 2005).

### Role of sex education

It should:

Cover information

Develop values

Develop interpersonal skills and the ability to make responsible decisions. (Haffner, 1990)

### Sex education

Sex education should be individualised based on needs and strengths.

Provide accurate information

Needs to develop social competence

### Basic features

Explain private and public behaviours

Physical development and differences in gender

Teaching about appropriate touch and staying safe

Understanding emotions and expressing them in an appropriate manner.

Knowledge of reproduction

How to.... masturbate, manage menstrual cycle, use contraception

Understanding variety of relationships

Sexual health awareness

### Relationships

Social interaction skills (for dating and future)

Rules of physical intimacy

Consensual relations (legislation)

Dealing with rejection

Managing conflicts and on-going relationships

### Potential strategies

Use a combination of strategies- behaviourist, cognitive-behaviourist and perspective taking.

Pictures, visual clues, schedules

### Strategies

Providing communication means and helping to use them appropriately

Role play, using videos

Explaining social rules- lists, circles of closeness

Using distractions and alternatives

Understanding the required vocabulary

Social stories

Comic strip conversations

Problem solving scenarios

### Resources

Provide clear and explicit visuals

Need for same sex teachers?

Consider your school/ organisation sex education policy

Involve the individual and their family members

### To sum up

Individuals with autism often have similar sexual and relationship needs

It is important to recognise this and provide the required skills.

Appropriate sex and relationships education can improve the quality of life(Koller, 2000).

### References and useful reading

Attwood, S. (2008) Making sense of sex, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Cambridge, P., Carnaby, S. & McCarthy, M. (2003) 'Responding to Masturbation in Supporting Sexuality and Challenging Behaviour in Services for People with Learning Disabilities', *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 7 (3), 251-66

Gougeon, N. (2009) Sexuality education for students with intellectual disabilities, a critical pedagogical approach: outing the ignored curriculum, *Sex Education*, Vol. 9 (3), pp. 277-291

Haffner D.W. (1990, March). *Sex education 2000: A call to action*. New York: Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S.

Hartman, D. (2014) Sexuality and relationship education for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders, London: Jessica Kingsley

Hellems, H., Colson, K., Verbraeken, C., Vermeiren, R., & Deboutte, D. (2007) Sexual behavior in high-functioning male adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorders, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 260-269

Koller, R. (2000) Sexuality and adolescents with autism. *Sexuality and Disability*, 18(2), 125-135

Mandell, D.S, Walrath, C.M., Manteuffel, B., Sgro, G., & Pinto-Martin, J.A. (2005) The prevalence and correlates of abuse among children with autism served in comprehensive community based mental health settings. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29, 1359- 1372

Murphy, N. & Young, P. (2005) 'Sexuality in Children and Adolescents with Disabilities', *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* 47, 640-4

National Children's Bureau (2003) Sex and Relationships Education framework, London: NCB

Ray, F., Marks, C., Bray-Garretson, H. (2004) Challenges in treating adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome who are sexually abusive, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 11, 265-285

Reynolds, K. (2014) Sexuality and severe autism, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Stokes, M. & Kaur, A. (2005) 'High-Functioning Autism and Sexuality: A Parental Perspective', *Autism* 9 (3), 266-89

Tarnaj, B. & Wolfe, P. (2008) 'Social Stories for Sexuality Education for Persons with Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder', *Sexuality and Disability* 26, 29-36