

# Sexual Safety Issues for People with ASD

In Dating Relationships

At the Workplace

In the Community

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# Discussion Overview

- Why are individuals with autism spectrum disorder at greater risk for problems related to sexuality?
- Issues highlighted to help address sexual health and risk
- Recommendations and Resources



# Need to Provide Sexuality Education

- Limited Access to Information
- Limited Social Opportunities to Learn
- Environmental Inattention and Deficits Hinder Understanding
- Help Protect Against Victimization and Exploitation
- Improve Confidence and Assertiveness
- Correct Misinformation from Internet and Media
- *“Because they have the right to learn all they can to enable them to become sexually healthy persons.” – Lisa Mitchell*



# Inherent Risk

- Nature Of The Disorder
- Communication: Identify, Express, Describe
- Social: Naïve, Lack Connection & Access to Information, Lack of Practice
- Emotional: Powerless, Needy
- Personal Care: Hygiene, Grooming, Toileting
- Attention: Environmental Awareness, Observation
- Lack of Information/Resources/Options exacerbates risk of victimization and abusing.



# Cultivating Vulnerability

- Well-Intended Adults Inadvertently Contribute
  - Regard: Eternally Young, Less Capable
  - Practices: Ignore, Excuse, Enable, Avoid
- Our Vision & Efforts Out of Sync
  - Aspire to Quality of Life Long Term
  - Focus On Less Meaningful Pursuits Short Term



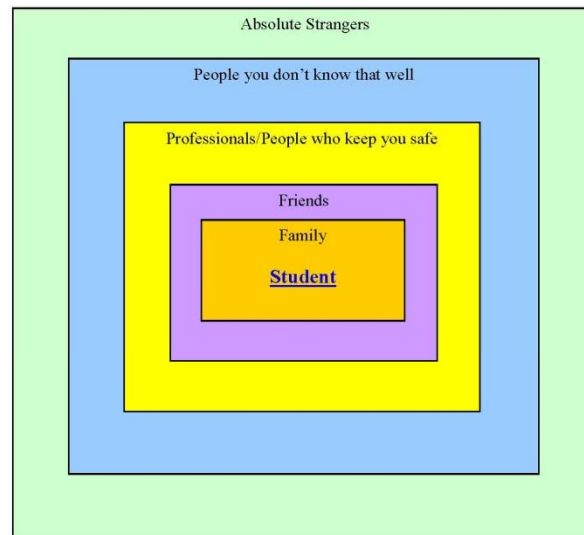
# Right Lessons We Fail To Teach

- Societal Norms & Customs (*Unwritten*)
- Peer Alliances: Instill Value, Desire & Abilities
- Relationships
  - Framework: Type, Nature, Social/Behavior Conduct
  - Navigation: Dynamics & Evaluation
- Independence (*Becoming The Boss Of Me*)
  - Personal Self-Sufficiency
  - Social Competence & Confidence
- Self Advocacy



# Squares of Intimacy

A Representation of Relational Categories



360-1



# Wrong Lessons We Teach

- Passivity & Compliance To Authority
- Dependency On Others (Basic Needs)
- Acceptability Of “Atypical” Behavior
- “Muddy” Social Boundaries
- Reliance On Parents For All Social Sustenance
- Asexuality: “Sex” is a Non-subject
  - *Don't Ask / Don't Tell*





# Common Problematic Issues

- Inappropriate sex partners
- Inappropriate initiations
- Unclear boundaries (people, locations, etc.)
- Adults make inaccurate assumptions of what is appropriate because of TV, internet or movies
- Extreme internet use
- Victimization /Abuse



# What can we do?

## Where do we start?

Good News, if you are uncomfortable with the topic, you don't start by talking about sex.



# Early Foundations

- Independent Self Care: Skills & Routines
- Dressing, Bathing, Toileting
- Proficiency & Habits
  - Degree of Undress: *Don't Be That Guy*
    - Pants to Ankles?
    - Naked To Poop?



# Basic Social Practices

- **Personal Space & Boundaries**
  - Grabbing, Climbing, Touching
  - *“Friends”*, Tickling, Hugging, Wrestling
- **Practical Etiquette**
  - Privacy: Closing The Door, Knocking
  - Public Urinals: Which One? Looking? Chatting?
- **Functional Concepts**
  - Personal/Private  $\leftrightarrow$  General/Public
  - Applied To: Information, Settings & Behavior



# Private Time Program



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# Social Practices

- Develop social opportunities with same age peers
- Clarify role of adult service providers
  - One way street vs. two way street
  - Cannot be all about you
- Do not allow adults to be alone with children or to consider children their peers.
- Challenge to make a friend of the opposite sex



# Social Independence

- **Autonomy & Judgment**
  - Decision Making: Simple Choices To Complex
  - Compliance → Cooperation → Assertion
    - Authority Figures Especially, Initially With Peers
- **Community Awareness & Safety**
  - Checking In, Notification
  - “Set Ups”: Enticing, Seeking Assistance
  - Internet: Safe Navigation Guidelines



# Self Advocacy

- **Prepare:** Empower VS Rescue
  - Knowledge: Rights & Responsibilities
  - Inoculation: Anticipate & Rehearse
- **Recognize & Describe:** “Wrongful Behavior”
  - Range: Hurtful → Exploitive → Dangerous → Abusive
  - No One Exempt: Strangers → Family → Friends
- **Disclose:** Importance & Purpose
  - Offenses: Actual, Attempted, Questionable
  - Lifelines: Trusted, Responsive, Non-judgemental





# Bring Up the Issues: Information and Tone

- Normalize experiences and allow for them to inform you of their perspective
- Humanize sexuality
  - Set intimate relationships on the continuum of all relationships
- Create an open door policy
  - Prove that you are a safe, helpful and non-judgemental resource for them.
  - Discussing sex helps teach this lesson.



# Tips – General Information

- Find a resource to talk about this (a class, a counselor, a trusted family member, etc.)
- Provide functional knowledge
  - What is ok (when, where, who, how)
  - What is no ok (when, where, who, how)
- Discuss everything has a time and place
- Make sure they understand the basic laws of consent
- Rights, Responsibilities and Resources



# Tips – Internet Safety

- Encourage Individual to Practice Online Behaviors/Conversation Appropriate in Public
- Private Behaviors/Conversation Should be in Person
- Use Technology Together
- Discuss Safe Guidelines
- Resources:
  - K9 Web Protection –Free Internet filter
  - Netsmartz Workshop - Internet Safety information
  - Teen Safe App – Monitoring
  - Enough is Enough – Rules and Tools



# Resources



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# Books

- *The Rules of Sex – Social and Legal Guidelines for Those who Have Never Been Told* by Nora Baladerian, Ph.D. and Johnny Nunez, 2006
- *Crafting Connections - Contemporary Applied Behavior Analysis for Enriching the Social Lives of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder* by Mitchell Taubman, Ph.D., Ron Leaf, Ph.D. and John McEachin, Ph.D., Autism Partnership, 2011
- *A 5 is Against the Law! Social Boundaries: Straight Up! An honest guide for teens and young adults* by Kari Dunn Buron, Autism Asperger Publishing Co., 2007



# Counseling

- **Autism Partnership – Seal Beach**  
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- Pete Candella, LMFT – Orange  
(714) 771-1404



# Technology

- Internet Safety information
  - Netsmartz Workshop: [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)
- Cell Phone Monitoring and Tracking
  - Teen Safe App: [www.teensafe.com](http://www.teensafe.com)
- Free Internet Filter
  - K9 Web Protection: [www.k9webprotection.com](http://www.k9webprotection.com)
- Protecting Children Online
  - Enough is Enough – Rules and Tools, [www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org)



# Overall Goal

**Promote Safety, Connectedness and  
Optimism**

**Ultimately Promote Empowerment**







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