



# Sex Ed for SPED



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## WHY IS IT NEEDED?

Students with special needs are often not taught the medical terms for their body parts, taught "sugar coated" rules for how not to get pregnant, or simply told "Don't have a boyfriend". Our students deserve the right to be taught the true process for the way things happen, how to say no, how to protect themselves from abuse, and how to advocate for themselves in uncomfortable situations. This is important for ALL learners, despite their varying abilities, but especially for those with caretakers and teachers who help them in the restroom, shower, and with other private activities due to their disability.

People with special needs at all levels experience sexual drives, behaviors, and feelings that can be challenging to them and/or to others. Most, if not all, will need some assistance in managing these at some points in their lives. The kind, timing and amount of assistance will be determined by the needs of the individuals.

Society's expectations and prejudices and fears about sexuality in individuals with disabilities make it essential that we address sexual behaviors directly and give instruction early. Sex education for individuals with Autism must be given a high priority when we choose what to teach.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU CREATE YOUR LESSONS AND CONTENT

Parent involvement and participation is crucial. This is primarily because decisions in the area of sex education really have two parts: values (which behaviors we should teach) and strategies (what behavior we can teach and how.) A positive parent/professional relationship involving mutual trust will usually help resolve those issues around values. Once the values questions are resolved the strategies issues are somewhat easier.

Sex education is something that is acquired through a systematic process, just like any other concept or skill. That is, we must take into account the learning styles of the person with whom we are working. The activities must be highly structured, have limited dependence on spoken language and use concrete visual supports.



# KEY CONCEPTS


Some of these concepts are not obviously connected to sexuality, however, they are fundamental to our young people having satisfying relationships and remaining safe. While some may not directly related to “sex education,” the considerations addressed in this fact sheet are fundamental to the development of a good sex education program.

1. On going social skills instructions
2. Discrimination of Public and Private
3. Personal Hygiene
4. Body Parts and Functions
5. Identifying different types of relationships
6. Personal Boundaries
7. Permission
8. Touching Others
9. Contraception
10. Sexually transmitted diseases
11. Masturbation
12. Sexuality
13. Safety
14. Advocating for oneself



## ONGOING SOCIAL SKILLS

Provide explicit feedback as you teach these social skills that relate to relationships. It is important that you encourage others to give the learner honest and respectful feedback as well. Often people “feel sorry” for others with a disability and let those kinds of things go by. Our kids deserve the same respect and honesty as anyone else—they need clear social feedback to learn and reduce the risk of making “social mistakes” that increase the likelihood of isolation.

- Greeting skills
  - Conversation skills
  - Controlling rigidity
  - Saying and hearing NO
  - Different types of touch
    - Hurtful
    - Helpful
    - Accidental
    - Loving
  - Affection giving skills
    - Ways besides hugs and kisses to pass on warm feelings
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# PUBLIC VS PRIVATE

- Some things must be absolutely private and others may be more public.
- Places, things we do and talk about, and actual items can be either public or private.
- Private is about you and is about choosing to share or not share. This may mean doing things by yourself, choosing not to share private information, and keeping certain items and words to yourself. You do private things only in private places.
- Public is about being with other people, sharing information or doing things with other people. It means that you are not alone and therefore you do not do private things in public places.


For some higher functioning individuals it may be necessary to explain why a particular behavior is public or private. For example - "We do not get undressed in public because it is a private behavior. Taking our clothes off is being naked. Being naked is a private behavior. Our bodies are special and we get to choose who sees our bodies naked. Most people don't like to see other people naked." Lower functioning individuals may need specific reinforcement programs for appropriate behavior. In extreme circumstances strategies such as overcorrection and positive practice may be needed for inappropriate behaviors.

You can teach this skill using sorts, social stories, and modeling with your words and behaviors. For example, in front of the student, the teacher may say "Ms. Lauren, is it okay for me to take my clothes off in the halls?" "No, Ms. Lauren. You can take your clothes off in PRIVATE. You do not want everyone to see your body so we do not take them off in the hallway. The hallways are PUBLIC."



## PERSONAL HYGIENE

Being clean and tidy will help students be more confident and is a basic human need. It will also make others happier and more willing to be around them. Being able to care for one's own personal hygiene needs reduces the need for attendants to be around when such activities are taking place and thus reduces the opportunity for exploitation.

- Toileting and cleaning properly after a bowel movement
  - Appropriate hygiene during menstrual periods
  - Bathing and showering
  - Using deodorant
  - Changing underwear
  - Wearing clean outer clothing
  - Nasal hygiene
  - Hair care, make-up, shaving
  - Brushing teeth
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# BODY PARTS AND FUNCTIONS

The goal here is to introduce concepts of body parts and their functions (including the changes that are taking place) to be sure that these are understood . Typically, this can be taught to ALL individuals in some way or another using pictures, concrete visuals, and simple language for them to understand.

- Private Parts and their medical terms
- Body changes at puberty. The differences in males and females become more apparent.
- Feelings and emotions change.
- Reproduction.



## IDENTIFYING DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS

Children need to understand the relationships that people have with one another. Each relationship is different. Often children with ASD don't understand the different types of relationships and may make social mistakes or put themselves at risk.

- Strangers
- Acquaintances/Associates
- Friendships
- Dates/Boyfriend/Girlfriend

It is important that individuals with autism know the difference between friends and paid support people in the lives of our children as often these relationships can be confusing. When it is not clear about paid care giving roles, boundaries can become blurry and the rules of touch may become unclear for the child. It makes issues around safety and touch more difficult to teach.

We must ensure that our children understand that these are paid workers and that they are not "friends." They are associates who help them perform an activity. Our children need to develop age-appropriate friendships. It is important that support workers set boundaries in these types of relationships.



## TOUCHING

- Personal Boundaries—understanding what your own comfort level is when people are in your physical space.
- Permission—getting and giving permission, which is the ability to say and hear “no.”
- Touching Others - types of touch.

This is an important topic, as boundaries help us to define whom we can touch and who can touch us. It is about respecting the personal boundaries and space of other people. It helps people keep themselves safe---if your child understands boundaries then they will understand when their boundaries are being crossed without permission.

# TOUCHING

It is important to encourage others to be clear about their boundaries with your child so that they can model feedback. Encourage others to discourage inappropriate shows of affection/touching.

The adolescent needs to understand why people are in different types of relationships and why touch is only for a very few people who are well known. You should always feel safe when they hug you or touch you – reinforce the child’s ability to choose touch. For example, do not make them give someone a hug when they are letting you know that they do not want to—even if it doesn’t feel “polite.”

Even if it is difficult it is important that you remind others, as necessary, about how touch may relate to their relationship and ask them to support the concepts that you are trying to teach.

You can use the Circles concepts to teach relationships, touch, and boundaries. Use a circle of string or rope to show the personal space for the child. Teach that others may not enter that space without permission nor may they enter another’s space without permission. A larger circle can represent a circle of close family and friends who may be in the hug (with permission) circle. A yet larger circle is the handshake circle. Yet one more circle is for people you see often—store clerk, other teachers in the school—acquaintances/associates—people to whom you wave or say hello. You know these people, but you do not have a ‘touch’ relationship with them. You may talk with them sometimes. Finally there are strangers. You do not trust, talk to or touch these people.

## OTHER SEX ED TOPICS

- Contraception
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Masturbation
- Alternative life styles

## SAFETY

Safety is about...

- Being able to recognize possible danger
- Creating a safety plan and knowing what to do
- Feeling confident and assertive (being able to strongly state what you need and don’t want.)

One thing adults can do is to give the child multiple opportunities to make choices. This may be as simple as allowing him/her to choose what to have for dinner or where to go outside when walking or on an outing. Remember that it is often easier/faster for us to make those decisions, but in order to build your child’s confidence it is important for them to develop decision-making and advocacy skills where they can.



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