

VANDERBILT  UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER



I/DD ECHO

Relationships and Sexuality

Rachel Loftin, PhD

Speaker Disclosures

- Target audience: Family practitioners, internists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, psychologists.
- Objective: To improve the knowledge of primary care providers who care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Speaker Disclosure: **Rachel Loftin** has no relationship with any commercial firm having products related to topics discussed at this conference. Actual disclosure forms are available upon request.

Presentation focuses on development, not maturation

- Limited information available
- Maturation *largely* same in ASD as in TD
- Development is focus



Risks

- Substantially higher risk of abuse
- Possible higher risk of perpetration
 - Counterfeit versus true deviance



- BUT lower quality of life is a real risk

Relationship Barriers in ASD

- Social-Communication
- Acquisition of social knowledge/norms
- Insistence on Sameness
- Sensory Experience (ex: mouth noises)
- Social Motivation
- Interest
- Secondary traits (anxiety)
- Chronological Age > Age of Social Functioning

Potential Family Factors Influencing Poor Sex Ed

- Family culture
 - Beliefs
 - Poor modeling/DV
 - Lack of knowledge
- Embarrassment, uncertainty, unwillingness
- Caregiver fatigue
- Lack of supervision online



Interference with Sexuality Education

- Curriculum designed for gen ed students
 - Doesn't cover the social curriculum
 - No explicit instruction; euphemisms
- Assumptions of prior knowledge
- Misinformation via pornography not corrected
- Often missing key points

Is Sexuality Different for People with ASD?

- We don't know.
- Emerging research suggests possible differences in
 - Behavior
 - Identification
- **Most** desire relationships but few attain
 - Recent study found about 50% had relationships, usually lower.
 - Rate may be increasing! Another recent survey found 73% of respondents indicated romantic relationship experience



Sexual Behavior

- Long thought to have higher rates of asexuality.
- Recent studies mixed but some find rate is close non-ASD.
- Data on sexual acts not yet well researched.
- Some clinical indication that atypical sexual behavior vs. willingness to disclose



Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

- Trans and other GNC rates seem to be higher in ASD
- Social norms?
- Gay, Lesbian & Bi- identity and behavior may be higher



Risks Associated with LGBTQIA+ Identity

- Increased suicide risk in ASD
- Increased suicide risk in LGBTQ
- Lack of belonging
- Feeling like a burden

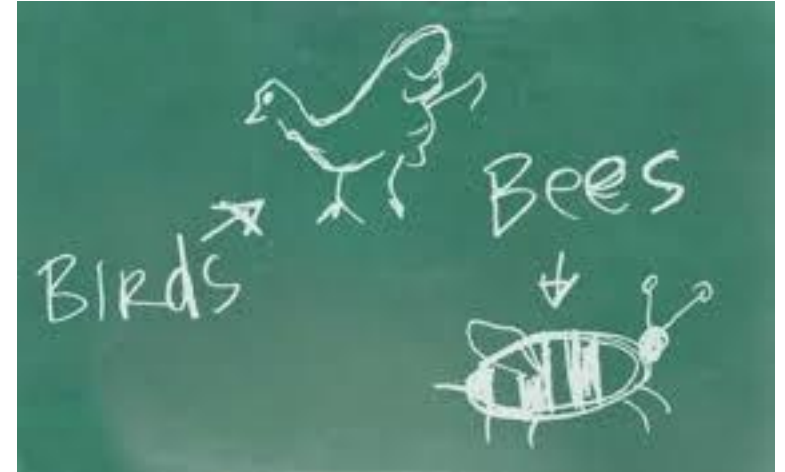
Domains to Address in Sex Ed

- Human Development (including reproduction, puberty, sexual orientation, and gender identity)
- Relationships (including families, friendships, romantic relationships and dating)
- Personal Skills (including communication, negotiation, and decision-making)
- Sexual Behavior (including abstinence and partnered/unpartnered sexuality throughout life)
- Sexual Health (including STDs, contraception, and pregnancy)
- Society and Culture (including gender roles, diversity, and sexuality in the media)

(Planned Parenthood)

What and How to Teach About Sexuality

- Facts
- Social Aspects
- What to do, What not to do, and WHY
- Concrete
- Clear
- Factual
- Nonjudgmental



Themes to Teach Throughout



- Safety
- Responsibility
- Diversity
- Pleasure

Adaptation

- Range of specialized curricula now exist
- Problem, though, of who knows ASD and who knows sexuality
- Diversity in learners means that even specialized curricula need to be individualized



General Strategies for Parents/Caregivers

- Stress safety and quality of life
- Consider person's communication style
 - Open books
 - Private, embarrassed types
- Make materials available
- Good links bookmarked
- Other available adults
- PARENTAL CONTROLS—(from Janet—this is an issue—see notes)
- Check with school about sex ed included in IEP-(Do we include?)

Resources

Puberty and Adolescence Resource



A Guide for
Parents of
Adolescents with
Autism Spectrum
Disorder



These materials are the product of on-going activities of the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network, a funded program of Autism Speaks. It is supported in part by cooperative agreement UA3 MC 11054, Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P Network) from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Combating Autism Act of 2006, as amended by the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act of 2011), Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Service to the Massachusetts General Hospital.

- <https://researchautism.org/using-the-peers-method-to-teach-dating-skills-to-adults-with-autism/>
- <http://wrongplanet.net/how-to-flirt-and-get-a-date-autism-talk-tv-20/>
- <http://www.scarleteen.com/>
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/find-resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/atn-air-p-puberty-adolescence-resource>
- <https://researchautism.org/findingyourway/> p.52

VANDERBILT  UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER



Thank you!