

ASD and Adolescence Part Six - Sexuality

This article is the sixth of a series of eight articles about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and adolescence. The articles are designed to be a guide for parents of children with ASD; they will provide information about adolescence, the extra challenges that may arise for children with ASD during this time, and techniques for teaching your child about adolescence and dealing with the challenges.

The eight articles are:

1. Introduction
2. Physical changes and lifestyle choices
3. Teaching public and private and appropriate sexual language
4. Emotional and social changes
5. Peer pressure, bullying, drugs and alcohol
6. Sexuality
7. Unwanted sexual attention and sexual abuse
8. Techniques and advice for parents

Sexuality

Interest in the opposite sex begins during adolescence. It is likely that children will have their first relationships during this time. This will lead to being intimate with others, and having sexual intercourse. It is important for adolescents to be knowledgeable about related topics in order to make informed decisions in these areas.

Masturbation

Masturbation is touching the genitals to give sexual pleasure. Masturbation is a

natural behaviour and commonly starts during adolescence. It can become a problem if it does not occur in a private place, if it is followed by guilt, or if it becomes an obsession that gets in the way of other activities.

In some adolescents with ASD, masturbation becomes a method of sensory stimulation. They need to be aware that there needs to be a balance in the activities they do, and that during the day it is best to develop interests other than masturbation.

Sexual intercourse

Adolescents need to know why people have sex, what happens during sex, and the different types of sex. They should know about virginity, celibacy, abstinence, homosexuality, bisexuality, and ways they might be able to tell when it is the 'right time' to have sex.

Information on the 'rules of sex' is also necessary. Sex under the age of 16 is illegal. Sex should only ever occur in a private place. Sex should never be forced and always consensual. Any religious or family values regarding sex should be discussed also. Above all, adolescents need to know that they should never be pressured into having sex.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

STIs are infections that are passed on during sexual contact. Sexual intercourse and oral sex are the riskiest sexual activities in terms of getting or passing on



an STI. Some STIs are bacterial which mean they are caused by bacteria and can be treated with antibiotics (e.g., chlamydia & gonorrhoea). Some are viral, caused by a virus, and only the symptoms of the virus can be treated (e.g., herpes, hepatitis & HIV/AIDS). Other STIs are parasitic (e.g., lice & scabies).

Some common symptoms of STIs include pain, discomfort, irritation or itching in the pelvic area, unusual discharge, sores, lumps, rashes, blisters, warts. However, many STIs have no symptoms, and when left untreated can affect the health and fertility of the individual. Therefore it is important for people who are sexually active to get regular sexual health checks.

The risk of getting an STI may be reduced by having fewer sexual partners, using condoms, and not making sexual decisions under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Contraception

Both sexual partners are responsible for contraception. Condoms are the only form of contraception that protect against STIs. There are many types of contraception to choose from: the combined contraceptive pill and the mini contraceptive pill, the emergency contraceptive (morning after) pill, injections, rods, rings, diaphragms, and caps.

Adolescents also need to know about abortion and contraception myths. These include not being able to get pregnant the first time you have sex, using gladwrap or balloons instead of condoms, and using coca cola as a douche to prevent pregnancy.

Sexual relationships

Sexual relationships should be healthy and fun. There should be honesty, trust and respect between the partners. The stages of a relationship and behaviours that are appropriate at each stage should be explained to individuals with ASD. They need to know that they cannot force someone to be attracted to them, and that not all relationships work out.

References and Recommended Reading

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