



ASD and Adolescence Part Eight - Techniques and Advice for Parents

This article is the eighth 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

Roles of parents of children with ASD approaching adolescence

There are many roles that parents of children with ASD have to take on when they are approaching adolescence:

- Parents need to show their child that they will be a trustworthy listener and they will listen to their questions, problems and opinions without being judgmental.
- Parents need to educate their child about the changes that come with

adolescence and about sex, and they also need to educate others about their child.

- They need to model appropriate behaviour as well as setting rules and guidelines for their child and following through with consequences when the rules are broken.
- Parents need to guide their children through moral issues, and to help their child interpret social situations and solve problems.

Advice to parents of children with ASD:

- Ensure that you know what you believe before you start to talk with your child. That way you will be able to give your child consistent information, advice and rules.
- When your child approaches you for advice or information, be willing to talk to them and give them age appropriate information that is factual and logical.
- Cover all topics with your child. That way they will have the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. They will know that you are not keeping anything from them and trust you as a source of information.
- Create an environment where the child feels comfortable talking to you and knows they will get factual information.
- If you are embarrassed, explain to your child why you are embarrassed.



- If you do not know the answer to one of their questions, research the answer together using books, at the library or on the internet.
- Keep instructions simple at first and add more information when necessary.
- Repeat yourself often so that they remember.
- Explain why things are important socially (e.g., you need to shower everyday so that you smell fresh because people do not want to hang out with others who are smelly).
- Encourage your child to be excited about the changes.
- You don't have to be face to face, you could talk while cooking or going for a walk.
- A buddy or mentor to teach social skills, inform on fashion, language and trends, and to help decipher social situations.

References and Recommended Reading

Attwood, S. (2008). *Making Sense of Sex: A Forthright Guide to Puberty, Sex & Relationships for People with Asperger's Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Attwood, T., Faherty, C., Wagner, S., Iland, L., Wrobel, M., Bolick, T., McIlwee Myers, J., Snyder, R. & Grandin, T. (2006). *Asperger's & Girls*. Texas, USA, Future Horizons, Inc.

Henault, I. (2006). *Asperger's Syndrome & Sexuality*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Holliday Wiley, L. (Ed.). (2003). *Asperger Syndrome in Adolescence: Living with the Ups, the Downs, & Things in Between*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Nichols, S., Moravick, G. M. & Tetenbaum, S. P. (2009). *Girls Growing up on the Autism Spectrum*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shore, S. M. & Rastelli, L. G. (2006). *Understanding Autism for Dummies*. Indiana, USA: Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Techniques for teaching children with ASD about adolescence:

- Use techniques that have worked before for your child.
- Provide reinforcement for listening and for appropriate behaviour.
- Use visual aids such as pictures, schedules, calendars and photos.
- Break tasks down into smaller tasks that are more manageable.
- TV, current events and books can facilitate discussion.
- Use siblings/peers/videos for models.
- Do 'What if?' scenarios with your child.
- Role play potential situations with your child.
- Use social stories to explain the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of others.
- Use power cards using child's special interest or hero to explain in a few steps how they should behave in a certain situation.

