

Sexual Safety

Efficacy Rating
NA

Sexual Safety

Personal safety is a real concern for any child with social, communication and cognitive challenges. Children with ASD may not develop the same understanding of the dangers in society as other children and are at greater potential risk for abuse (physical and sexual) and less likely to report or describe such instances of abuse.

Changes in behavior without apparent sources of pain or illness should heighten the practitioner's suspicion for potential abuse. Increased anxiety, depression agitation or aggression, avoidance of particular situations or people and withdrawal may be additional signs of abuse (Volkmar & Wiesner, 2004).

Teaching children with ASD social and safety boundaries, and the communication skills to respond to unsafe situations is worth advocating for in educational or developmental service plans.

Children with autism and any cognitive impairment may have difficulty understanding the distinction between public and private. They may need more concrete instruction to learn the differences and appropriate behavior for each setting. For example a child who masturbates may need specific reminders about that being a private activity, or may need direct instruction if they are inappropriately touching other's breasts or genital areas.

The Circles Approach

Children with autism have a difficult time reading social cues and establishing relationships, and are not likely to learn these skills without specific instruction. In teaching about relationships and intimacy some families and providers use a program called CIRCLES

This system employs visuals to enhance children's awareness of those individuals with whom they can be safe. Concentric circles are drawn with names placed in the center of the circle that are closest to the child. Gradually those less familiar or unknown to the child are placed in the outer circles. The child with ASD is then taught acceptable ways to touch or be touched by those closest to him as opposed to those who are less familiar or strangers.

Examples of these circles include the "stranger circle" or outer ring, the wave, the handshake, and the hug as the inner circle reserved for closest friends and family.

Instruction in private and public behaviors can be incorporated into circles types of approach

Autism and Sexual Issues

<http://groups.msn.com/TheAutismHomePage/autismandsexualissues.msnw>

Sexual Safety Resources and Information

Websites:

Sexuality education for children and youth with disabilities

<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/outprint/nd17txt.htm>

Autism and sexual Issues

<http://groups.msn.com/TheAutismHomePage/autismandsexualissues.msnw>

Tools, Materials, Curriculum:

Kahn, R. (2001). *Too safe for strangers*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

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Articles:

Suris, J.C., Resnick, M.D., Cassuto, N., & Blum, R.W. (1996). Sexual behavior of adolescents with chronic disease and disability. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 19* (2), 124-131.

American Academy of Pediatrics, (1996, February). *Sexuality Education and Safety for Children and Young Adults with Disabilities*. Retrieved May 6, 2003 from <http://www.aap.org/policy/01225.html>

Books:

Schweir, K.M. & Hinsburger, D, (2000), *Sexuality: Your Sons and daughters with intellectual disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes.

Volkmar, F. R., & Wiesner, L. A. (2004). *Healthcare for children on the autism spectrum: A guide to medical, nutritional, and behavioral issues*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.