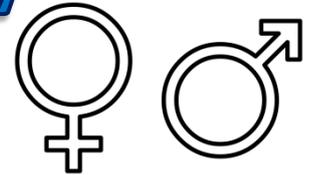




Teaching Puberty and Sexuality for People with Autism



Why do Pupils with ASCs Need Additional Puberty and Sexuality Teaching?

- Poor awareness of the unwritten rules; these become increasingly complex with adolescence, particularly with respect to dating and sexual behaviour
- Breaking the unwritten rules that govern sexual behaviour can have serious consequences
- Neuro-typical pupils become experts on people, pupils with ASC become experts on things. 'When my peers became interested in fashion and the opposite sex, I was still watching Thomas the Tank Engine. I didn't know about things like hairdressing'
- Because these pupils resist change, they may not recognise themselves in pictures as young children. And when they have grown older they still feel young, and behave accordingly. And who will they go to to check it out with?
- **They are not surrounded and supported by a peer group.**
- ASC pupils often acquire incorrect social information from TV or film or stick rigidly to acquired social information, without adapting it for different circumstances
- Sex and Relationship education in class is often pitched too high for ASC pupils or makes assumptions regarding prior knowledge. Social and emotional aspects are not covered in enough detail
- For pupils for whom change is worrying and routine and sameness is security, puberty is terrifying. Their own bodies are changing and behaving in ways that they have little or no control over. This can be very distressing

How do we Teach Pupils with ASCs about Puberty and Sexuality?

- It is no good teaching an ASC pupil about periods, wet dreams, erections etc. after they have been experienced. Forward planning and explicit teaching about what to expect will make these things far less distressing
- Offer pre-teaching and post-teaching to address misconceptions acquired during SRE in class and to address themes not covered in typical SRE teaching
- Wherever possible ensure that parents or carers and schools are working together.
- Be clear and concrete, reduce ambiguity, give rules and use visual supports such as social stories, charts, diagrams and cartoons
- For most pupils sex education will need to be done in the context of a private mentoring session or specialised group activity

Components of a good Puberty and Sexuality Package Pre-adolescence:

- Clear and concrete instructions about modesty
- Clear and concrete information about the physical processes of puberty – with lots of reassurance (remember how anxious many pupils are about change of any sort)
- Clear and explicit information about sexual activity and its social and emotional context
- A lexicography of words used to describe parts of the body and sexual activities, including words in common currency (ask other young people of similar ages for help with this)
- Clear information about the context in which these words are appropriate
- Clear and concrete information about personal hygiene

Recommended books:

- NHS Puberty and Sexuality Pack (first half)
- 'What's Happening to Ellie?: A book about puberty for girls and young women with autism and related conditions' Kate E Raynolds
- 'What's Happening to Tom?: A book about puberty for girls and young women with autism and related conditions' Kate E Raynolds
- 'Personal Hygiene What's That Got to do With Me?' Pat Crissey
- 'The Girl with the Curly Hair: Autism and Puberty' Alis Rowe

