

Enhancing Sexual Awareness in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Table 1. Sexual education content areas for adolescents with ASD

Education Area	Components
Body parts and Functions	Anatomy and Physiology, Pregnancy, Gender Differences, Maturation, Masturbation
Personal Hygiene	Sexual Hygiene, Body and Disease, STD (sexual transmitted diseases) and HIV prevention, Birth Control
Self- Protection /Abuse prevention	Protection against abuse, Sexual feelings Sexuality as a positive aspect of self, Sexual behaviors other than intercourse, Appropriate/inappropriate touching, Appropriate/inappropriate public/private Behaviors, Decision making, Use of condoms, Reduction of fear and myths, Personal rights, Sexual discrimination, Say “no” to nonconsensual sex and high-risk behaviors, How to communicate and report abuse, Internet safety and dating websites, Communicating with strangers online
Relationships	Friendships and intimacy, Social Skills, Responsibility to partners, Feelings and expression, Dating and marriage, Parenting, Family types and roles, Sexual orientation

(based on Littner, Littner, & She Bae, 2017; Tarnai & Wolfe, 2008; Wolfe, Condo, & Hardaway, 2003).

Table 2. Strategies /techniques and examples that were applied to the participants

Strategies/Techniques	Examples
Social stories	“My name is Nixon. I am 14. I think about hugs. I would like to hug Kate. Sometimes, people use two –person hugs to share their feelings. These hugs may mean “I love you”, “We are both Happy”, or “We are both Sad.” When two people hug each other at the same time, they often: -Stand close, facing each other -Wrap one or two arms around the other person -Squeeze a little but not a lot -End the hug when either person begins to relax their arms (Gray, 2010)
Social Skills training	-How to express one’s sexual feelings towards a person of interest
Videos	-Watching common behaviors when we are in a romantic relationship (holding hands, kissing)
Role playing	-Conversations that we refer to on a first date
Vivo Socialization	-Having soft drink in a cafeteria

Results

In the first phase of our intervention, Nixon had difficulties in understanding social rules and privacy and he was never concerned about issues regarding abuse, but he achieved a good awareness of body concepts. After the implementation of the program, Nixon had improved in the above areas (according to Nixon and his parent interview, qualitative dimension):

- He clarified inappropriate and appropriate sexual behaviors (although he was confused regarding hugs in public settings)
- He improved his relationships with peers
- He reduced feelings of loneliness
- He increased his general maturity
- He reduced victimization of himself
- He improved his relationship with his family
- He knew where to ask for help in case of abuse

Nixon was benefited from the sexual awareness program not only from the social skills training point of view but also from an emotional perspective. As he mentioned: “I used to feel embarrassed to talk about relationships but now I feel more open, although I still fear of rejection. I am still uncertain if I am a likable person. I learned that I can observe people and I can make a movement only if we have a friendship in the first place and there is good chemistry between us. Trust is important as well as mutual respect. There is no need to rush into relationships. The most important thing is not to give up.” Nixon continued saying “I feel like I want to do a new beginning and try new things. I want to work on my own so as to be able to take initiatives and move a step further. I need to realize though that it is not possible to be likeable from everyone. I don’t want to think about what others are doing but to focus on how to improve myself. Everyone is a unique individual and if you like something very much you need to try hard so as to achieve it. Life is full of obstacles. And if you fail, it is not the end of the world. If you don’t lose you don’t learn” As we can see in Figure 1, Nixon tried to illustrate the importance of interacting with others in order to build a romantic relationship and his fear of rejection. I feel, he says, “that socialization should be the most important aspect, and school should teach life skills and not just rigid knowledge. Instead of learning history we should study how to live our life”. We must mention that Nixon still hates school and he always finds excuses in order to avoid it. In our last session he mentioned that “we cannot change our past but we can create our own future if we learn from our mistakes. In the past, I was very nervous and I had no patience, now I try to be calmer and become a better person. Now I can mix with older and younger people and I can learn new things.”

According to mother the program seemed to have positive effects in Nixon’s ability to develop better social skills to interact with people and be more tolerant with others. Also he developed his equestrian skills and parent used that as a vehicle to improve his social skills and be more open with his peers. His mother though mentions that every now and then he appears rigid and negative about the school system in general.

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