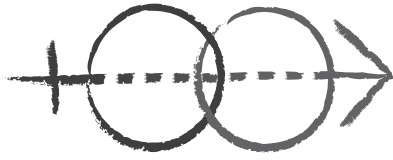




CHARTING the COURSE

A Family Toolkit to Help
Youth with Autism Navigate
Sexuality and Relationships

AUTHORS and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



CHARTING the COURSE

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Introduction to *Charting the Course*





Welcome to *Charting the Course: A Family Toolkit to Help Youth With Autism Navigate Sexuality and Relationships*. *Charting the Course* helps parents of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) approach talking about sexuality and relationships. Although conversations on topics related to sexuality can be difficult at times, you are a key resource to helping your child understand sexuality and practice appropriate skills and behaviors. Physically, children with ASD mature the same as their peers, yet they may have challenges understanding the intricate social and emotional aspects of sexuality.

Charting the Course is not a general sexuality education resource. *Charting the Course* is a one-of-a-kind program designed specifically with parents and children with ASD in mind. You will find hands-on, detailed ways to approach sexuality topics in the best way for your child. Preparation, practice, and purposely applying sexuality education lessons into their own lives can help children with ASD mature into healthy, responsible adults.



Icons to help you along the way

The following icons are used throughout the guide to help point out and highlight important sections of materials.

	Key Messages	Throughout the guide, you will find Key Messages for each chapter and section. These Key Messages highlight the most important takeaway points for each topic.
	Website	Boardwalk Adventure is a complementary component to Charting the Course, designed for children and adolescents ages 10–18. In an interactive game environment, players practice skills related to friendships, relationships, hygiene, and other sexual development topics.
	Learning How Worksheets	The Learning How Worksheets are the hands-on, put the information into practice component of Charting the Course. You'll find references to specific worksheets regarding a particular topic wherever you see this icon. Some worksheets are for you to complete on your own, while the majority of worksheets in Chapters 1-4 are meant for you to complete with your child.
	Important Terms	This icon highlights important terms related to sexuality topics.

About *Charting the Course*

How Will *Charting the Course* Help Me?

Charting the Course helps parents take sexuality education information and customize it into concrete, usable ways for their child with ASD.

By using *Charting the Course*, you will practice how to talk with your child about sexuality topics and, specifically, how to customize these topics to be appropriate to his or her needs and learning style. You will also increase your comfort (and your child's comfort) in talking and learning about sexuality topics, while using approaches to sexuality education that work well for children with ASD.



KEY MESSAGES

of *Charting the Course*:

1. Sexuality education is important for children with ASD.
2. Sexuality education can be customized for children with ASD.

Who is *Charting the Course* for?

Charting the Course is created for:

Parents. The content of *Charting the Course* is created for parents of children with ASD. The materials can also be used by other caregivers, individuals in a child's life, or advocates. While this may be the case, we'll refer to "parents" throughout the content.

Children with ASD, ages 10 through 18. The *Charting the Course* content may be adapted to fit the functioning level and developmental level of your child. Children with ASD have many different abilities and ways of learning and communicating. While some of the approaches in *Charting the Course* may suit children with ASD who are more verbal or social, we hope that there are ideas and custom solutions that can be appropriate for your child, wherever he or she may be on the spectrum. Likewise, it is up to you, as the parent, to determine which Learning How Worksheets are age appropriate for your child. As you determine which worksheets to complete with your child, keep in mind that sometimes your child may have an awareness or knowledge for topics that seem more advanced than you may have thought they were prepared for.

What is the Basis for *Charting the Course*?

In the United States, there are several initiatives that set the standard for sexuality education. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) has established guidelines for the types of content that should be included in any sexuality education program. Also, in early 2012, the nation's first sexuality education standards were also published by the Future of Sex Education Initiative. The guidelines and standards emphasize that all individuals deserve sexuality education, and there are particular topics that should be covered to help youth become healthy and responsible adults.

Charting the Course integrates these guidelines into the program content and then takes them one step farther. Rather than creating a general sexuality education curriculum, *Charting the Course* infuses topics that are important for all children to know about sexual development with strategies that make these topics easier to learn and practice for children with ASD. The ultimate goal of *Charting the Course* is to give children with ASD (with help from their parents) the knowledge and resources related to sexual development to support their transition to a healthy and responsible adulthood.

How Does *Charting the Course* Apply to Different Cultures or Religions?

We know that parents using *Charting the Course* may have different religious, cultural, and ethical beliefs about sexuality education. Your family's values will provide the foundation for teaching these important concepts. *Charting the Course* covers different topics that may or may not align with your values. *Charting the Course* supports sexuality education for all children and gives parents the resources to learn how to best talk to their children about these sometimes challenging topics. Using the tools and ideas that this resource provides, you will personalize how you use the materials and how you approach these topics with your child based on your own values, culture, and religion.

What are the Components of *Charting the Course*?

Charting the Course has interrelated components to help you and your child.

- ▶ **Parent's Guide.** The Parent's Guide includes specific information, activities, and resources to provide parents and their children with opportunities to practice concrete skills related to sexual development.
- ▶ **Boardwalk Adventure Web site.** This Web site for children with ASD provides opportunities to learn about sexual development in fun, age-appropriate, and interactive ways. Through the use of games and a fun beach-themed story, the Web site content complements the topics provided for you in the Parent's Guide.

In addition to providing context to the WHAT and WHY of each sexuality education topic, each chapter of the Parent's Guide also includes an extensive section on the HOW. The "Learning How" sections include handouts and activities to give you hands-on resources to directly apply the sexuality education lessons with your child.

The Boardwalk Adventure Web site gives your child with ASD opportunities to learn about the personal changes that happen during adolescence and situations to practice skills in a safe, interactive, and fun environment. The lessons in Boardwalk Adventure closely tie into the Parent's Guide content. Throughout *Charting the Course*, we will provide prompts and ideas for how to tie the Web site into your discussions about sexuality with your child.

Sexuality education covers a lot of topics; some are challenging, some might feel uncomfortable, and some might feel daunting to you and your child. This is an exciting time, filled with new learning, new opportunities for growth and independence, and new ways of learning about the world. *Charting the Course* gives you many ways to approach sexuality education with your child, in ways that are personal and can fit with what you and your child need.



Foundation Topics

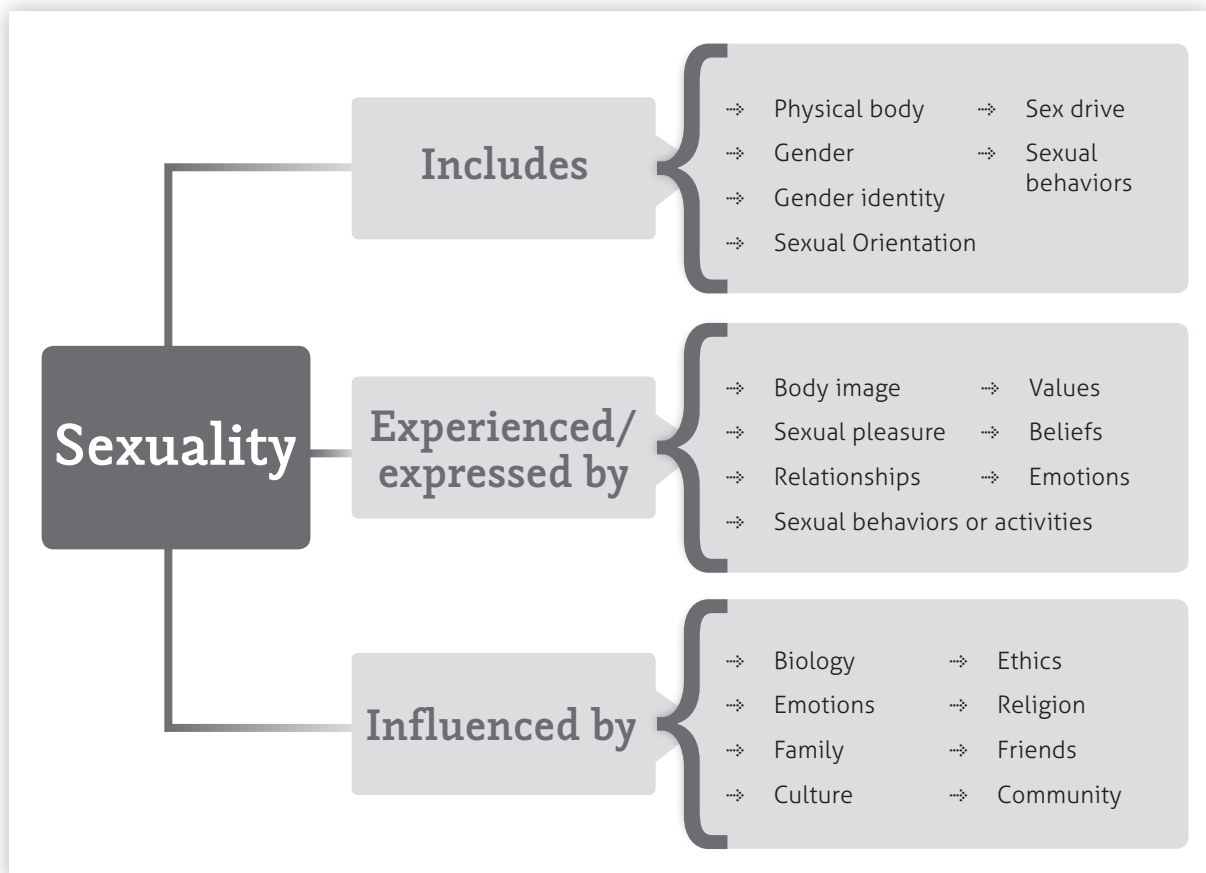
Sexuality education is a large and complex topic. The information and skills related to sexuality education that you share with your child are based on a variety of things; most importantly, your family's values. Understanding sexuality includes understanding ourselves and our values to make positive decisions. The following sections, Sexuality, Values, and Decision Making, are foundational topics that will be a part of any discussion or lesson that you share with your child about sexuality. These are big topics that you will revisit and think of often as you work with the *Charting the Course* materials.

Sexuality Values

Decision Making

Sexuality

Understanding our sexuality is a lifelong process. Sexuality is not just about intercourse or other physical expressions. It also includes understanding and relating to ourselves and others as sexual people; learning about physical development, sexual behaviors, and sexual health; understanding gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation; learning interpersonal skills; and clarifying our personal values.



It is natural for people to be curious about their bodies from a young age. As children approach puberty, this exploration of bodily changes becomes even more meaningful. Children often learn from parents, peers, media, or school about navigating the changes in their body and relationships that happen during adolescence.

Children with ASD develop physically and sexually around the same time as their peers. However, social awareness and understanding physical and sexual development do not always overlap. As a core characteristic of ASD, your child may not recognize the unwritten rules of sexual development, like why good hygiene helps with making friends, the difference between hugging a friend and hugging a romantic interest, or what's appropriate to talk about in public. Unlike their peers, children with ASD have trouble learning about these intricate topics by observing others, at school, or through media. Without the knowledge of appropriate ways to act or who to talk to about these changes, children with ASD can often be misunderstood or misperceived.

You are your child's first and best resource on sexual education and development. You can work together to navigate the increasingly complex adolescent social world. Giving your child ways to prepare for, understand, and practice dealing with his or her changing body and relationship experiences builds confidence, can reduce anxiety, and, most importantly, can help your child stay healthy and safe.

Sexuality education includes many topics, many of which are part of *Charting the Course*. While there are many specific sexuality topics for children to know, in general, it is helpful for them to understand that sexuality is not just sex or intercourse. Because sexuality can be an abstract concept with different components, giving your teen specific, concrete examples of his or her sexuality in real-life situations can be a good place to start.



KEY MESSAGES

Sexuality

- ▶ Sexuality is a part of being human.
- ▶ Sexuality is about physical development, sexual behaviors, sexual health, personal values, and interpersonal skills.
- ▶ Sexuality is about more than just intercourse or physical expressions of sexual behavior.



Learning How Worksheets

What Does Sexuality Mean to Me?, page 13

Parents as Sexuality Educators, page 19



Values

Values are ideas or strong beliefs that are built on experiences, culture, religion, and life. Values help individuals determine what is important to them and what they think of as good and bad, and right and wrong. You share your values on everything with your children, from what to eat, to what to watch on TV. Values are also the foundation for teaching your child about sexuality.

Yet, values can be abstract and difficult to grasp for children with ASD who more readily understand concrete examples and literal explanations. Values can also have lots of gray areas. Children with ASD think more in black and white, and so gray or more abstract ideas can be challenging.

When you teach your child about sexuality, you do so based on your own values and experiences.

You are teaching him or her about what is important to you related to sexual education. As you move through the chapters of *Charting the Course*, keep in mind that you can tailor what and how you share sexual education materials with your child based on your own values. *Charting the Course* believes that sexuality education is important, yet what you teach and how you teach it should also be based on what is important to your family. For instance, if you value abstinence or reserving sexual intimacy for marriage, you will want to incorporate this core value into your conversations and lessons with your child.

Values may also appear as rules to children with ASD. Some values or rules seem like they cannot be broken, which can be a challenge for children with ASD, who very literally accept and follow rules once they understand them, even if they might not be appropriate in that specific situation. Children with ASD can also get very upset when others do not follow the “rules” as they understand them. General guidelines without specific examples can be hard to implement for some children with ASD. By incorporating learning opportunities in a variety of settings, you can help your child see how one value can apply to multiple situations in a variety of ways.



KEY MESSAGES

Values

- ▶ Values are ideas and beliefs built on a person’s culture, experiences, and religion.
- ▶ Values are an important part of learning about sexuality and relationships.
- ▶ Other people may have different values related to sexuality and relationships.
- ▶ Values may change over time.



Learning How Worksheets

Journal Activities, page 23

Social Experiences, page 37

Decision Making

As a parent, you want your child to learn how to make good, thoughtful decisions. Decision making is a term used to describe the process of making choices. The way we make decisions guides our behavior, and so it is a necessary skill for your child to use when making decisions about his or her behaviors related to sexuality and relationships.

The ability to make positive, effective decisions develops over time. Things such as reasoning, values, attitudes, self-esteem, and social influences (like family, friends, and peers) all contribute to making good choices. It is important for children to have a strong sense of their values and to consider their options carefully.

Adolescence brings a greater sense of independence and with that comes increasingly demanding situations that require more complex decision making. Children may be faced with many challenging decisions, from how to ask someone on a date to whether or not to have sex. You will not always be there to help them make choices, and so it is important to help your children develop the skills to make good decisions on their own.

Children with ASD tend to make rational, informed decisions based on the literal interpretation of what they know or understand. Often, they prefer things to stay the same, and they therefore resist change. Since decisions often result in change, you may find this to be a challenge for your child.

Weighing the pros and cons of a social situation can be challenging when children cannot accurately interpret what would be appropriate. Decisions are made based on a compilation of values, opinions, and evaluations in a given situation. There may not be a right or wrong decision (in certain instances), which can be difficult for children with ASD to understand.

Helping your child to practice decision-making skills is an ongoing process. There are ways to analyze situations or problems and develop good decision-making skills. Having opportunities to make decisions (whether wise or unwise) helps children learn.



KEY MESSAGES

Decision Making

- ▶ Decision making is a process of making choices.
- ▶ Decision making can be a complex process, especially when dealing with sexuality and relationships.
- ▶ Decision making often requires being flexible and analyzing a particular situation or issue.



Learning How Worksheets

Decision Making Worksheet, page 39

Opportunities to Practice, page 45

Conclusion

Teaching your child with ASD about sexuality may seem overwhelming right now. This Introduction chapter is meant to give you a foundation for how you approach the other topics covered in Charting the Course by understanding sexuality, considering what is important to you, and encouraging the use of effective decision-making skills. The Introduction Learning How Worksheets that follow are meant for you to complete alone to give you hands-on ideas for applying these big concepts to sexuality education with your child.

Take your time when discussing sexuality with your child. You may find that he or she is ready to talk about some of the topics covered in the Charting the Course chapters but not for other issues. You can tailor this resource to fit the needs of your child at this time and come back to topics when ready.



Worksheets

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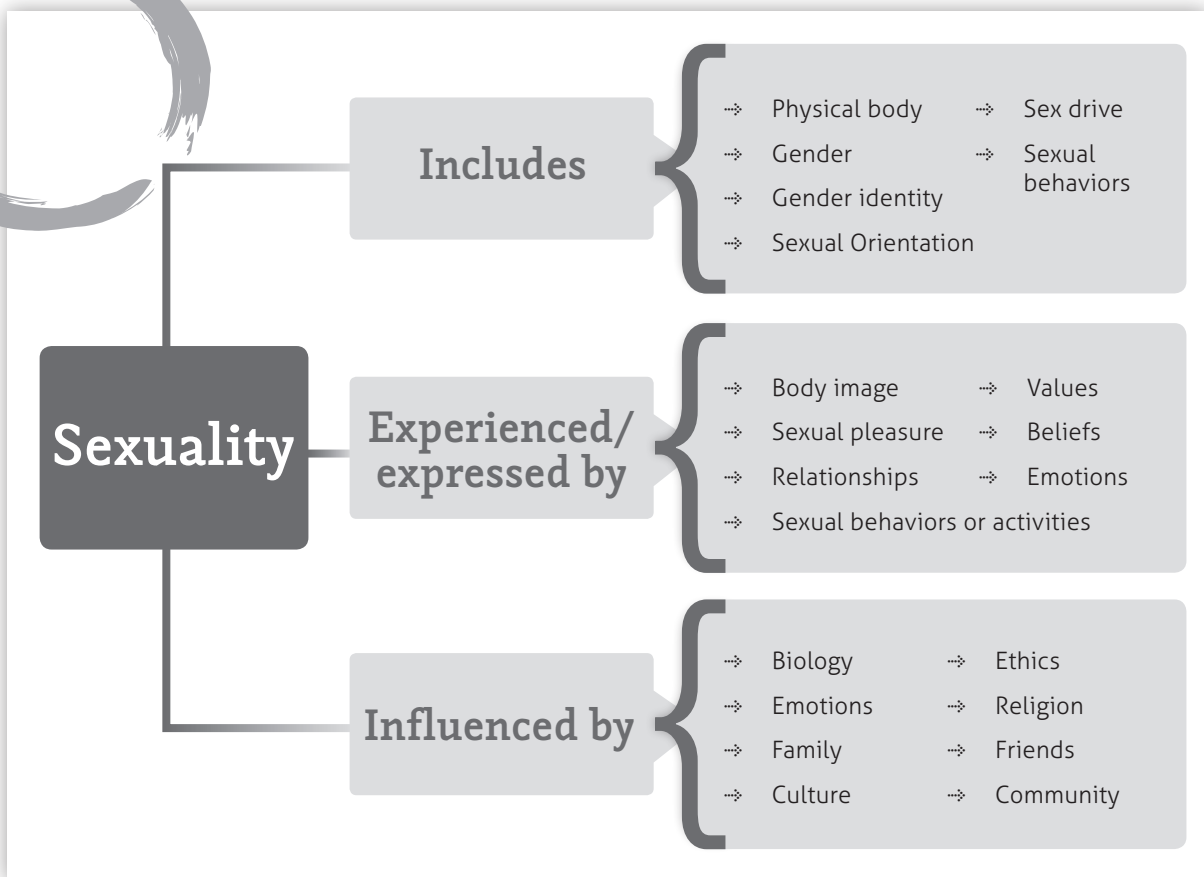


SEXUALITY

What Does Sexuality Mean to Me?

Understanding sexuality is a lifelong process. Sexuality is not just about intercourse or other physical expressions. It's also a multifaceted concept that includes understanding and relating to ourselves and others as sexual people, learning about physical development, sexual behaviors, and sexual health, and understanding gender roles, gender identification, and sexual orientation. Sexuality is experienced by pleasure, images, and emotions. It is also influenced by many factors, such as our values, family, biology, and more.

The purpose of this worksheet is to think broadly about sexuality and its meaning. Consider what sexuality means to you and also what it means for your child with ASD. Use the questions on the back as prompts to think about what a multifaceted definition of sexuality means to you. By reflecting on these questions, it may help you prepare to have future conversations with your child about sexuality. There are no wrong or right answers as you think about your experience of sexuality. For each of the questions on the next page, write your answers in the space provided.



Questions

1. When you thought about sexuality (*before coming to Charting the Course*), what did you think it was?

2. What do you think sexuality is now? Has it changed? Why?

3. In looking at the graphic, what surprises you?

4. What do you wish you knew more about?

5. What do you think are the most important aspects of sexuality?



SEXUALITY

Sexuality and My Child

It can be difficult to think of your child and sexuality. As children grow older, many parents find themselves feeling fear or concern about their child as they begin to mature, and this fear may be even stronger for parents of children with ASD. While children with ASD develop sexually and physically around the same time as peers, their understanding and experience of sexual development is not the same. In this worksheet, we ask you to think about sexuality as it relates to your child with ASD, and we hope you will reflect on how sexuality education can benefit your child. Specifically, we want you to consider what your concerns are as they relate to sexuality, as well as what your hopes or goals

are for using this program, both for yourself as a parent and for your child with ASD.

Use the questions below as prompts to think about how *Charting the Course* can help you with sexuality education. There are many questions, so you can pick and choose to respond to whichever questions are the most relevant to you at this time. Responding to these questions is simply a starting point as you embark on this program. You can also come back to these questions later, if you would like. You can either write your responses in the spaces provided, or you can also talk them through with your partner, spouse, or a close friend.

Questions

1. Why did you initially come to *Charting the Course*?

2. What do you hope to get out of it?

3. Why is sexuality education important for your child with ASD?

4. What fears or worries do you have as your child with ASD gets older?

5. In what ways has your child with ASD begun expressing (whether verbally, behaviorally, or emotionally) his or her sexuality?

6. What are your goals or hopes for your child with ASD as an adult?

7. What are your child's goals?

8. How can sexuality education support these goals?

9. What are your goals for using these materials?

10. How can understanding his or her sexuality positively impact your child?

11. For you and your family, what are the most important aspects of sexuality to teach your child?



SEXUALITY

Parents as Sexuality Educators

As a parent, you are the best person to teach your child about sexuality education. While these materials contain helpful information in approaches you can use to provide sexuality education, you are the key factor in helping them to learn these difficult topics. As a parent, you know your child best. You know how he or she learns best, and you know his or her interests and goals, so you will be able to effectively tailor the materials to your child's needs and strengths. This is especially important as a parent of a child with ASD, as you understand your child's social and communication difficulties and can present information in a way that makes sense to your child. You can also tailor the materials in a way that is consistent with your family's values. Learning about sexuality is not a one-time event.

As a parent, you are a consistent presence in your child's life; therefore, you can find many opportunities to infuse lessons about sexuality into daily life.

In this worksheet, we ask you to think of specific reasons why you are your child's best sexuality educator. These reasons should be specific to you and your child with ASD.

Examples:

- ▶ My child trusts me.
- ▶ I can provide responsible peer mentors.
- ▶ I understand how my child learns.
- ▶ I can teach sexuality in the context of our family values.

Now think of some reasons of your own, and list them on the lines below:



SEXUALITY

Common Concerns About Sexuality Education

Talking about sexuality is daunting for a lot of parents, especially when they are trying to teach their children. Many parents find topics related to sexuality easy to avoid. However, these conversations are an essential part of your child's process of growing up. Remember, you are not alone. Most parents have very real concerns and fears as their children grow up, and many other parents who have come before you

have had to navigate this difficult process. You can learn from the experiences of others to find what works best for you and your child with ASD.

Below are some questions and concerns that parents often have, followed by responses on how to approach these concerns. These can be an excellent resource as you prepare for and continue through the *Charting the Course* program.

Questions and Answers

Question 1

Q *Will talking about sexuality make my child more likely to have/want to have intercourse?*

A Talking about sexuality will prepare your child with accurate information. While talking about these topics will increase awareness of sexuality and sexual behavior, it will also help to keep your child safe by helping him or her to understand appropriate ways to express him or herself and to learn about how others express themselves. Learning about sexuality will help your child know the correct words to use and what behaviors are appropriate in certain contexts. It will also help your child be able to make more informed decisions and know who to talk to about his or her questions or issues.

Question 2

Q *I'm not sure how to teach my child what's appropriate in public versus private.*

A Public and private conversations and behaviors are a big topic for children with ASD. It can help your child learn the difference between these behaviors and conversations if you provide specific examples of what's public versus private in multiple settings. You will want to make public/private situations relatable to your child's life, and you should be clear and specific about appropriate behaviors and conversations in different public and private settings. More on teaching public versus private conversations and behaviors can be found in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Question 3

Q *Will my child be able to have a serious relationship? Will he or she want to?*

A Interest in relationships varies among everyone, whether they have ASD or not. Individuals with ASD may have different ways of expressing themselves or experiencing relationships, but most do want connection with other people. All you can do is support your child, whatever his or her interest level. By providing the tools and information he or she needs to understand sexuality and relationships, you can help him or her develop more comfort in these kinds of relationships if he or she chooses to engage in them.

Question 4

Q *Do I need to teach my child about sexual intercourse?*

A Children with ASD develop sexually and physically the same as their peers. Most individuals do have interest in expressing themselves sexually, either by themselves or with another person. Therefore, it is very important that you teach your child about sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviors so that they are able to handle their feelings and behaviors appropriately.

Question 5

Q *I'm worried my child won't want to listen or talk to me.*

A It is common for children not to want to talk to parents about this stuff, and children with ASD are no different. If your child refuses to talk to you about sex, help your child to identify trusted individuals in his or her life who they can talk to. This could be a family friend, an aunt or uncle, or your spouse or partner. By having someone you are close to be here for your child, you can make sure they are getting the information and support they need. Also, you should continue to give your child opportunities to learn from you. Make sure your child knows that, even though he or she may not feel comfortable coming to you at this time, you will continue to be there for him or her.

Question 6

Q *I'm embarrassed (or my child is embarrassed) to talk about sexuality with each other.*

A This feeling is totally normal. Just be honest—if you feel uncomfortable, let your child know how you feel. Also, if you notice your child is feeling embarrassed, let him or her speak and listen to how he or she feels. Try to remain open, and look for natural opportunities to talk about why sexuality education is important and how it can help your child be a healthy and responsible adult.



VALUES

Journal Activities

Before teaching your child with ASD about your family values, it is important for you to understand your values well to feel comfortable with explaining and demonstrating them (in concrete ways) to your child. The concept of values and that different families may have their own sets of values are abstract ideas that can be challenging for your child with ASD to understand. In particular, values related to sexuality may not be explicitly defined, but you tend to have ideas of what is appropriate sexual behavior and what is inappropriate. Because these values related to sexuality are often not concretely explained, it can be difficult for your child to understand them.



Values are ideas or strong beliefs that are built on experiences, culture, religion, and life views. Values help us to determine what is important and what is not; what is good and what is bad; and what is right and what is wrong. For more information on values, flip back to page 7.

Most families already have a clear set of values and know what is important to them, but you may not have formally thought about them before. This series of journaling activities calls for you to consider the values you already have, especially as they relate to sexuality and relationships. The activities will also ask you to consider how you can make these topics more concrete and, therefore, more easily understood by your child with ASD.

By framing what your values are and how you can talk to your child with ASD about your values, this journaling activity can help you prepare for conversations with your child about sex and relationships.

Below are a few ways of reflecting on the values that may be important to you and your family. You can also use the “List of Family Values” handout on page 31 to help you identify specific values. As you move through the journal activities, you can write down your thoughts on your family values and how you will share them with your child with ASD.



VALUES

Journaling Topic 1:

What is Important to You and Your Family?

To help you write about your values, think about what is important to you. Think broadly about your expectations of your child with ASD, and consider the following questions:

- ▶ What kinds of behaviors do you approve of for your child with ASD?
- ▶ What kinds of expectations do you have for your child with ASD?
- ▶ What kinds of behaviors do you want your child with ASD not to engage in?
- ▶ How will you talk to your child with ASD about your expectations?

A large rectangular area with a light gray border and rounded corners, containing 25 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.



VALUES

Journaling Topic 2:

How Do Your Values Relate to Sexuality?

It will be helpful for you to consider how your values relate to the information you will share with your child in the Charting the Course program. After identifying what is important to you, you may want to think about how you can use these perspectives when interacting about this content with your child. While these questions may be difficult to answer, they may also help you to effectively communicate your values to your child with ASD.

- ▶ How would you feel if your child with ASD wanted to be friends with someone of the opposite sex? How would you explain to your child that being friends with people of the opposite sex may be different than being friends with people of the same sex?
- ▶ If your child with ASD was spending a lot of time with someone he or she seemed romantically interested in, what behaviors would you think are appropriate (e.g., hand holding, kissing)? What would you say to your child to let him or her know your expectations?
- ▶ How would you feel if your child with ASD wanted information on contraception? What information will be important for your child to know about contraception?
- ▶ What would you say to your child if he or she showed interest in having intercourse before marriage?

A large rectangular area with a light gray border and rounded corners, containing 25 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.



VALUES

Journaling Topic 3:

How Are You a Role Model?

As a parent, you are a natural role model for your child with ASD. For this journal topic, list examples of how you demonstrate your family values to your child. You can identify what you have done in the past to illustrate your values, and you can also come up with new ideas on how to demonstrate ways that your child can behave that are in agreement with your family's values.

- ▶ Read your early journal entries, and list what values come through as being important to you.
- ▶ For each important value, write down one or two ideas of things you can do to demonstrate that value.
- ▶ Your child may also pay attention to how you behave. While children with ASD may not pick up on social cues, it is still important for you to act in ways that you want your child to act. Consider how you and your child interact and what he or she may learn from your behavior.

Examples:

- ▶ If honesty is a value you want to teach, think of a time from your past when you were not as honest in a situation as you could have been. Explain how honesty, while it may have been hard, may have improved the outcome of the situation.
- ▶ Take the opportunity to use television shows, news stories, or interactions you witness as a way to highlight a particular value. From these real-life examples, you can help your child understand how you may or may not want him or her to respond in a situation.
- ▶ You can demonstrate your values in many different ways. It may be as simple as holding the door open for someone as a way to display courtesy. Ask your child to do the same and explain why this action is important to you.

A large rectangular area with a light gray border and rounded corners, containing 25 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.



VALUES

List of Family Values Handout

It can sometimes be difficult to pinpoint the exact words that describe your family values. To help you clearly identify your values, this worksheet lists some common examples of values that families may share. Circle the values

that are important to your family. If you think of any values that are not listed, you can write them in the lines at the bottom. While this is not a comprehensive list, it can be a good starting point for you to consider your values.

Accountability	Drive	Joy	Purpose
Achievement	Empowerment	Kindness	Reaching out
Ambition	Encouragement	Knowledge	Resourcefulness
Appreciation	Endurance	Laughter	Respect
Belief in yourself	Excellence	Leadership	Respect of elders
Belonging	Fairness	Learning	Responsibility
Boundaries	Faith	Listening	Right choices
Caring	Flexibility	Living life	Rising above
Character	Foresight	Living your dreams	Sacrifice
Charity	Forgiveness	Love	Safety
Class and grace	Friendship	Loyalty	Self-control
Cohesion	Generosity	Making a difference	Selflessness
Commitment	Giving back	Mentoring	Service
Common ground	Good manners	Motivation	Sharing
Communication	Gratitude	Obedience	Smile
Compassion	Hard work	Order	Soul
Compliments	Helping others	Openness	Spirituality
Confidence	Honesty	Opportunity	Sportsmanship
Conviction	Honor	Optimism	Stewardship
Cooperation	Hope	Overcoming	Strength
Courage	Humility	Passion	Teamwork
Courtesy	Including others	Patience	Traditions
Curiosity	Individuality	Peace	Trust
Dedication	Ingenuity	Perseverance	Uniqueness
Determination	Initiative	Persistence	Unity
Devotion	Innovation	Personal liberty	Vision
Discipline	Inspiration	Practice	Volunteering
Doing your part	Integrity	Preparation	Wisdom

Feel free to also list other values on the lines below:



VALUES

Demonstrating Values in Everyday Experiences Handout

It can sometimes be challenging for parents to find opportunities to begin conversations with their children about values. A good way to start these conversations in a natural way is to find teachable moments in daily life. By using real-life situations, you can help your child learn about family values in a familiar context, which can help both you and your child feel more comfortable talking about difficult topics. Here are a few examples of teachable moments that you can use to begin discussions about family values.

Music

Music is a natural part of our lives, whether it is playing on the car radio or blaring into your child's headphones from an MP3 player. By listening closely, you can find good opportunities to use that music to begin discussions on values.

- ▶ *Creating the opportunity:* There are many times when you and your child can be around music at the same time. You can suggest that your child choose the radio station when you are in the car, or you can pay attention to music in the background when at the mall or watching television.
- ▶ *Approaching the conversation:* Listen to the lyrics of the song for conversations that relate to your values. Pay attention for examples of the values you want to instill as well as the ones you don't. While one song may have lyrics about sex with multiple partners, another may demonstrate honesty or positive sexual behaviors, such as welcomed affection or intimacy.
- ▶ *Applying it to your child:* Each child is different, and every parent has a different relationship with his or her child. Consider your relationship with your child, as well as your opportunities to use music to create conversations with your child:
 1. When do you spend time with you child, and what are you doing during those times? Are you ever around music together?
 2. What kinds of music does your child listen to?
 3. What topics do you think would commonly be raised in your child's music?
 4. How would you use a lyric to start conversations about important values?

For example, in the song below, you could easily bring up topics related to values of being kind to others, not saying mean words:

"Mean" by Taylor Swift

You, with your words like knives and swords and weapons that you use against me

You have knocked me off my feet again got me feeling like I'm nothing

You, with your voice like nails on a chalkboard, calling me out when I'm wounded

You, pickin' on the weaker man

A large rectangular area with a light gray border and rounded corners, containing 25 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.



VALUES

Movies, Television, and Video Games

Many of the shows, movies, and video games children watch or play will cover topics related to morals and values. Try to find an opportunity to be in front of the TV at the same time as your child with ASD or sit down with him or her while he or she is playing a video or computer game.

- ▶ ***Creating the opportunity:*** Consider finding a show you can watch together or maybe stop to see what they are watching on their own. When it comes to movies, you can take the time to watch a movie that they are interested in. For children interested in computer or video games, ask them to help you understand the story behind the game or ask if you can watch them play.
- ▶ ***Approaching the conversation:*** Pay attention to the plot of the show, game, or movie and look for storylines that demonstrate values that are important to you. For example, if your child is watching a show with a pregnant teenager, take the opportunity to discuss how your child feels about teen pregnancy and share your values about safe sex, abstinence, and how to handle an unexpected pregnancy, if it occurs. For video games, it may be important to check the rating. Some games have mature sexual and violent themes as part of the game. You may want to use the rating system as a way to talk to your child about what you feel is appropriate based on your family values.
- ▶ ***Applying it to your child:*** While most children watch both movies and television, everyone has different interests. By paying attention to the shows that your child is watching or the games he or she is playing, you can be conscious of what he or she is learning as well as use the topics to begin conversations with your child. Consider the following questions:
 1. What are your child's favorite shows and movies? Who are the main characters, and what is the main idea of the show?
 2. What are your child's favorite video or computer games? What is the theme of the game?
 3. What kinds of situations do you expect the characters in the show, video game, or movie to encounter? How can these situations relate to topics you may want to discuss with your child?
 4. How would your child feel about you watching a movie or television show together? If your child is uncomfortable watching together, would you be able to watch the show without your child and talk about it later?

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VALUES

Social Experiences

Observing other people is a great way to help teach your child with ASD about values and social interactions. Whether you are observing others in a grocery store or walking down the street, the people around you provide great opportunities to begin conversations about values, relationships, and sexual behaviors.

- ▶ *Creating the opportunity:* Find opportunities to be out in public with your child. Bring your child to the grocery store with you or offer to take him or her to the mall for a quick shopping trip. When you are out with your child, pay attention to the people around you. Look for other children engaging in behaviors that reflect values that you may or may not want your child to engage in.
- ▶ *Approaching the conversation:* Some children with ASD may not notice what other people are doing. To use social experiences to talk to your child, you will have to clearly point out other people engaging in the behaviors you are trying to discuss. If you are out with your child and you notice two people kissing on a park bench, stop for a moment and tell your child to look over at the couple on the bench. You can then explain to your child that they are kissing and sharing an intimate moment. Next, you can use this as an opportunity to ask your child what he or she thinks about intimate relationships. This can transition easily into a conversation about affection, intimacy, and public versus private behaviors. You can infuse this with your ideas and values about appropriate and inappropriate intimate behaviors.
- ▶ *Applying it to your child:* Think about the places you go with your child and the kinds of people you see there. Consider these situations when trying to begin conversations about values:
 1. What places do you visit with your child?
 2. What kinds of people do you encounter when you are out with your child?
 3. What kinds of behavior do people engage in when in public places, and how can these behaviors help transition into conversations about values?

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DECISION MAKING

Decision Making Worksheet

Making good decisions is not always easy to do. It takes time and practice to develop decision-making skills. All children can benefit from practicing these skills, and you can be an excellent resource for your child with ASD as he or she learns to navigate simple and complex decisions.

In addition to being there to guide your child, it can also be helpful to provide your child with a structured resource to help him or her to make

informed decisions. DECIDE is a tool that your child can use to help him or her make his or her own decisions. DECIDE can be useful for making any decision, whether big or small. Since decision making is such a huge part of sexuality, this tool will come in very useful for your child when he or she is placed in a difficult situation where a decision needs to be made. A template that can be copied can be found on page 43.

Basics of DECIDE:

D Define the Choice	What are the options? What is the problem?
E Examine the Choices	What are the positives and negatives of each option? What do you know about each option? How would you and others be affected by your choice/decision?
C Choose Your Option	Choose what seems best to you.
I Imagine Your Choice in Action	Make a plan. How will you move forward with your choice? How will it happen? Will you need help? From whom?
D Do It	Act on your choice.
E Evaluate Your Choice	How did it go? Were you happy with the results? What could have changed? What would you go back and change if you could?

*DECIDE tool from Be Right Back: Time to Decide. Baker, C, Brockmann, L, & Tercha, J. (2009). Danya International.



DECISION MAKING

DECIDE Example

Imagine your child was faced with the decision of whether or not they were going to attend a community picnic. Below is an example of how your child could use the DECIDE template to weigh his or her options.

1. **Define the choice:**

- ▶ Go to the picnic
- ▶ Don't go to the picnic

2. **Examine the options:** What are the positives and negatives of each option?

	Pro	Con
Option 1: Go to the picnic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I can see people from school.▶ I can be at my favorite park.▶ I can be outside.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I'm not sure what to talk to people about.▶ A lot of people will be there.▶ I won't like the food options.
Option 2: Don't go to the picnic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I can avoid being around a lot of people.▶ I can be comfortable at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I won't get to see people.▶ I won't have any plans.

3. **Choose an option:** Go to the picnic.

4. **Imagine your choice in action:**

- ▶ Brainstorm and practice topics to talk about with people (and specific people maybe to talk to).
- ▶ Go over appropriate behaviors and conversations for the community picnic.
- ▶ Bring my own food, which I know I will like.
- ▶ If I get overwhelmed, I will take a walk.

5. **Do it:** Practice conversations, write down appropriate social rules for picnic, make food to take, and then go to the picnic.

6. **Evaluate your choice:**

- ▶ I talked to two people.
- ▶ I ate the food I brought.
- ▶ I took some time for a walk.
- ▶ I left when I wanted to leave.



DECISION MAKING

DECIDE Template

1. **Define the choice:** What are the options? What is the problem? What's going on?

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

2. **Examine the options:** What are the positives and negatives of each option? What do you know about each option? How would you and others be affected by your choice/decision?

	Pro	Con
Option 1:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Option 2:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Option 3:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Option 4:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

3. **Choose an option:** Choose what seems best to you.
4. **Imagine your choice in action:** Make a plan. How will you move forward with your choice? How will it happen? Will you need help? From whom?

Two large rectangular boxes with rounded corners and a light gray border. Each box contains five horizontal lines for writing, providing space for the student to complete steps 3 and 4 of the process.

5. **Do it:** Act on your choice.
6. **Evaluate your choice:** How did it go? Were you happy with the results? What could have changed? What would you go back and change if you could?

A large rectangular box with rounded corners and a light gray border. It contains ten horizontal lines for writing, providing space for the student to complete steps 5 and 6 of the process.



DECISION MAKING

Opportunities to Practice

Practicing to make good decisions is a skill that is best practiced in everyday life. Opportunities present themselves all the time. Some of these decisions are big, and some of them are small.

When beginning to support your child with ASD with decision making, it is often best to begin with easier, nonsexuality-related decisions at first. A good way to promote your child to learn these skills is to have him or her use the DECIDE worksheet. You can incorporate DECIDE into more and more decisions as your child becomes more familiar to the process and it becomes more second nature.

All children must learn how to make positive decisions for themselves. Decisions are not always black and white, although it can be easy to take decisions and decision-making tools very literally. For children with ASD, it is often helpful to remind them that decision making is a process. Often, there is not a "right" answer, but they need to find an answer that is best for them.

When helping your child make a decision, encourage flexibility and seeing different options, which DECIDE will help with. This handout will give ideas of incorporating DECIDE into daily life and giving your child opportunities to practice them. For each of these, print out a DECIDE template. At first, you can use DECIDE together by filling out the template and evaluating it together. Then, you can give your child opportunities to do it on his or her own.

Suggestions of decisions to practice:

1. What to bring for lunch
2. What to wear to school
3. Participating in an afterschool activity
4. Studying versus watching a movie
5. Attending an activity with the family

Do you have any ideas of other everyday decisions your child can practice using DECIDE? Share in the space below.

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1

Puberty

CHAPTER

The process of puberty is a key developmental activity during the adolescent years. Puberty is certainly anything but simple; yet basically, puberty is a time when the sexual and reproductive organs of individuals mature. Preparing to become an adult also involves many physical, emotional, social, and mental shifts and changes.

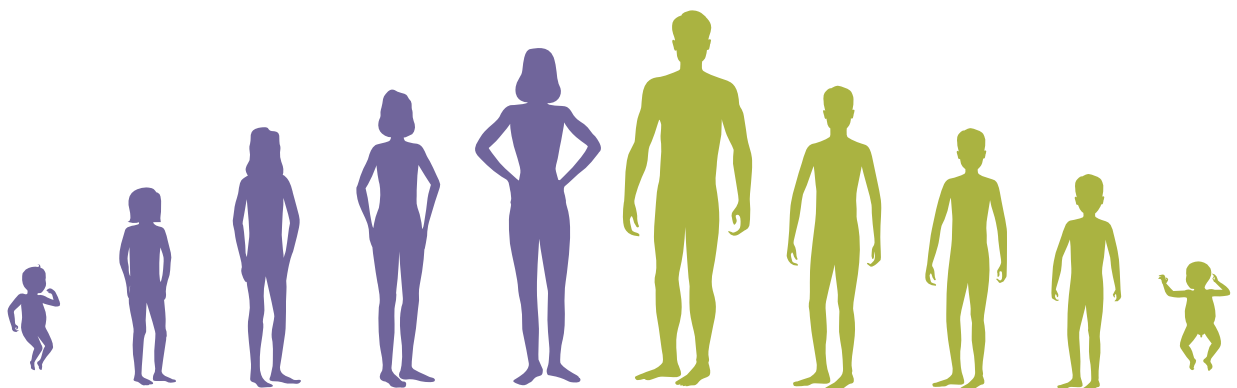
Puberty may feel daunting, whether you are a parent or a child. All parents have moments when they worry about how their child will navigate these changes and become a healthy adult. Your child with ASD is a child, first and foremost. He or she will go through puberty and all of the adolescent changes much like their peers. As a parent, you and your child will work together to understand, manage, and hopefully thrive during adolescence. There are many ways to support, encourage, and prepare children with ASD to tackle the excitement and challenges that puberty and

adolescence may bring. The following chapter, handouts, activities (and Web site) can be a guide to help you and your child navigate these next years in the best way for your child.



KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Children with ASD develop and mature physically at the same time as their peers.
- ▶ Children with ASD should understand and prepare for the physical and emotional changes of puberty.



Reproductive Maturity

Before puberty, an individual's genital and sexual organs are not completely developed. As a result, the reproductive system does not function (unlike the respiratory system or nervous system, for example). Hormones, chemical substances secreted by different glands in the body, start the process of puberty and reproductive maturity. While your child continues to grow and mature throughout adolescence, from the moment sperm is created and ejaculated or menstruation starts, your child can reproduce.

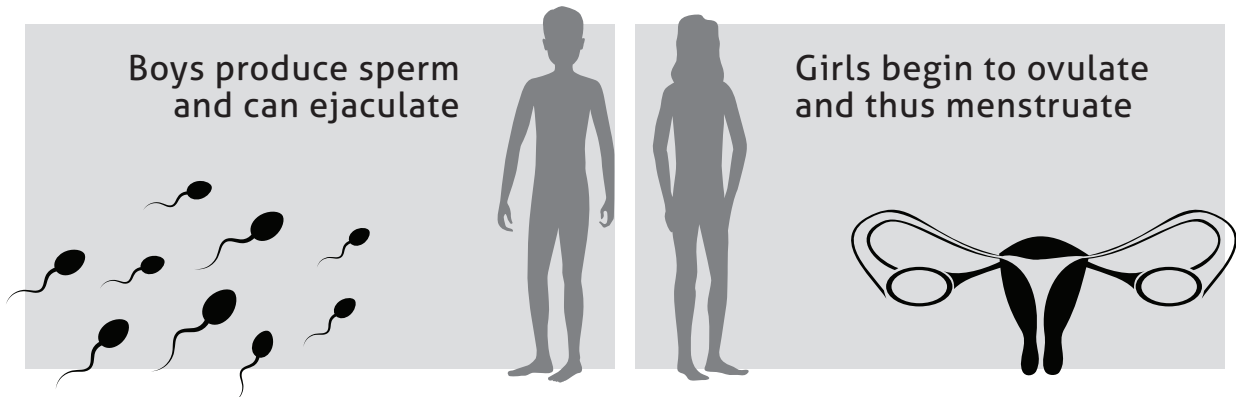
Boys and girls become reproductively mature when:



KEY MESSAGES

Reproductive Maturity

- ▶ When a girl starts to menstruate, she is able to reproduce.
- ▶ When a boy creates sperm and ejaculates, he is able to reproduce.
- ▶ Preparation, early and often, supports boys and girls in learning about their body.
- ▶ Public versus private behaviors and conversations become an important lesson to practice.




Physically, children with ASD generally develop and mature at the same age and rate as their peers. There are a lot of physical changes that happen, some that start even before the first menstrual period or ejaculation (see the next section, page 51). For your child with ASD, preparation, both early and often, is one of the key ways to help him or her understand what is happening when he or she experiences the first period or wet dream. Understanding what to expect, why it is happening, what to do about it, and who to talk to (at the appropriate time and place) are all ways to prepare your child for the responsibility of becoming reproductively mature.

For girls, when a mature egg is released (ovulation) and does not implant in the uterus (no pregnancy), the lining of the uterus is shed. A girl's first period (menarche) may start any time between the ages of 10 and 14. When she starts menstruating (getting her period), sometimes the period comes in irregular or hard-to-predict cycles. Eventually, her menstrual cycle will establish a pattern that she can get to know.

Menstruation is a normal and healthy function of the female body; although you may not know when the first period may start, it's easy to prepare early and often in anticipation of this milestone. For your daughter with ASD, knowing what to expect, including possible sensations (sight of blood, cramps, feel of a pad) and what to do when the period happens, are ways to feel more in control and comfortable with this new change. There are accessible steps to helping your daughter track and manage her period, maintain good hygiene, and practice what conversations and behaviors, related to her period, are appropriate in public versus private settings.


For boys, hormones in the brain tell his testicles to start producing more testosterone (the male sex hormone). Testosterone tells the testicles to grow and mature, and to begin producing sperm and semen. Semen leaves the body (with millions of sperm) in an ejaculation. Very often, a boy's first ejaculation is while he is sleeping, called a wet dream or nocturnal emission. While a boy experiences erections as a normal, healthy function of the penis throughout his life, during puberty, he starts having them more frequently. Upon the first ejaculation from the penis, he is capable of reproducing.

Like girls, for boys with ASD, preparing for ejaculation, wet dreams, and erections (often spontaneous) is key. Knowing what sensations to expect, why ejaculation happens, and what to do after experiencing a wet dream are all important topics. Giving him tools to learn about his body and how to manage it appropriately can help him feel more comfortable and healthy.



Game

Pier Game



Learning How Worksheets

Ejaculation and Nocturnal Emissions, page 59

Explaining and Preparing for a Menstrual Cycle, page 73

Secondary Sexual Characteristics

Even before boys start to produce sperm or girls start to menstruate, they may notice that their bodies are starting to change. As puberty begins and hormones from the brain are transmitting messages to the body, these hormones begin to influence development in the body. These physical changes that occur during puberty are called secondary sexual characteristics.

Everyone's body is unique, and the changes that happen during puberty will also be unique to your son or daughter. Boys and girls experience a variety of physical changes as they develop secondary sexual characteristics, and some are gender-specific and others are not. There are a lot of changes during puberty! All of the changes are preparing your child to become an adult.



Secondary Sexual Characteristics:

physical changes (besides the maturing of the reproductive system) that occur in the body during puberty.

- Some of the secondary sexual characteristics that are common in boys and girls are:
- ▶ Growth spurt
 - ▶ Weight gain
 - ▶ Facial changes
 - ▶ Deepening of voice
 - ▶ Body hair (underarms, pubic hair)
 - ▶ Skin changes
 - ▶ Sweat gland changes

There are also secondary sexual characteristics that are specific to boys versus girls. For example, for boys, the appearance of the penis and scrotum will change and mature, facial hair will begin to grow, their Adam's apple will enlarge, and muscle mass will increase. For girls, their breasts develop, hips widen, and the appearance of the external sexual organs (like the labia) matures.

There are many reasons to help your child understand the changes in his or her body. First, it can help your child feel less embarrassed, more comfortable, and develop more respect for his or her body. Your child can also learn about the process of puberty and feel prepared for the changes ahead as he or she can learn how males and females are alike and different. At the same time, any change can be difficult for your child. Children with ASD have some specific challenges related to their maturing bodies.

For example:

- ▶ The unpredictability and change that puberty brings on can create feelings of anxiety, discomfort, and behavioral reactions.
- ▶ With all of the change and newness, children "say" how they are feeling through their behaviors. They may act out more or withdraw into themselves.
- ▶ A changing body brings with it new sensations. For your child, whether he or she is hyper- or hyposensitive to certain sensations, secondary sexual characteristics may create additional discomfort for him or her.
- ▶ Secondary sexual characteristics also have a social impact, influencing relationships and interactions. For your child, not seeing the social impact of poor hygiene or taking responsibility for a more adult body also impacts him or her socially.

KEY MESSAGES

Secondary Sexual Characteristics

- ▶ The unpredictability and changes that come with developing secondary sexual characteristics can be uncomfortable.
- ▶ Both boys' and girls' bodies will change during puberty, in different ways.
- ▶ Changes to the body may heighten certain sensory sensitivities.

It can sometimes be easier to explain to teens *WHAT* will happen during puberty and the physical changes. Facts may be easy to memorize and are more black and white. The gray area, an equally important aspect for children with ASD, is the *WHY*. Why these changes are happening and why they are important to your child can provide context. Some of the reasons why understanding these changes are important to your child may be:

- ▶ To be more comfortable with his or her body
- ▶ To know what to expect before and while changes are happening
- ▶ To prepare ahead of time for changes, as much as possible
- ▶ To know it's okay to ask questions and, perhaps, the types of questions he or she may have
- ▶ To relate these changes back to his or her life and how he or she might be impacted
- ▶ To understand that secondary sexual characteristics are another step to becoming an adult
- ▶ To take responsibility for his or her more developed body
- ▶ To take care of his or her hygiene, and physical and emotional health
- ▶ To relate to peers by noticing the changes happening to the people around him or her


Sensory sensitivities can make the physical changes during puberty more uncomfortable for your child. For example, children with ASD may be hypersensitive to:

- ▶ The feeling of pubic hair
- ▶ The feel of an erection
- ▶ The smell of body odor
- ▶ The feel of wearing a sanitary pad
- ▶ Wearing a bra

In addition to hypersensitivity, your child may be hyposensitive to some senses. For example, he or she may not notice:


- ▶ His or her body odor
- ▶ When he or she needs to use the bathroom
- ▶ When he or she needs to change a pad or tampon

Every child with ASD is unique and will react to the changes that come with puberty in different ways. Depending on the sensitivities your child experiences, you can guide him or her in understanding his or her secondary sexual characteristics and brainstorm ways, together, to address specific areas of sensitivity. By helping him or her become aware of the changes his or her body is going through, he or she can learn what to expect and how to care for his or her body in the most appropriate way—for *him or her*.



**BOARDWALK
ADVENTURE** Game

Scavenger Hunt game



Learning How Worksheets

Preparing for Physical Body Changes, page 91

Sensory Sensitivities, page 93

Hygiene

A big topic of conversation among parents of adolescents with ASD is usually hygiene. How do I get my son to remember to wash all of his body parts in the shower? What can I do so she puts on new clothes? How do I teach him to notice to put on deodorant? Taking care of yourself and your body is part routine, part social convention, part personal preference. Your child may not notice or care to participate in his own hygiene routine; yet being able to take care of himself, especially as his body continues to develop into one of an adult, is a skill that he needs.



KEY MESSAGES

Hygiene

- ▶ Hygiene is about taking good care of your body.
- ▶ Hygiene impacts relationships with others.
- ▶ There are ways to make a hygiene routine unique to the individual (and certain sensitivities).

Hygiene is a responsibility and a routine that keeps your whole body clean and healthy. Hygiene is about:

- ▶ Smelling clean (e.g., wearing deodorant)
- ▶ Wearing clean clothes and socks
- ▶ Washing your body and hair regularly
- ▶ Brushing and flossing your teeth
- ▶ Eating healthy
- ▶ Sleeping well (8—10 hours a day)

As part of becoming an adult, your child needs to be responsible for taking care of his or her body.

Personal hygiene is an important part of being an adult and functioning well socially, physically, and emotionally in the world. It is

also a necessity as the body is changing in new ways that often require new and improved hygiene routines. For example, as sweat glands become more active, bacteria on the skin can cause an odor—necessitating showers and deodorant. Taking charge of personal hygiene helps to develop independence as well as learning more about (and paying more attention to) his or her body. It's also important for good health and making and keeping friends.

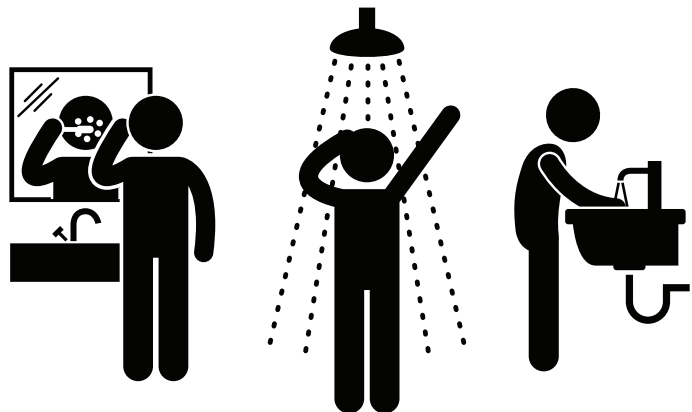
Yet, parents of children with ASD notice that their son or daughter may not have any interest or awareness of their hygiene or that of others. Sometimes it takes noticing a boy at school to want to start taking a daily shower, or sometimes it takes lots and lots of practice with a very specific hygiene routine. While it may take prompting from you and other adults in his or her life, your teen can develop positive and healthy hygiene habits.

Together, you can create a routine that works for your child. A basic, healthy, and responsible hygiene routine might include:

Sleep—Getting enough sleep each night

Eating—Eating and drinking foods that are good for you and maintain high energy

Washing—Developing a shower or bath routine to keep the whole body and hair clean




Smell—Wearing deodorant

Dress and appearance—Wearing appropriate and clean clothes; shaving, getting haircuts, keeping nails clean, and/or deciding to wear makeup

Brushing—Brushing teeth regularly; brushing and maintaining hair


Exercise—Finding physical activities to keep the body healthy and maintain an agreeable mood

If your child is having trouble following a hygiene routine, consider whether he or she is hypo- or hypersensitive to certain textures, touch, or smell. If this is the case, certain aspects of the routine may be physically uncomfortable, like the spray from the shower on his or her head, or the texture of soap products on his or her skin. Other times, simply starting and maintaining a new routine can be difficult and takes time and practice. More so, some children need help to purposefully break down a hygiene routine into specific, manageable steps with added visuals (e.g., checklists, picture schedule), which can be hung in the bathroom and/or bedroom. As you work together to practice and refine a hygiene routine that works, you can modify the routine and find products that are the most comfortable for your child.



Game

- Initial Bathroom game
- Scavenger Hunt game
- Home game



Learning How Worksheets

- Establishing and Personalizing Hygiene Routines, page 103
- Sensitivities and Hygiene, page 109

Emotional Changes

During puberty, just as physical changes are happening in your teen's body, there are also emotional changes occurring. Having a changing body, dealing with new social pressures, and adjusting to these changes every day can have an impact on how your child feels. It can be uncomfortable, even stressful, to manage all of these changes, and hormones play a big role in the intensity and range of your child's emotions.

As emotions intensify, he or she can even swing quickly from feeling cheerful and confident to feeling sad and uncertain the next moment. While emotions tend to balance out after puberty, in the meantime, know that just as body changes happen to all children as they go through puberty, emotional changes, too, are a normal and healthy part of development. Yet, just as body changes may be difficult or confusing at times, so might your child's emotions.

For most children with ASD, recognizing how they are feeling, understanding how they are feeling, and communicating how they are feeling are very real challenges. By adding more intense feelings and mood swings, children with ASD can be easily overwhelmed. A lot of children (with or without ASD) are unable to express how they are feeling and thus act out more or withdraw more into themselves. Without the words to communicate how they are feeling, your children may use behaviors to do the talking, which can lead to frustration, sadness, or anxiety.

Help your child to know that how he or she feels is perfectly normal (and probably similar to how peers are feeling). Feeling angry, sad, or really happy is all part of a healthy human experience. During puberty and the adolescent years, emotions may intensify and shift quickly; preparing your child for this possibility can help him or her. There are also many healthy ways to cope with and express emotions. Working with your child to find what works for him or her, whether it is exercise, quiet time, or taking a deep breath, can help your child feel more in control.



KEY MESSAGES

Emotional Changes

- ▶ Just as hormones influence how the body changes, hormones also influence emotional changes.
- ▶ Intense, swinging emotions are common.
- ▶ There are many ways to recognize, cope, and talk about emotions.



Learning How Worksheets

Explaining Emotional Changes, page 111

Recognizing Emotions, page 113

Conclusion

Whether your child is just starting puberty or is in the middle of adolescence, this time can feel daunting and full of new challenges. Children with ASD are children first, and they develop in similar ways to their peers, related to reproductive and physical maturity.

Given the range of ASD symptoms, teaching and practicing skills related to puberty can and should be tailored to each child with ASD. The following section of handouts and activities (and also the Web site) provides how to do this with your child.



Worksheets

1

CHAPTER

REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

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REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Ejaculation and Nocturnal Emissions

What is ejaculation?

Sometimes, following an erection, semen can leave the body through the erect penis. This event is known as *ejaculation*. A teen's first ejaculation often happens in his sleep, but it can also occur through masturbation (or self-stimulation). Explain to your son that as his body is developing, he is becoming reproductively mature. Ejaculation during puberty is a sign a boy is growing up with the ability to now conceive a baby if he chooses to have intercourse with a female (For more information on intercourse, refer to Chapter 3.).

What are nocturnal emissions?

Ejaculation that happens while sleeping is referred to as a *nocturnal emission* (sometimes referred to as a wet dream). When your son wakes up in the morning, he may find a small wet spot on his underwear or bed sheets. Nocturnal emissions are due to the higher levels of testosterone as your son's body matures. Let your son know that many boys going through puberty may have around 2–3 nocturnal emissions a week. Remind him that ejaculation and nocturnal emissions are normal occurrences for all boys his age.

When your son experiences a nocturnal emission, chances are he may feel embarrassed about having it. He might also be unaware of what his body is experiencing.

- ▶ Make it clear to your son that ejaculation is different from urinating, as this can relieve some anxiety for your teen who may think that he is wetting the bed.
- ▶ Be sure your son knows that he is not in trouble when he has a nocturnal emission and reassure him that it is part of a healthy process of growing up. As with spontaneous erections, reassure your teen that nocturnal emissions tend to happen less often after this stage of puberty.
- ▶ Encourage talking about nocturnal emissions and keep an eye out for signs that they might be happening (bed sheets in the wash, more difficult time going to bed) since your son may not tell you his bed is wet out of embarrassment.





REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Creating a Plan for Nocturnal Emissions

Create a plan


A good way to prepare your son for nocturnal emissions (or wet dreams) is to create a plan together before it happens. Use the checklist and the narrative below (accompanied by visuals) as a guide.

Wet Dreams Kit

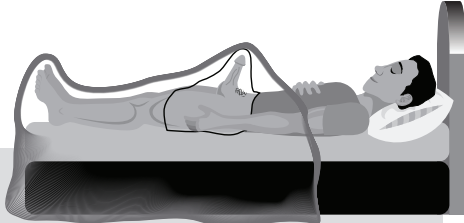
- ▶ Tissues/cloth/soft paper towels
- ▶ Clean PJs
- ▶ Clean bed sheets
- ▶ Trash can

Narrative: Wet Dreams


Sometimes, I might have a sexual dream when I sleep, or I might not even remember my dream at all.




When I'm sleeping in my bed, I could get an erection and ejaculate. This is when sperm comes out of my penis. I don't have control over this when I am asleep, but that's okay because this doesn't hurt. It happens to boys my age during puberty.



Sometimes, I will wake up and my pajamas and sheets are a little sticky and wet. This is called a wet dream (or nocturnal emission). It's normal and healthy. This is different from wetting the bed, and I did not do anything wrong.



When I have a wet dream, I should always use a tissue to wipe my penis after I wake up. I should also wipe off other places on my body where it is wet.





Then I throw away the tissues I just used into the trash can.

Next, I need to change into a clean pair of pajamas. I will feel much more comfortable wearing dry pajamas.



After changing my pajamas and sheets, I should put them into the dirty laundry basket to be washed.



Afterward, I need to change my sheets and place new ones on my bed. I can ask my parents for help if I need to.



Now I need to wash my hands with soap.



Checklist for Plan

Feel free to customize accordingly when discussing the plan with your son.

- Wipe off self with tissues where wet
- Wipe off other parts of my body where wet
- Change pajamas and bed sheets
- Put on clean pajamas and bed sheets
- Put dirty pajamas and bed sheets into the laundry
- Wash hands

Although your son may feel embarrassed about having nocturnal emissions, help him understand that you are available to answer any questions he might have about them. It may take some time for your son to get used to the routine. However, once your child understands this routine and can do it consistently, teach him that it is okay not to always tell you about his nocturnal emissions but to handle the procedure independently. You may use this time to teach

him how to do laundry on his own if he wants to maintain privacy.

Also, if your son has more questions or needs someone besides you to talk to about nocturnal emissions, problem-solve with your son to determine who would be the best person (e.g., brother). Explain it to your son as an opportunity to talk to someone he trusts about his experience and routine when they have nocturnal emissions, too.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Erections

What is ejaculation?

When a male is aroused by a pleasurable thought or touch, the penis fills with blood, hardens, and becomes longer as it stands away from the body. This process is known as an erection. When having an erection, your son may experience some tightness, a tingly sensation, and some pressure against his pants or underwear.

While your son may feel insecure and frustrated about these changes, it is important to reassure him that getting erections are normal and healthy.

When will an erection happen?

For your son, erections will occur more frequently as he goes through puberty, sometimes even for no reason. These spontaneous erections may happen when your son wakes up in the morning, while sleeping, or when his bladder is full. They can also occur during other times, such as when he is at school or in public. You can reassure him

that as he gets older, his erections will become less spontaneous. For now, these unplanned erections may cause stress for you and your son.

For example, your son may get an erection...

- ▶ While watching a kissing scene during a TV show.
- ▶ When he thinks about a person he is attracted to or someone he likes at school.
- ▶ From feeling the seat vibrations from sitting on the school bus.
- ▶ When listening in class and having no sexual thoughts at all.

Help your son to know that there are different instances when he may experience an erection—they can be unpredictable and sometimes embarrassing when in public places. It is okay for an erection to happen, and there are ways to manage it appropriately when it does. Together, you can work with your son to create a plan to follow.

Keep in mind:

- ▶ Be comfortable with using medical terminology with your son, like saying “erection” and “penis.”
- ▶ Remember to emphasize that erections are a private matter that should not be talked about with other people in public (classmates, neighbors) but with a trusted adult (parents, school nurse) when the time is appropriate. Be specific about where/when to talk with your son.
- ▶ Be prepared for your son to ask questions and respond with positive statements, such as: “That’s a good question; I’m glad you asked.” or “Sure, let’s talk about that when we get home.”
- ▶ Be careful with any literal interpretations of your explanations. For example, if you mention that an erection will happen when your son sees a girl, he may believe it will happen every time he sees a girl. Provide your son with some situations of when an erection may occur or times that it has occurred so he can gain a general understanding.

How can you and your son prepare for erections?

Review the tips and graphics below with your son of what to do or not do when an erection happens.

What to do when you get an erection in public:



Stay seated and try not to think about it. You can also think about something totally unrelated and thought consuming—like remembering baseball statistics, reciting a poem in your head, or remembering a favorite vacation.



Tuck your penis up into your underwear—so it is not sticking straight out creating a bulge in your pants.

Go somewhere private, like the stall in the restroom, and wait for the erection to go away (Be sure to ask for permission to go to the restroom if you are in class.).



What NOT to do when you get an erection in public:

Tell others about it



Touch yourself in public





REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Develop a Plan for Erections

Talking to your son about what to do when an erection occurs can offer some comfort as well as help him prepare for what to expect and know what appropriate actions to take.

Sit down with your son and fill in the chart below. You can use the information above each box to help begin your discussion.

Prepare Son for What to Expect	<i>Describe what erections might feel like and when they may occur...</i> _____ _____ _____
What to Do	<i>List actions he should take when in public...</i> _____ _____ _____
What NOT to Do	<i>List actions he should not engage in when in public...</i> _____ _____ _____
Who to Talk to and When	<i>Name trusted adults and appropriate settings...</i> _____ _____ _____
Who NOT to Talk to and When Not to Talk	<i>Identify people and settings of who/when it's not appropriate to talk...</i> _____ _____ _____
Related Questions Son May Have	<i>"Does it hurt?" or "How often does it happen?"</i> _____ _____ _____
Resources to Refer to	<i>Visit Male Reproductive System – http://kidshealth.org/parent Visit Guy Puberty – http://www.plannedparenthood.org/info-for-teens</i>



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Teaching Public and Private with Erections and Nocturnal Emissions

Learning About Public and Private

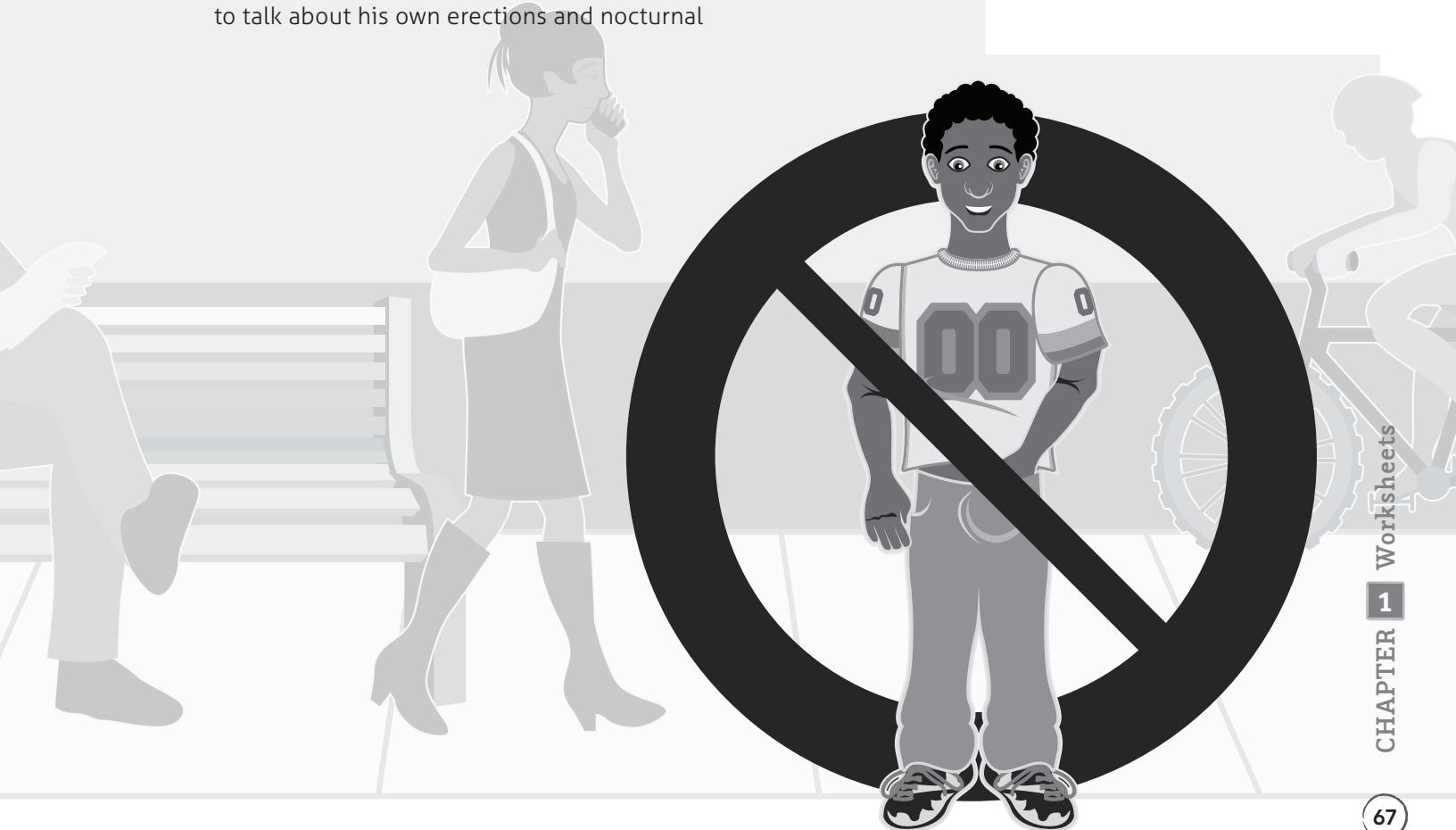
A big concern for many parents is helping their children understand the differences between public and private behaviors and conversations. The idea of appropriate behaviors and conversations in public and private places is a big concept that takes a lot of time and practice. This worksheet offers some ideas to incorporate the skills for determining public and private in relation to erections and nocturnal emissions.

Ongoing importance of public and private

It is important to practice with your son and describe, in detail, where and when it is okay to talk about his own erections and nocturnal

emissions. You can create your own scenario as it relates back to your son's life to prepare him for handling similar situations in the future. You may need to reinforce the concept of public and private on a continuing basis until it is well established and routine for him by looking for open opportunities to talk about it. For instance, you can bring it up when your son is buying new clothes, going to the doctor, getting changed to go swimming, or when your son is doing laundry after having a nocturnal emission.

Review the tips and activities on the following pages to help your son practice recognizing public and private in his life.





REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

How to Get Started in Teaching Public and Private

These tips can be used with this topic on erections and nocturnal emissions. This similar method of defining public and private behaviors and conversations in your son's life will be used in many topics throughout Charting the Course.

1. Define public and private body parts.

- a. Go over what body parts and clothing are okay for other people to see in public and those that need to be covered. (Wearing a t-shirt and shorts and showing some skin on the arms and legs is fine; showing underwear and penis in public is not acceptable).
- b. Show your son a picture of himself in regular clothes and one of him in a bathing suit. Explain to him that the areas covered by the bathing suit are private, meaning no one should be able to see or touch them.

2. Define public places in your son's life.

- a. Have your son look through old magazines and cut out pictures of various indoor and outdoor settings. You can also search for graphics from the Internet or take photos of public and private spaces in your son's life.
- b. Then allow him to identify and sort these locations as public or private and tape them onto a poster board labeled "Public" on the left side and "Private" on the right side.

3. Define private space in your son's life.

- a. Be very specific. His bedroom is private with the door closed. The bathroom can be identified as private if your son can generalize the fact that this is only the bathroom in your own home, not the public restrooms outside of your home. Explain that a bathroom at the mall or school, for example, is always public, and a friend's bathroom is his friend's private space only.

- b. Communal areas in one's home, such as the kitchen and living room, are public because they are shared with other family members.

4. Add in behaviors and conversations appropriate for public/private. Give examples.

- a. If he experiences a spontaneous erection during class, he needs to ask for permission from the teacher to use the restroom (For more information, refer to Chapter 1).
- b. If your son has a question related to erections or nocturnal emissions, he should wait until he arrives home to talk to you in a quiet area without being interrupted by other people. He should not talk about it with friends or classmates.
- c. Use pictures as visual references from your son's life for him to see what behaviors and conversations are acceptable in these specific locations.

5. Practice appropriate behavior and conversations for sensitive public areas.

- a. Think about areas that are public, but sensitive, such as public restrooms where men use the urinals, locker rooms where people shower and change, or community swimming pools.
- b. Discuss proper behavior in spaces that, while public, have an element of privacy. In locker rooms, turn away from other boys while changing, do not make eye contact and stand too close (give a space of 3 or 4 feet), and do not stare at parts of other people's bodies that are normally covered by underwear or a bathing suit.
- c. Make sure your child understands that, while it may be OK to undress in a locker room, it is not OK to do private things like touch himself.

6. Practice his understanding of public and private in different situations. Use the following scenarios to help prompt your son to think about what he should do and let him think of the appropriate alternatives to these questions. Have him write down his responses as they can serve as his own social narrative. Remember to customize your plan around your son's life.

- a. "If you got an erection at school, is that something you talk about during class? Who could you talk to about having an erection?"
- b. "If you had a nocturnal emission, do you tell your classmates? What would you do instead?"
- c. "Is it okay for you to show your underwear and penis to other people at school?"
- d. "If you had a question about erections or nocturnal emissions, do you ask your friends? Who could you ask, and when?"



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Public versus Private Chart: Example

Review the example and work together with your son to define public and private spaces in his life. Identify specific examples of what public and private settings, behaviors, and conversation topics in your son's life and list them on the chart below in detail. For the purposes of this worksheet, fill out the chart in relation to erections and nocturnal emissions.

Try to think through what a typical day for your son would be like to help him connect with the information in the chart. Put the chart in your son's room or make a list of reminders that he can carry with him to school. If he decides he needs a visual reminder for school, tell him that his list should be kept private (only for him to see).

	Public	Private
Definition of Setting and Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Open area where other people are more likely to be around and can see/hear what I'm doing ▶ Other people can be friends, neighbors, or strangers ▶ Grocery store ▶ Classroom ▶ Park ▶ Living room, kitchen at home ▶ Movie theater ▶ Beach ▶ Friend's house ▶ Public bathroom ▶ Friend's bathroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Being by myself in a secluded area with the doors locked, where people have to ask for my permission before entering ▶ My bedroom ▶ My bathroom and shower
Behaviors (When and Where)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Eating lunch ▶ Reading a book ▶ After school dance, club, or sporting event ▶ Touching my arms, legs, hair ▶ Hugging my parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Trying on new clothes (in the fitting room by myself with the doors locked) ▶ Showing my underwear and penis (in my bedroom/bathroom by myself)
Conversation Topics (When, Where, and With Whom)	With friends, family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Weather ▶ Homework ▶ Sports ▶ Vacation plans ▶ Favorite foods 	With my parents only, at home in a quiet space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Erections ▶ Nocturnal emissions ▶ Ejaculation

Develop Public versus Private Chart for Your Son's Life

The chart below can be used for any topic that involves defining public and private.

	Public	Private
Definition of Setting and Examples	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Behaviors (When and Where)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Conversation Topics (When, Where, and With Whom)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Explaining and Preparing for a Menstrual Cycle

Along with the many changes girls experience during puberty, talking about menstruation may seem overwhelming for you and your daughter to handle in the beginning. This is normal, and there are steps you can take to prepare for her period and make this a positive experience for both of you.

Your daughter will have certain needs when her period arrives, or your daughter may have already begun menstruating and is having a hard time dealing with this new change. This worksheet will help address some of the challenges your daughter could be facing and offer a few suggestions on how to approach her periods.

Questions to Consider Before Talking to Your Daughter

Try answering these questions before you talk with your daughter about menstruating. Your responses will help you focus on her particular needs as well as gain a better understanding of what kind of plan will work for both you and your daughter.

a. How do you feel about your daughter starting to menstruate?

b. What worries or concerns do you have in regard to preparing her for her menstrual cycle?

c. How do you expect your daughter to react when you start talking to her about menstruation?

d. What are some existing ideas or resources you have for addressing your worries or concerns?

e. Who else can support you and your daughter during this time?

Teaching Highlights for Explaining Menstruation

You may want to begin by asking your daughter what she has heard about menstruation, if anything at all. This will allow you to gain a better idea of what she may or may not know and give you an opportunity to clarify any misinformation she may have heard. Below are some ideas of key points to cover when you talk to your daughter about menstruation.

- ▶ All girls start menstruating during puberty because of hormonal changes as they get older.
- ▶ Menstruation is a normal, healthy sign of growing up, and it shows that your body is maturing and now capable of conceiving a baby.
- ▶ Most girls start their first menstrual cycle around the age of 11 or 12.
- ▶ When you are menstruating, blood leaves through your vagina over the course of 3–5 days.
- ▶ Girls wear pads that stick to their underwear to soak up the blood (like a large band-aid).
- ▶ You will need to change your pads every 4 hours throughout the day at a maximum.
- ▶ Menstruation occurs monthly and can start at any time of the day (morning or nighttime).

- ▶ Sometimes around the time your menstrual cycle starts, you may become tired, moody, or feel bloated.
- ▶ Each menstrual cycle is unique: your blood flow and duration may vary each month.

Your daughter's first period may occur without warning, so teaching her about menstruation before her first period (early on around age 8 or 9) can help avoid any surprises since she may feel scared and confused about the changes going on in her body.

If your daughter has already started menstruating, reassure her that:

- ▶ Menstruation is a natural process that all girls experience as they go through puberty.
- ▶ Having periods is different from wetting the bed.
- ▶ Menstrual blood is not harmful but needs to be managed by using pads.
- ▶ Even during your period, washing private areas are still important to do on a daily basis.

She might be shy, nervous, and hesitant to talk about her menstrual cycle, but spend some time with her to figure out how far along she is on her period.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Strategies to Help Your Daughter Prepare for Menstruation

How I can help her before her menstrual cycle begins

Refer to the steps below and take note of what your daughter may or may not be able to do on her own. For her first several cycles, she will most likely need your guidance until she is able to get a firm hold of her routine and perform these skills independently. Try experimenting with various types of methods to see what best suits your daughter's learning approach.

- ▶ *Make a trip to the supermarket or drugstore:* Together with your daughter, walk through the feminine hygiene aisle and pick out a variety of panty liners and pads (of different sizes and brands).
- ▶ Girls with ASD may be particularly sensitive to the feel of pads placed in their underwear. You can experiment at home with different kinds to see what feels most comfortable for your daughter, or start off using panty liners to practice until she starts menstruating; then, use larger sized pads as necessary. They may have to try wearing them for a few hours (or minutes) at a time over a period of time to build up comfort.
- ▶ *Awareness of menstrual blood:* Prepare your daughter for the sight of blood in her underwear as well as on her pad. You could use red food coloring to mimic what menstrual blood may look like.
- ▶ *Placement of panty liners or pads:* Using a permanent marker on her underwear; indicate where the pad should be placed. Also, demonstrate what can happen (leaks) if the pad is not correctly placed on her underwear.
- ▶ *Checking and changing pads:* Post a checklist of steps of how to change pads on her bathroom wall or laminate an index card with the steps so that she can carry it in her purse.
- ▶ *Proper disposal of pads:* Use a picture narrative to show an example of how to wrap the used pad with toilet paper or empty wrapping and then place it in the trash can.
- ▶ *Reminders:* Tell your daughter that leaks can occur if pads are not changed every few hours. Have her practice when to change a pad at certain time intervals by setting an alarm on her cell or another time device.
- ▶ *Pain relief:* Tell your daughter that uncomfortable physical feelings like stomach cramps and headaches are only temporary. You may suggest over-the-counter medications (to use under your supervision) or other precautionary measures that can help ease the pain, such as a massage, taking a walk, doing something she enjoys, or using a heating pad. See what works best for your daughter.

Develop a schedule together of when she should change her pad at specified time frames, such as in the morning, after lunch or dinner, or before going to sleep. Make sure the times coordinate with the times her classes in school change so she is taking a natural break between classes. More information on tracking periods will be in the next worksheet, "Managing Periods."



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Checklist for period

To best manage her period at home or at school, your daughter will need to have a few essential items on hand. Below are some materials that both of you may want to include in her kit, which she can keep in her school locker, purse, or backpack. Remind her that she may need to restock on pads after one or two menstrual cycles.

- Sanitary pads
- Panty liners
- Medicine for menstrual cramps (go over directions together with your daughter or give it to the school nurse)
- Extra underwear
- Extra pair of pants, preferably dark-colored

When she has her period

Your daughter may not be at home when she experiences her period. As daunting as that might sound to her, there are ways to prepare for such an occasion. First, she will need to recognize, on her own, that she is having her period. Keeping mindful of your daughter's personal learning style, come up with a list of detailed steps to walk her through what to do when her period arrives.

Again, your daughter may remember best by posting the steps in her bathroom, carrying a laminated index card with the steps, or with more of a hands-on approach of practicing repeatedly at home with you by her side guiding her through the steps.

Checklist for a Period Plan

Below is an example of a period plan, which you are free to customize as necessary to best fit her needs and capabilities.

- Does your underwear feel wet? Find a restroom where you can privately check for red- or brown-colored stains on your underwear. If in class, remember to ask your teacher for permission to be excused to go to the ladies restroom.
- Do you need help? Stay calm and find a trusted female adult. You do not need to tell anyone besides the trusted female adult about your menstruation.
- Are you at home? Place stained underwear in the dirty laundry basket and put on a clean pair of underwear.
- Are you at school or out in public? Make sure you have a period kit on hand.
- Take out a clean pair of underwear and a new pad to put on. Select a pad depending on the blood flow.
- If you do not have any pads, ask the school nurse or trusted female adult for help.
- Make sure you wash your hands before changing a pad.
- Remove the wrapper and take off the long, center backing that covers the adhesive part, and stick the adhesive side of the pad on the inside of the underwear to soak up blood.
- Throw the wrapping and backing strip into the trash can.

Checklist for a Period Plan (cont.)

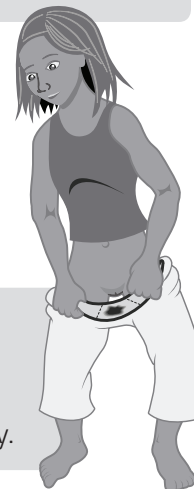
- Once finished in the stall, wash hands thoroughly with soap.
- Change sanitary pads every few hours (e.g., every 4 hours) in the bathroom. Before leaving the restroom, set an alarm on your cell phone or pay attention to the nearest clock to remind yourself of when you will change your sanitary pad again.
- When changing your pads, dispose of the old pad first before putting a new one on your underwear. Wrap the used pad with toilet paper or tissue and put it in the trash can/ designated disposal bin. Do not flush pads down the toilet.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Visual Narrative: Getting a Period

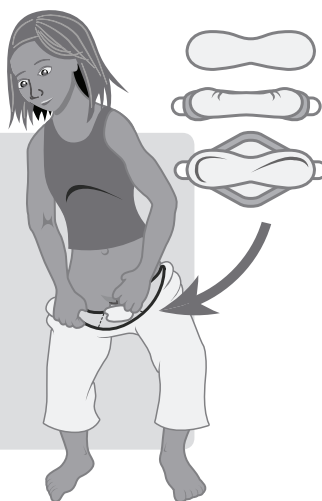
To help your daughter get a better idea of what to expect when she has her first period, she can use the narrative and pictures below as reference.



About once a month, I will see blood on my underwear. This is called a period. It's natural for all girls my age to first experience this during puberty.



Sometimes when this happens, my stomach might feel queasy, too. These are called menstrual cramps. It feels uncomfortable only for a short time. I should ask my mom or a trusted female adult for help to figure out how I could get rid of my stomach cramps.



When I have my period, I need to change my underwear and put a pad on to protect my new underwear from getting dirty. My period kit should include:
1 change of clean underwear
and 1 sanitary pad.



Every few hours, I need to go to the bathroom again to change my pad. After taking out the old pad and putting in a fresh one, I need to throw away the old pad. I have to wrap it up in toilet paper and throw it away in the trash. I cannot flush it down the toilet because it can clog the toilet.



Since your daughter might be overwhelmed with the amount of information, you may want to spread out your talk about menstruation into several conversations after her breasts start to show and often to reinforce the routine. You may want to write or print out these steps on paper to give to her a visual to refer to as needed. Remember, practicing multiple times before her period will make her feel more comfortable about the process and allow her to adjust more easily to this change in her life.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Managing Periods

After guiding your daughter through her first period, or *menarche*, you can work together to find some ways to manage her periods for the future. The goal of this worksheet is to offer you some ideas to help your daughter plan for her monthly cycle successfully and gain a greater level of independence when dealing with her periods.

Tips to Remember to Change a Pad or Tampon

Below are some ideas you can go over with your daughter to help her remember when she should change her pad or tampon throughout the day. Try experimenting with a variety of methods to see what kind of reminder is most effective for her.

- ▶ During the daytime, have her set a timer or an alarm on her watch or cell phone for when it is time to change her pad or tampon every few hours (e.g., every 4 hours). Have her set it each time she finishes changing her pad before leaving the restroom.
- ▶ At night after showering, have her change into a clean pair of underwear, put on a fresh pad, and take an extra pad or tampon (unopened) and lay it on her dresser so that she can remember to change into it first thing in the next morning.
- ▶ Print out a copy of her schedule at school and use a highlighter to mark when a good time would be for her to change her pad (e.g., breaks between classes, after lunch). Have her carry this schedule in her purse or book bag.

Planning for accidents

Even with the best preparation, your daughter may experience a few unexpected leaks. If she is particularly sensitive to the sight of blood, try to reassure her that menstrual blood is not harmful and that there are many ways to

manage and prevent such accidents. Here are some suggestions your daughter can follow:

- ▶ Change pads and tampons at least once every 4 hours. On heavier flow days, go to the restroom and check the pad more frequently.
- ▶ Use pads and tampons that are large and absorbent enough for the blood flow. Make sure to position the pad in your underwear correctly before leaving the restroom.
- ▶ Keep a spare pair of underwear and pants in your locker and book bag for emergencies at school.
- ▶ Lay an old towel under your hips, and between your body and the bed mattress, before going to sleep to prevent stains on bed sheets.
- ▶ With my parent's help, learn how to use a stain removal product before doing laundry (may depend on her level of independence).

Having extra supplies

Having extra pads or tampons and clean underwear is a good way to be ready for when her period arrives. Make sure your daughter has extra supplies:

- ▶ On hand, in her purse or book bag
- ▶ At home, in the cabinet of her bathroom
- ▶ At school, in her locker

After a couple menstrual cycles, she might need to make a trip to the store and buy more feminine hygiene products. If your daughter runs out of them unexpectedly or forgets them at home, make sure to go over her options in case of emergencies. For instance, asking the school nurse or a trusted female teacher may be a good choice. Some public restrooms may have a feminine hygiene dispenser where pads can be purchased.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Learning to Chart Cycles

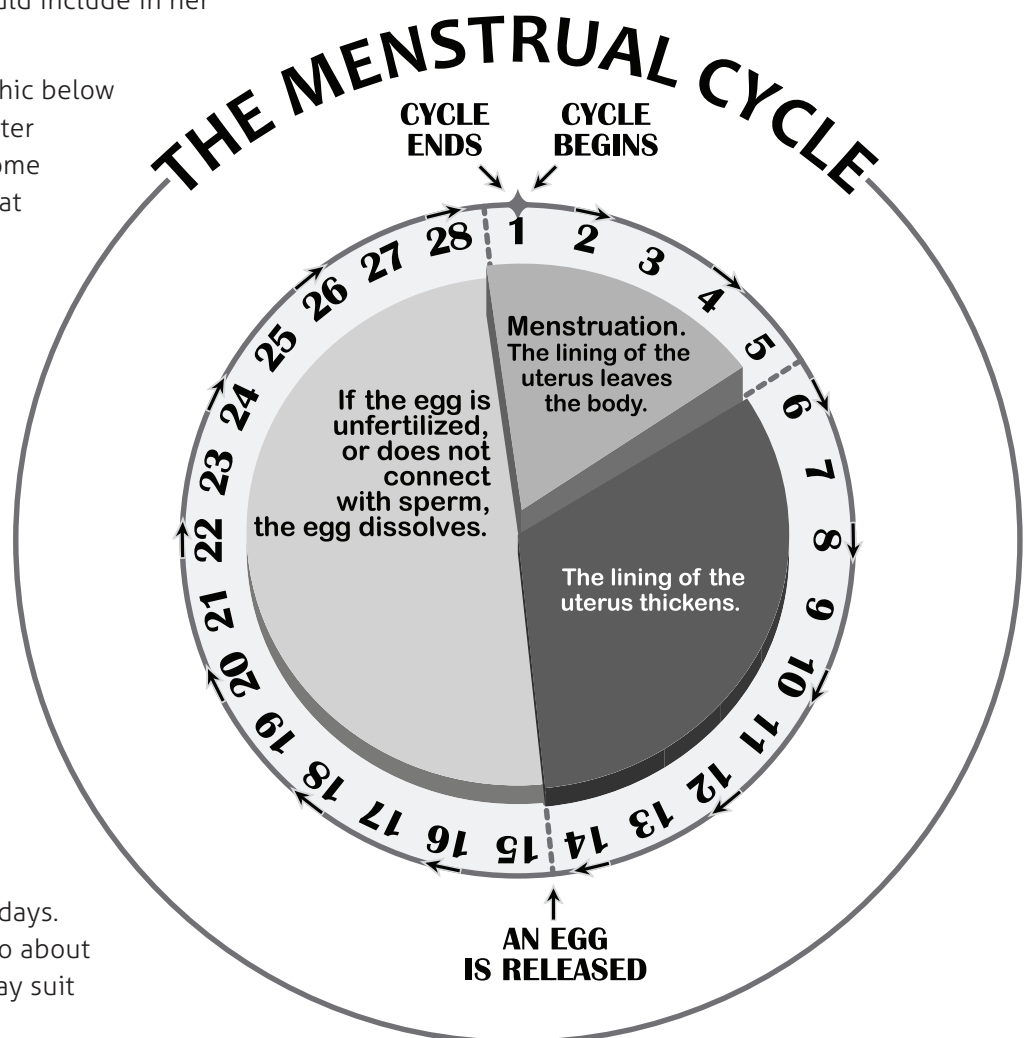
Teaching your daughter about the menstrual cycle to anticipate when her next period is due may help her managing her periods on her own. To help her remember when her period may come, she can use a calendar to write down how many anticipated days until her next cycle will start. Get involved and brainstorm some creative ideas with her for keeping a detailed record of her periods on her calendar. Some girls enjoy the process of tracking, so use this opportunity to make it into a learning activity.

The steps below are to help you teach your daughter how to track her periods. Remember that the more observations she records while on her period, the more likely she will be able to manage her periods in the future. Review the example to help you get an idea of what your daughter should include in her observations.

1. Review the graphic below with your daughter to help her become familiar with what happens to her body during menstrual cycles. Each cycle tends to last for 28 days on average (from the first day the period starts to the first day of the next period), although it is not uncommon for a period to be shorter or longer by a few days. Watching a video about menstruation may suit

your daughter's learning approach. Refer to the next worksheet, "Resources," for more information.

- ▶ Mention to her that she may experience irregular periods at first, periods that might not happen every month, but the frequency of her cycles will become consistent as she gets older.
2. Using the calendar template, have your daughter calculate when her period may start and let her record how long her period lasts. The average menstrual cycle is about 28 days total, from the first day of the period to the first day of the next, but may be longer or shorter by a few days.



- ▶ You may also want to have her record when she experiences any menstrual side effects (cramps, pimples) on her calendar, too. By doing so, she may be able to better manage these uncomfortable symptoms and reduce them in the future.
3. For instance, if your daughter’s calendar shows that she gets pimples a couple days before her period, she can try to prevent those breakouts by practicing good hygiene and using topical products to prevent or treat the acne breakouts right away.
4. As she keeps track of each month, compare the calendars together and use them to learn more about her menstrual cycle and how to most effectively prepare for her periods in the future.
- ▶ Pay attention to how many days her period tends to last, some common symptoms she may experience, and how often she needs to restock on feminine hygiene products.

My Period CALENDAR

KEY

Estimated Date

Light Flow

Medium Flow

Heavy Flow

Restock Supplies

Notes

MONTH: _____ **YEAR:** _____

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							
Week 5							

Some ideas to consider:

- ▶ Hang a wall calendar in her room and use colored markers or pens to draw symbols (circles, stars, etc.) to indicate when her period occurred and record any other observations.
- ▶ If your daughter prefers using the computer, search for personal period trackers available online. Often apps or software allows you to calculate when your next period may occur and to add notes on your computer about the type of blood flow and symptoms you experienced each day.
- ▶ Set an alarm or mark calculated days on your daughter’s mobile calendar.



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Plan for Period Symptoms

When your daughter has her period, she may experience some uncomfortable feelings, such as abdominal cramps, headaches, moodiness, and bloating, which are all common symptoms of a period. With your assistance, your daughter can alleviate some of these uncomfortable symptoms. Refer to the following suggestions and see what works best for your daughter's needs.

- ▶ Engage in light to moderate exercise: Set aside 30 minutes 3–4 times a week for aerobic exercise.
 - ▶ Your daughter may have certain limitations when it comes to physical activity, but try some simple exercises such as light jogging or jumping jacks to see what works best for her.
- ▶ Get plenty of rest: Try to get around 8 hours of sleep.
 - ▶ Pay attention to her schedule and, if you can, try not to plan too many family events while she is getting used to managing her period so she can get a full night's rest.
- ▶ Eat healthy and stay hydrated: Consume less sweets and caffeinated products, like chocolate and coffee. Remember to drink 8 cups of water per day.
 - ▶ Use fruits as a snack alternative at home and to bring to school.
- ▶ Use over-the-counter pain relievers that treat menstrual cramps.
 - ▶ Depending on your daughter's capabilities, you may choose to teach her how to take the medicine on her own or directly under your supervision.
- ▶ Practice good hygiene: Shower every day and wash genitalia regularly from front to back with mild soap.





REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Public and Private Behaviors and Conversations About Periods

Learning About Public and Private

A big concern for many parents is helping their children understand the differences between public and private behaviors and conversations. Your daughter may need time and practice to know what behaviors and conversations are appropriate in public and private settings so that she can manage her periods independently and successfully.

Review the activities on the following pages to help your daughter practice recognizing public and private while managing her period. Remember that these suggestions can be altered to meet her specific learning needs.

Opportunities to Talk About Public and Private

You may need to reinforce the concept of public and private behaviors on a continuing basis. Practice her understanding of public and private in different settings by looking for open opportunities to start the conversation. For instance, you can bring it up when your daughter is:

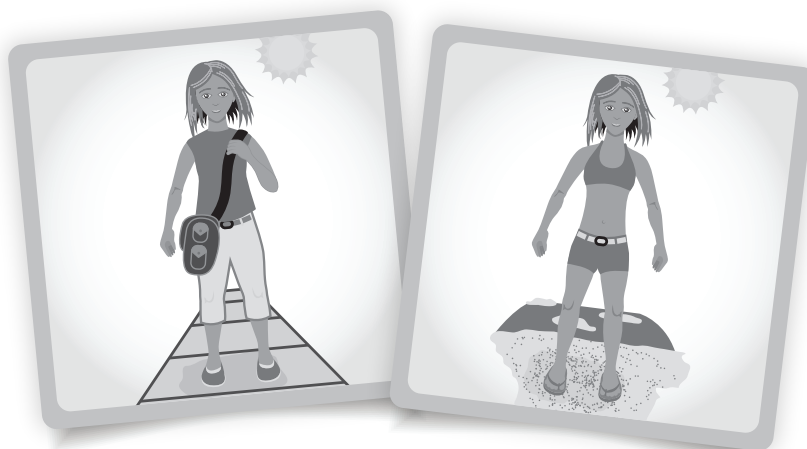
- ▶ Buying new clothes
- ▶ Going to the doctor for a checkup
- ▶ Getting changed to go swimming
- ▶ Asking questions about pads and tampons
- ▶ Going to use the public restroom
- ▶ Doing laundry due to her clothes or bed sheets having been stained because she had her period

How to Get Started in Teaching Public and Private

Below are some tips that may be used when talking about menstruation with your daughter. These steps can be adjusted to fit her level of understanding in regard to the topic of privacy. This similar method of defining public and private behaviors and conversations in your daughter's life will also be used in many topics throughout Charting the Course.

1. Define public and private body parts.

- a. Go over what body parts and clothing are appropriate for other people to see in public and parts that need to be covered. For instance, checking her pad or tampon and showing underwear and her vagina in public is not acceptable. If your daughter has a toy doll, you can use it as a model to show her what is okay to show for certain situations (in class, in the restroom, etc.)
- b. Show your daughter a picture of herself in regular clothes and one of her wearing a bathing suit. Explain to her that the areas covered by the bathing suit are private, meaning no one should be able to see or touch her in those places. You can use a red pen to circle the private areas to emphasize this point.



2. Define public and private places in your daughter's life.

- a. Help your daughter create a public and private poster for periods to keep in her room. Have her look at pictures of indoor and outdoor settings in old magazines, from the Internet, or personal photos of public and private spaces that your daughter sees on a daily basis.
- b. Allow her to sort these locations as public or private and tape them onto a poster board labeled "Public" on the left side and "Private" on the right side.

3. Add in behaviors and conversations appropriate for public and private. Give examples.

- a. Match the visuals you found with what behaviors and conversations are acceptable in specific locations. You can also refer to the images in the picture narrative of the "Preparing and Explaining Periods" worksheet and ask her where it is appropriate for her to engage in a certain step.
 - ii. If she experiences a leak during class while on her period, she needs to ask for permission from the teacher to use the restroom or go to the nurse's office to change her underwear and her sanitary pad.
 - iii. If she carries her pads or tampons to school, she does not need to show them to everyone in class.
 - iv. If she has a question related to periods, she may need to wait until she arrives home to talk to you in a quiet area without being interrupted by other people. You may want to advise her that she should not talk about it with other classmates or friends.

5. Practice her understanding of public and private in different situations.

Use the following scenarios related to periods to help prompt your daughter to think about what she should do and let her come up with the appropriate alternatives to these questions. Have her record her responses as they can serve as her own social narrative. She can choose to write, draw, or talk about her answers, or use another method that best meets her learning style.

- a. "If you are having your period, is that something you bring up during class? Who could you bring it up to, how and when?"
- b. "If you are out of extra pads or tampons, do you tell your classmates? What would you do instead?"
- c. "Is it okay for you to check your underwear or pad/tampon in front of other people at school? What would be the best thing to do?"
- d. "If you had a question about periods, do you ask your classmates? Who could you ask, and when?"
- e. "If you just finished changing your pad or tampon, do you tell other people about it? What would you do instead?"
- f. "If you are wearing shorts, a skirt, or a dress, should other people be able to see your pad or tampon? How would you avoid this?"
- g. "If your period accidentally leaked onto your underwear and through your pants, do you tell your friends? Who could you go to for help?"



REPRODUCTIVE MATURITY

Public versus Private Chart: Example

Review the example chart below and work together with your daughter to establish public and private spaces in her life. Identify specific examples of what public and private settings, behaviors, and conversation topics relating back to periods and list them on the chart template in detail. If you choose “bedroom” and “bathroom,” as private, give more specific locations, such as “my bedroom,” “friend’s bedroom,” and “in a locked restroom stall at a café” as public places. Remember to mention

that communal areas in one’s home, such as the kitchen and living room, can be public because it is shared with other family members.

Try to think about what a typical day for her would be like to help her connect with the information in the chart. Post the chart in your daughter’s room or make a copy for her to put in her book bag or purse to bring to school. If she decides to carry it to school, tell her that the list should be kept private, not shared with others.

	Public	Private
Definition of Setting and Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Open area where other people are more likely to be around and can see/hear what I’m doing ▶ Other people can be friends, neighbors, or strangers ▶ Grocery store ▶ Classroom ▶ Park or beach ▶ School bus ▶ Living room, kitchen at home ▶ Movie theater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Being by myself in a secluded area with the doors locked, where people have to ask for my permission before entering ▶ My bedroom ▶ My bathroom and shower ▶ In a locked stall in a public restroom
Behaviors (When and Where)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Eating lunch ▶ Reading a book ▶ Touching my arms, legs, hair on my head ▶ Hugging my parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Changing into new pants and underwear (my bathroom or bedroom by myself with the doors locked) ▶ Checking or changing my underwear, pad, or tampon (in my bathroom by myself with doors locked)
Conversation Topics (When, Where, and With Whom)	<p>With classmates, acquaintances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Weather ▶ Homework ▶ Vacation plans ▶ Favorite foods 	<p>With my parents only, at home in a quiet space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What a period is ▶ How to use a pad or tampon ▶ Period symptoms ▶ To myself: ▶ Finished changing pad or tampon

Develop Public versus Private Chart

The chart below can be used for any topic that involves defining public and private behavior or conversations.

	Public	Private
Definition of Setting and Examples	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Behaviors (When and Where)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Conversation Topics (When, Where, and With Whom)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



SECONDARY SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS

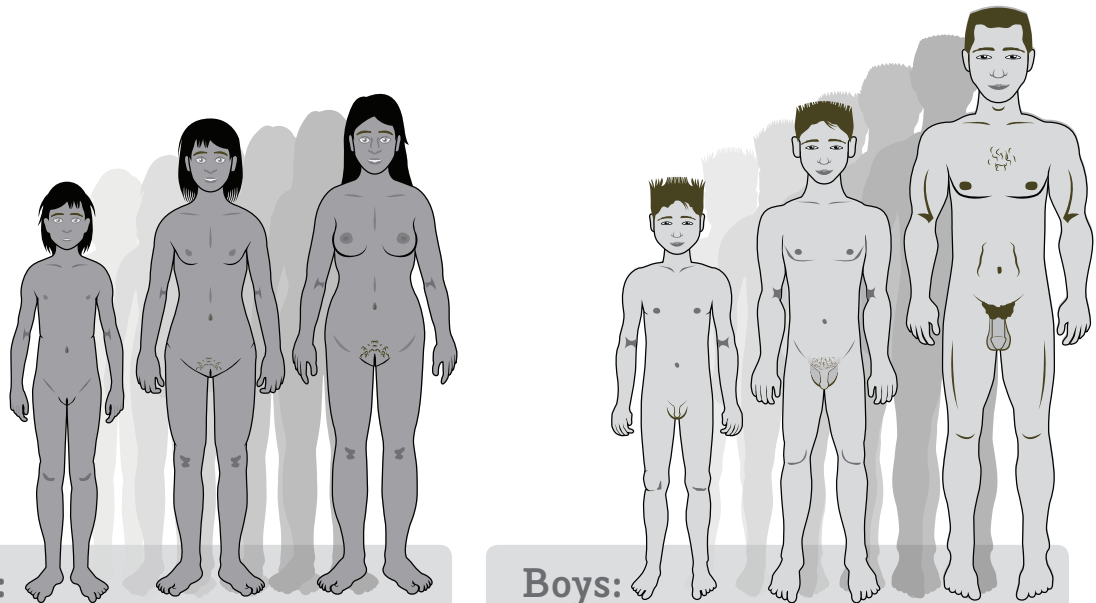
Preparing for Physical Body Changes

Children with ASD may have a particularly difficult time understanding the changes that come with adolescence. Your child may feel uncomfortable with the idea of change, so he/she will need your support to understand and accept these physical changes in his/her

body. There are different ways to prepare your child for these changes in his/her physical appearance, and this worksheet offers a few ideas and tips you can use with your son or daughter to help him/her get a good idea of what to expect.

Activity: Changing Body Picture Book

For some children with ASD, it may be helpful to see the physical body changes that happen to boys and girls during puberty. You can use the images below to help your child list the differences between each stage of development. If you have family photo albums, you can use old pictures of a trusted and well-known adult (a parent, aunt, or uncle) to see how they changed over time, developing from a child to an adult. Help your child relate his/her own growth and development to that of the relative in the photos.



Girls:

- ▶ Widening of hips
- ▶ Weight gain
- ▶ Start to grow mounds as breasts

- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Boys:

- ▶ Growth of facial hair
- ▶ Growth spurt

- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Your child may have several questions about these changes. As you talk about the differences your son or daughter notices in the images, try to help him/her relate to why these changes are happening and how it will affect his/her life. Below are some important points to highlight in your conversation.

- ▶ During puberty, hormones cause everyone's body to change. As a result, your body matures in shape and size into an adult.
- ▶ Girls tend to develop earlier than most boys do.
- ▶ Your body may grow at a different pace from your friends. This is normal because the timing is different for everyone, even if you are of the same gender.
- ▶ Everyone's body is unique, so we end up looking different from each other.
- ▶ Your changing body can become more sensitive to certain sensations (such as the feel of underwear).
- ▶ These changes can also affect your interactions with your friends.

Conversation Starters: Noticing Changes in Peers

You may want to encourage your child to notice changes he/she sees in friends or classmates at school. Below are some ideas to suggest to your child of what changes to look out for. Then relate the observations back to your child. Be sure to teach your child that his/her observations need to be kept private, not shared with friends or said out loud at school.

- ▶ Are they wearing new clothes?
- ▶ Have they become taller?
- ▶ Does their voice sound different than before?
- ▶ Do you know any other differences in their appearance?

Activity: My Changing Body Log

After comparing the pictures and observing their peers, your child should have some understanding of the physical changes that come along with puberty. Have your child relate to these changes and have him/her document them by writing in a journal, taking photos, drawing pictures, or recording voice memos. Here are some questions your child can address in his/her entries.

- a. What do I notice changing in myself?
- b. What do I have questions about regarding the changes I notice?



SECONDARY SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Sensory Sensitivities

Many children with ASD might be more or less sensitive to certain sensations as their bodies mature. During puberty, there are many changes that could impact their sensitivities, and your child may find these sensations very uncomfortable. For example, he/she may

notice him/herself sweating more, having oilier skin, more body hair, or needing to wear a bra. As a result, you may have to help your child recognize the need to attend to his/her changing body and develop a plan to address these new sensitivities.

Activity: Overcoming Hypo- and Hypersensitivities

Your teen may feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, or may not even realize the need to address his/her bodily changes. The template below is a way to guide you through this process as you work with your child to list the sensitivities you and your child notice or are aware of and some practical ideas to deal with these sensitivities that work for him/her. The template includes just a few examples of general sensory sensitivities children with ASD may have. For the degree of sensitivity column, involve your child in the process to determine which measure corresponds with his/her reaction to the different stimuli. This will help your child become more aware of how he/she feels about certain sensory input. Together with your child, brainstorm some possible solutions while actively asking what he/she thinks about the different options.

As you and your child explore the different options, take note of the progress your child is making while he/she tries different methods of addressing his/her bodily changes. Use the “Ways to Improve” column to help you and your child keep track of solutions that work, as well as potential areas for improvement. Below are some suggestions to help you and your child move forward in terms of overcoming these sensitivities in his/her life.

- a. Observe your child to see how the options are working out for him/her. Talk about his/her reactions to these options.
- b. Brainstorm ways of how to improve existing solutions, how to make them easier to implement.
- c. Keep practicing options until your child is accustomed to the new behavior or skill.

Hypo- and Hypersensitivities Chart: Example

Sensory Sensitivities	Degree of Sensitivity <small>(check one)</small>	Possible Ideas	Ways to Improve
<p>Smell</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Likes or dislikes smell of certain body washes, deodorants, shampoos, conditioners, or shaving gels ▶ Overreacts or underreacts to smell of his/her own body or of others ▶ Bothered by smell of scented feminine hygiene products ▶ Distressed by smell of others' perfume or cologne 	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Test out or smell the "try me" samples for different scented products at the store to find one that smells good ▶ Look for fragrance-free selections first 	
<p>Sound</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Has difficulty recognizing friends' voices as they change (deepening, lower in pitch) ▶ Frustrated with not being able to regulate his/her voice ▶ Avoids the sound of water running in the shower or sink ▶ Distracted by a new tone of voice ▶ Super sensitive to noises in the environment while menstruating 	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice talking slower, without yelling ▶ Take a break from sounds (ask to be excused if necessary) ▶ Wear headphones or ear plugs ▶ Identify where the sound is originating 	
<p>Sight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Avoids or seeks out certain colors or patterns on clothes ▶ Highly distressed by sight of menstrual blood on pad, tampon, underwear 	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Try on and choose clothes that appeal to self (use a mirror to help) ▶ Practice changing a sanitary pad at home with food coloring added to look like menstrual blood 	

<p>Oral/Taste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dislikes brands of toothpaste and mouthwash ▶ Teeth/gums sensitivity ▶ Refuses to eat spicy food ▶ Refuses to drink hot beverages ▶ Fearful of dental cleaning ▶ Complains about aftertaste of multivitamins or over-the-counter medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pack lunch from home to bring to school ▶ Try different toothpastes or mouth products, something with a less intense taste, or for sensitive teeth ▶ May want to try multivitamins that take the form of candy 	
<p>Touch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dislikes the feel of a bra on chest and back ▶ Dislikes the feeling of wearing a pad ▶ Avoids using shaving cream and touch of a razor against face, legs, underarms ▶ Distressed by the presence of pubic hair, the feeling of pubic hair against underwear ▶ Dislikes how skin itches as pubic hair starts to grow ▶ Dislikes tightness of clothes around genitals ▶ Prefers or refuses to wear certain types of fabric for clothes ▶ Refuses to use skin products or lotions on body ▶ Distressed by feeling of water from shower falling on top of head ▶ Complains about having hair brushed, brush against scalp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Try different options for underwear (material, shape) ▶ Try practicing wearing a pad before necessary ▶ Explore different types of razors (e.g., electric, throw away) ▶ Find clothes, perhaps made from different materials (cotton, knit) that feel comfortable, loose fitting, larger, or tight ▶ Sample different products at the store before purchasing ▶ Use lotions or talc powder on genitals ▶ Desensitize parts of the body where it is hypoactive to touch ▶ Try a bra on at home to find one that fits comfortably ▶ Wash soft fabrics multiple times so they will feel comfortable 	

Hypo- and Hypersensitivities Chart: Template

Sensory Sensitivities	Degree of Sensitivity	Possible Ideas	Ways to Improve
Oral/Taste <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Touch <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



SECONDARY SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Preparation for Secondary Sexual Characteristics

The unpredictable nature of changes during puberty can be unsettling for children with ASD, but there are many ways you can help

support them in dealing with these changes. This worksheet offers some tips for how you can help prepare your child.

Tips for Preparing

- ▶ **Explain early and often.** Educate your child on what changes to expect beforehand to help ease the stress that comes with accepting and managing these secondary sexual characteristics. Make yourself available to talk and answer any questions your child has while these changes are happening.
- ▶ **Use pictures and videos.** Make copies of pictures (online, in books) depicting physical changes that may interest your child. Underneath these pictures, write short captions of how these images relate to your child. See the “Resources” handout for where you can find sample pictures of body changes during puberty.
- ▶ **Follow your child’s learning pace.** Approach your child based on his/her specific learning style and interests. He/She may want to review the resources together with you, or independently, and then come to you for clarification. Remember not to overwhelm your child with too much information at one given time.
- ▶ **Explain changes in both genders.** It may be good to have your child become aware of the changes that occur in the opposite sex, as it can help explain some differences he/she notices in friends at school.
- ▶ **Cover public and private topics and behaviors.** Reinforce the idea that certain topics and behaviors may not be socially acceptable to talk about or to do in front of others, but instead kept to him/herself. For instance, if your child observes that a classmate’s voice cracks when talking, it is not something that should be pointed out in front of everyone.
- ▶ **Give context to changes.** Address changes seen of characters in books and movies that can be used as examples to show the changes in the body. Your child may also find it easier and less embarrassing to talk about the changes he/she observes in friends at school.
- ▶ **Make a visual checklist of changes.** After reviewing the appropriate resources, create a list for your child to check off as he/she notices these physical changes. This visual can be placed on your child’s bedroom wall. Check the “Changing Body Picture Book” to help you get started.
- ▶ **Maintain a positive, reassuring tone.** Although talking about and managing these changes is no easy task, make sure to stay positive and reassure your child that these changes are part of a normal, healthy process of growing up. Tell your child that even though his/her body will mature and gradually change, he/she will remain the same person.



SECONDARY SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Normalizing Your Child's Experience

Your child may feel embarrassed about the changes going on in his/her body, so hearing from those close to him/her that they also experienced these same changes may help him/her feel less anxious about growing up. Try involving older siblings or other close relatives to help comfort your child about these changes. Below are some points you might want to go over in your conversation:

- ▶ Your body is growing and changing.
- ▶ These changes happen inside and outside your body.
- ▶ Your body may change differently from your classmates (some change earlier, others later)
- ▶ These changes happen to everyone because everyone grows up!

Questions to Consider

Answer the following questions to help you move forward.

a. What have I done already to prepare my child for these changes?

b. How do I expect my child to react to these changes?

c. After reading the suggestions above, what are some tips that my child may be interested in?

d. How can I support my child even more in managing the new responsibilities of taking care of his/her body?



HYGIENE

Establishing and Personalizing Hygiene Routines

As children adjust to the physical changes in their body, they will also need to address the needs of their growing body by creating new hygiene routines. Children with ASD often need time to adjust to changes in their body and may have a difficult time implementing

hygiene routines on their own. This is normal as they get used to the new responsibilities when it comes to taking care of their body. This worksheet offers some general steps and tips to help create a customized routine with your child for any type of hygiene-related task.

Steps to Create a Hygiene Routine

Follow the steps below to help:

- a. Identify a routine to target (e.g., showering, brushing teeth, washing hands, shaving).

- b. Determine what has been working and what has not been working. Your child may be capable of completing some tasks independently but have trouble with certain parts of the routine. List below areas your son/daughter is having trouble performing and areas that are easy for him/her related to hygiene.

- c. Work together to develop a routine.
- ▶ Discuss when it would be appropriate or the best time to implement a routine.
 - ▶ Break down the plan for a routine into very specific steps. Use words or pictures that your child is familiar with. Also, be aware of literal interpretations of these steps. For example, it may be better to tell your child to brush his/her hair in the morning before leaving for school or before heading out to a special event instead of saying that he/she needs to brush his/her hair whenever it becomes messy.
 - ▶ Represent steps on a chart using a visual checklist with pictures, words, video references, or in another way that has previously been easy for your child to learn a new skill. See the "Resources" handout for a list of media references.
- d. Implement the routine and steps. You may need to guide your child through the routine, but have him/her do the steps on his/her own.

- e. After a week (or less if your child is struggling with a routine), revisit the steps. Revise the routine as necessary and see what is working and not working for your child. As he/she picks up on these skills, you can condense the number of steps in the routine. However, if your child tends to forget certain steps, you may want to emphasize them by using a highlighter or having different-colored text.
- f. Implement again. Revisit the routine as needed until your child has established the routine.
- g. Develop a reinforcement system to motivate your child for practicing his/her routine successfully. For example, provide a small allowance for every time he/she performs a hygiene task with little or no reminders/assistance.



HYGIENE

General Hygiene Schedule

A challenge for many children with ASD may be remembering all of the steps required in a routine. Work with your child to help decide when he/she should perform a certain task related to hygiene, including the time of day and how often. For instance, showering during the evenings may be easier to do rather than in the mornings before rushing off to school every day, while shaving does not need to happen on a daily basis. You also may want to list the items your child will need to gather to help him/her complete the routine.

Below is an example of a shower schedule with specific steps listed in detail to give you an idea of the things to keep in mind as you help your child remember the different steps of a routine. Again, if your child learns best with visual references, you can include personal photos or drawings with short captions underneath for each individual step. You may want to print out and laminate the schedule and leave it in the bathroom or bedroom for your child to refer to.

Example

My Showering Routine	
Time of Day	Evening
Things I Need	Shampoo, conditioner, body wash or soap, towel, fresh clothes (underwear, pajamas shirt and pants)
Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Take off clothes <input type="checkbox"/> Turn on water <input type="checkbox"/> Using hand, feel for a comfortable temperature (mark a place on the dial, as needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Turn on shower head <input type="checkbox"/> Get into shower <input type="checkbox"/> Wet hair <input type="checkbox"/> Put shampoo in hand <input type="checkbox"/> Put shampoo in hair and lather <input type="checkbox"/> Rinse shampoo out of hair <input type="checkbox"/> Put conditioner in hand <input type="checkbox"/> Put conditioner in hair <input type="checkbox"/> Rinse conditioner out <input type="checkbox"/> Use soap or shower (with cloth—based on personal preference) <input type="checkbox"/> Start by washing face, ears, neck (work your way down—be specific with all body parts) <input type="checkbox"/> Rinse all (same) body parts again <input type="checkbox"/> Turn off shower head <input type="checkbox"/> Turn off water <input type="checkbox"/> Dry body and hair off with towel (can be specific with steps)

Template

My _____ Routine	
Time of Day	_____
Things I Need	_____ _____ _____
Steps	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____

Many hygiene routines may build off of each other, so you may want to have a master list of "morning" and "evening" routines, which you can then break down into multiple parts using the template above.



HYGIENE

Context for Hygiene Routines

Teaching your child why hygiene is important can help motivate him/her in his/her daily routines. In fact, there are many ways to accomplish this since every child is different.

You can refer to any of the ideas listed in this worksheet and see what might work best for your child.

Activity: My Hygiene Counts!

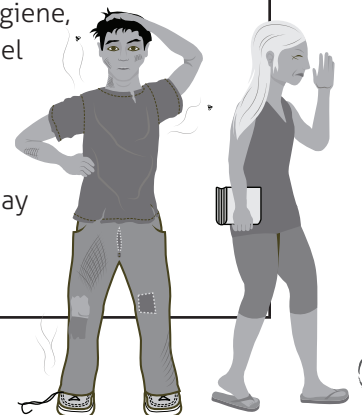
Work closely with your child to find what works best in motivating him/her. Your child can choose to talk about it, write it down, or draw pictures to convey his/her thoughts in this activity.

Steps:

- Have your child think about what is important for him/her in certain situations (e.g., in his/her favorite class, at an after-school activity, eating in the cafeteria, or hanging out with friends at the mall).
- Pick a task related to hygiene and relate it back to different activities your child likes and why hygiene was important in the context of the event.
- Use visuals of good and poor hygiene to illustrate how hygiene can impact your child and those around him/her.

Example

Situation	When I am at the school library...	
What's Important to Child	I want to talk with this girl there...	
Relate to Hygiene	<p>To present myself nicely, I need to take the time to shower and get ready before going to school. If I do this, I will likely have...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clean, freshly brushed teeth ▶ Clean body and hair (from shower) ▶ Clean clothes ▶ Clean nails 	
Good versus Poor Hygiene	<p>If I have good hygiene, then I will feel more confident and be able to talk to a girl in math class.</p>	<p>If I have poor hygiene, then I will not feel confident in the way I look and smell, and the girl from class may not want to sit next to me.</p>



Template

Situation	<hr/>	
What's Important to Child	<hr/> <hr/>	
Relate to Hygiene	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Good versus Poor Hygiene	If I have good hygiene... <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	If I have poor hygiene... <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



HYGIENE

Sensitivities and Hygiene

For children with ASD, particular sensitivities can make even the best hygiene routine more difficult to implement. Work with your child to see what sensitivities he/she may have so that you can modify the routine and make it more comfortable for him/her.

Fill out the template below to help facilitate your talk with your child in finding solutions to work around his/her sensitivities. You may want to refer back to the chart from the "Sensory Sensitivities" worksheet to help you complete the template.

1. What is the issue? Does a specific sensation feel unpleasant? Describe in detail.
2. Brainstorm (with your child if possible) ways this issue can be addressed. List different options (some ideas might be working to de-sensitizing the area, adding more prompting or shaping to hygiene routine practice, or even adding rewards for particularly difficult issues).
3. Try out the different ideas that you came up with.
4. Talk with your child or observe him/her to see how the changes are effective or not.
5. Refine the routine according to your child's reaction and your observations.
6. Revisit as necessary and keep practicing the hygiene routine.

1. Issue	<hr/> <hr/>
2. Brainstorm options	<hr/> <hr/>
3. Try the options	<hr/> <hr/>
4. Observe and report	<hr/> <hr/>
5. Refine	<hr/> <hr/>
6. Practice	<hr/> <hr/>



EMOTIONAL CHANGES

Explaining Emotional Changes

One of the main challenges for children with ASD is helping them understand the abstract topic of emotions. Your child will need your support in understanding why he/she might feel angry or upset at times and discovering ways to deal with these fluctuating emotions.

Explaining the changes that will occur can also help prepare your child for the changes he/she sees in the friends and classmates around him/her. This worksheet provides a few ideas from which you can choose to help you explain emotional changes to your child.

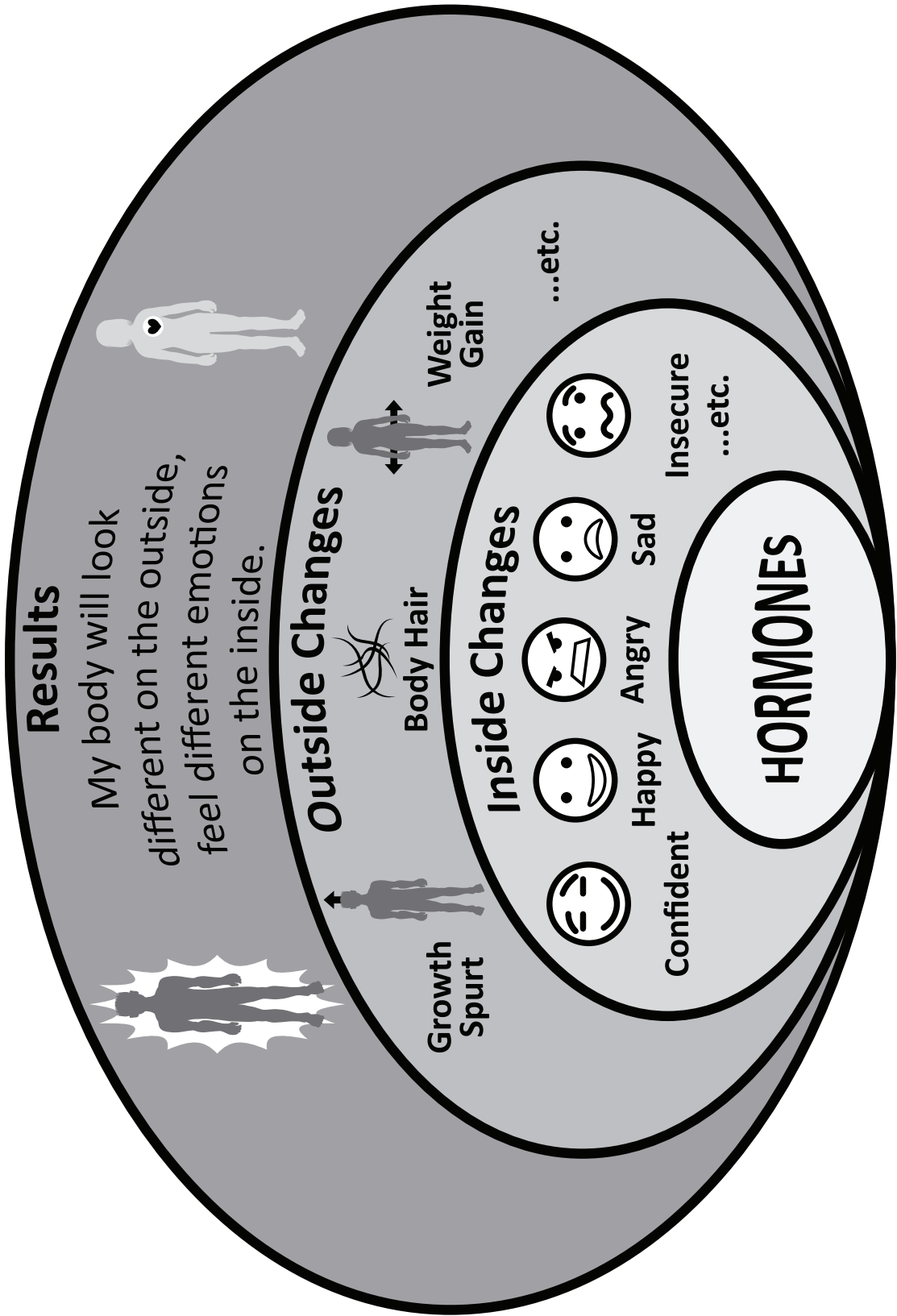
Activity: Fill-in-the-Blanks

The activity below will help guide you in explaining to your child why hormones influence emotions and moods during puberty. Together, review the key points below and allow him/her to fill in the blanks for the dialogue (which are underlined below). You can be creative by using simple drawings, pictures, and colored text for the different emotions to accompany each statement.

- ▶ Emotions and moods change during puberty because of hormones.
- ▶ As your body changes on the outside, like (describe physical change during puberty, e.g., getting taller), your body changes on the inside, too.
- ▶ These changes can create moments when you feel (list positive feelings, e.g., happy and energetic).
- ▶ Sometimes hormones also can make you feel (list negative feelings, e.g., sad, angry, or insecure).
- ▶ Just like the physical changes in your body, emotional changes are different for everybody.

Activity: Flow Chart

You may find that a flow chart is helpful to show your child how hormones inside the body relate to the physical changes and emotional changes that occur in him/her. Then go over the results your child should expect—outside changes mean that you will look different when you view yourself in the mirror, while inside changes will involve feeling a certain way when something happens and are not as visible as outside changes. On the following page is an example to help you get an idea of what to discuss at each stage of the flow chart.





EMOTIONAL CHANGES

Recognizing Emotions

It is important to help your child recognize different emotions and prepare for how to deal with them when they suddenly change or feel out of control. Many children have a difficult time expressing their feelings. This worksheet offers some suggestions on how to help your

child identify different emotions as well as to successfully develop a plan for your child to cope with these changes in his/her feelings. Depending on your child's ability to identify and cope with certain emotions, you may want to adjust your plan to focus on his/her needs.

Activity: Emotion Flashcards

You can have your child make flashcards for each emotion by drawing facial expressions on stick figures or searching online for pictures to represent these emotions. Your child will probably need your help in recognizing basic types of emotions, including being happy, sad, scared, surprised, or angry, which can be written in a thought bubble. Next, think of physical sensations your son/daughter could begin to recognize when he/she is feeling a specific way (e.g., when feeling sad, the

physical sensations include watery eyes and using a low voice). Finally,

write down choices you can make when feeling a specific way (e.g., when sad, I choose to not talk to people, or I choose to look down at the floor).

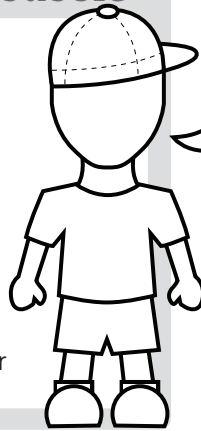
Feelings in thought bubble

Physical Sensations:

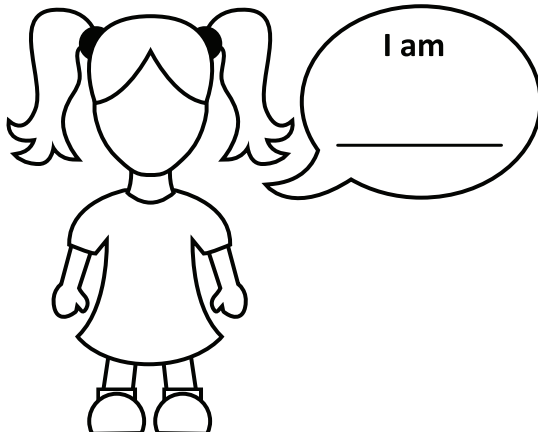
- ▶ Watery eyes
- ▶ Low voice
- ▶ Frowning

Choice Making:

- ▶ Not talking with people
- ▶ Looking down at the floor



I am
Sad



I am

Physical Sensations:

- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Choice Making:

- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Next, identify some situations where the emotion listed on the flashcard may come up. Try to think of real situations in your child's life, such as when he/she is in school or hanging with friends. For instance, your child may be feeling sad if he/she:

- ▶ Lost his/her favorite pencil at school.
- ▶ Has a friend who could not come to the movies with him/her.
- ▶ Could not play basketball because it was raining outside.

Preparing for Emotions

Discuss with your child the following questions to help him/her effectively deal with his/her emotions.

a. Where can I go? *Bedroom, bathroom, the school nurse's office.*

b. What can I do to calm down? *Take deep breaths, go for a walk, cry, lie down, listen to music.*

c. Who can I talk to when I am feeling this way? *My parents, a teacher, the school nurse, my special education teacher, school counselor.*

Emotions in Context

Below are some ways to help your child apply his/her understanding of emotions to a variety of situations:

- ▶ When you are watching a movie together, help him/her identify what the characters in the story may be feeling.
- ▶ When both of you are out in public, observe other people and the changes in their gestures.
- ▶ Explain your feelings after a particular situation, such as after a hard day of work. Also, if your child is comfortable doing so, have him/her share his/her feelings as well (e.g., about his/her day at school).

2

Relationships

CHAPTER

Adolescents with ASD are often very aware of wanting to fit in, have friends, and connect in relationships, and they are also aware that they are not sure how to do it. While other kids are getting to know themselves in relation to the people around them, adolescents with ASD need more support and practice to apply relationship skills to their own lives.

Adolescents with ASD most often have the same desires as their peers—to connect with others and be loved for who they are. While social skills are at the core of symptoms on the autism spectrum as well as at the heart of developing relationships, adolescents with ASD can and will have positive and healthy relationships with others who enhance their life.



KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Developing relationship skills takes practice and support.
- ▶ There are different types of friends and relationships in your child's life.
- ▶ Understanding the shades of relationships can give your child a framework for behaviors and conversations.
- ▶ With support and practice, adolescents with ASD can develop nurturing and fulfilling relationships

Friendships

Friendships provide support and camaraderie, as well as influence social skills, relationship skills, and other life skills. As adolescents strive for more independence, they spend more time with friends, and these friendships can exert a powerful influence on them, whether that influence is positive or negative. Friendships fill important emotional needs for all individuals, and the same is true for your child with ASD.

While social skill challenges are a core characteristic of the autism spectrum, adolescents with ASD want people in their life who share their interests, who appreciate them, and who they can rely on. Friendships can provide these qualities and this type of connection. Yet, learning how to relate to others, how to connect, and how to maintain those connections are inherently difficult and different for adolescents with ASD.

While social challenges are apparent for adolescents with ASD, more often than not, they are quite like other kids their age. They want more independence, they want to go to the movies or their favorite hangout place, talk on the phone, or be on the computer. How they approach and maintain friendships may be different and they may need extra help, yet they can be and often are very good friends.

Defining Friendships

Really, until you try to define it, you just “know” what makes a friend. Think of the different friends in your life and the qualities they share with you. This is what makes a friend for you. This “knowing” or recognizing friends is a quality that most adolescents with ASD have difficulty with. With their social challenges, adolescents with ASD need very specific rules and guidelines to determine what makes a friend, who might be a friend, and how to be a good friend. These aspects all require learning and practice on the part of your child with ASD.

There are different types of friends (as covered in the next section), and every person has qualities they prefer. Generally, a friend may have these characteristics:

- ▶ Shares similar interests
- ▶ Supports and cares for you
- ▶ Listens
- ▶ Easy to talk to
- ▶ Trustworthy
- ▶ Kind
- ▶ Fun
- ▶ Interested in what you have to say
- ▶ Accepts who you are
- ▶ Gives and receives (calls you and expects a call in return, congratulates you on an award, and remembers your birthday, and you remember his or hers)
- ▶ Respectful
- ▶ Shares similar values (e.g., religious, cultural, ethical, or social)
- ▶ Polite
- ▶ Honest
- ▶ Appreciates you
- ▶ Spends time with you
- ▶ Does activities with you



KEY MESSAGES

Friendships

- ▶ There are different types of friends.
- ▶ There are different qualities defined in friendships.
- ▶ Every adolescent has the right to develop friendships that nurture and feel safe.
- ▶ There are friendship skills that can be practiced to initiate and maintain friendships.

Friends can be male, female, a bit older, younger, or can influence you positively or negatively. Some friends can become a dating relationship, others may always be just casual friends, and others may not be friends forever. While friendships grow, change, and evolve, your child with ASD can get to know the basic tools of distinguishing, practicing, becoming, and achieving friendships that are healthy and fulfilling for him or her.

Individual Definitions of Friendship

Many adolescents with ASD do want and need friends, and developing these friendships should come in a way that feels comfortable and safe. As your child with ASD gets older, you can support him or her in thinking about what qualities are important in friendships. *Does he feel comfortable with a lot of friends or prefer one good friend to share activities with? Is it important that his friend talks on the phone with him? Does he want someone who shares similar values and interests?* Some people want a lot of friends and need to feel supported by a larger community, while others prefer just one or two close friends they can count on. Different friends bring different qualities to life.

Some adolescents with ASD may have particular peers they want to be their friend (e.g., maybe someone they see on the bus). As you support your adolescent in understanding and developing friendships, it is important to consistently explain that no one can force someone to be his or her friend, and everyone has the right to NOT be interested in being a friend. The same is true for your child; if he or she is uncomfortable or not ready for a particular friendship, that is his or her right. You can help your child know appropriate ways to tell the other person that he or she is not interested right now in a friendship (e.g., *Thank you, but right now I am focusing on other interests.*). Friendships take time and care to develop for your child to get to know the other person, and for the other person to get to know your child.

Being a Friend Versus Acting Friendly

The qualities that begin a friendship, such as saying hi, making eye contact, chitchatting, or being polite, can also be the same qualities as acting friendly toward someone. It can be really tricky for adolescents with ASD to determine when someone might be a friend, or when that someone is just acting friendly. Some adolescents may find using the “Shades of Friendship” (page 119) helpful to figure out whether someone may be a friend or may just be nice.

In general, when someone is a friend, he or she will do many of these acts of kindness:

- ▶ *Is happy to see you*
- ▶ *Smiles*
- ▶ *Periodically looks at you when you are talking*
- ▶ *Listens to you*
- ▶ *Shares your interests*
- ▶ *Is comfortable with you, and you are comfortable with him or her*
- ▶ *Wants to connect with you again (phone, email, meet in person)*
- ▶ *Likes being together*

When someone is acting friendly, you generally do not know them very well, such as an acquaintance, even a stranger. When someone is acting friendly, your adolescent with ASD would talk about very light, general topics (e.g., *How are you? Nice weather, Happy holidays*). He or she would be polite and casual, but not overly friendly, no touching, and would avoid conversations about politics, religion, or personal information.

Not a friend

Just as you can help your adolescent with ASD understand all of the qualities that define friendships, you can also help him or her learn the qualities that do not make a friend. Without the social awareness to pick up on teasing, bullying, or certain social cues, and with perhaps a keen interest in connecting with others, it can be challenging for your child to know when someone is taking advantage or is simply not a friend. For example, someone is not a friend when he or she:

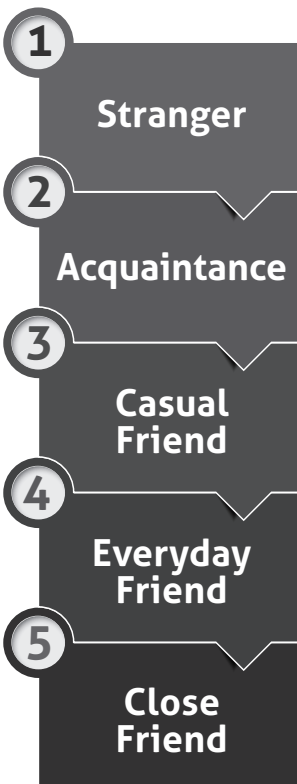
- ▶ Expects a bribe or gifts to be friends
- ▶ Teases relentlessly
- ▶ Only does what he or she wants to do
- ▶ Makes you feel uncomfortable

Understanding these qualities can support your adolescent with ASD as he or she is practicing to be a friend. Your son or daughter does not need to do, buy, or force friendship; being a good friend is being comfortable expressing yourself as you are and wanting another person to do the same.

At the same time, perhaps after much practice and effort to develop a friendship, your adolescent with ASD may be distraught when a friendship does not work out. Some friendships last a long time, and others might be short. For your child, the changing qualities of relationships are really hard to accept. You can be supportive by letting him or her know that no relationship is the exact same; friendships are not always permanent. Your child or the friend can decide if a friendship is not giving them what they need. Everyone has the right to change their mind. Friendships also take nurturing, give and take, communication, time together, and trust. When one or the other person is not able to give or receive these things, sometimes friendships end; that is also a natural part of the friendship cycle.

Shades of Friendship

One step that can be helpful in understanding friendships is to give categories to individuals your adolescent may encounter in life. Some resources use “relationship circles”; here, we’ll refer to them as “shades.”



Understanding the Shades of Friendship that make up different friendship categories can give a more concrete understanding of friendships. As is most often the case, there are many shades of friendship in life, so your adolescent with ASD will need support and practice in deciphering where people might fit in his or her life. Once able to recognize a person and practice associated behaviors and conversations that might match their shade, then your child is better equipped and more comfortable to interact with those friends.



Friendship Shade: Stranger		
Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do not know this person ▶ Have never seen him before ▶ Maybe recognize him from the bus (for example) but have never talked or interacted with him ▶ May be people on the street, at the mall, working at the grocery store ▶ Some people stay strangers forever ▶ Most people are strangers 	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Nod head ▶ Smile 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching (you don't touch; stranger doesn't touch you)
	Conversations	
	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May say hi, just to be friendly ▶ Say, "Have a nice day." 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Private or personal information

Friendship Shade: Acquaintance		
Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May be someone you see at the post office, in the hallway at school ▶ Might recognize an acquaintance but really do not know him ▶ May know his name but not his interests 	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Nod head ▶ Smile 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Go out with or invite over ▶ Touching ▶ Calling or texting ▶ Following to class
	Conversations	
	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Only positive thoughts and feelings ▶ Small-talk conversations about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Weather ▶ Movie or television show watched recently ▶ Sporting event in the news, school news 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal problems (yours or theirs) ▶ Personal information (like where you live or your phone number) ▶ Disclosure of ASD diagnosis

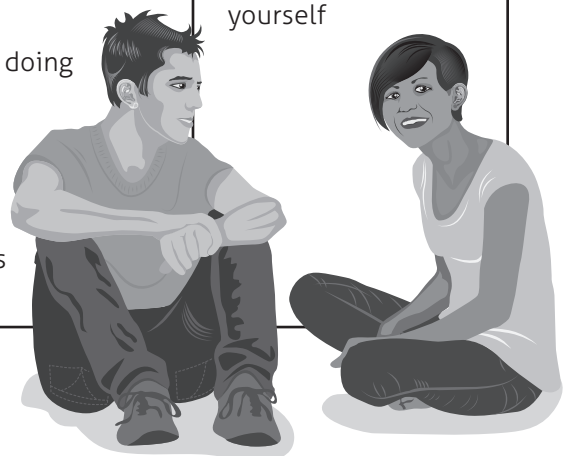
Friendship Shade: Casual friend		
Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May know from class ▶ Might know about his interests or abilities in school ▶ Talks to him ▶ Has something in common (like a class, sport, hobby) 	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High five ▶ Handshake ▶ Smile 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hugging ▶ Touching
	Conversations	
	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ School topics (class, homework, upcoming activity) ▶ Interests or activities ▶ Share phone numbers to do a class project together after school 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal problems ▶ Religion or political conversations ▶ Family history

Friendship Shade: Everyday friend

Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Begin to trust each other ▶ Know what your friend likes to do in his spare time, his special interests ▶ Share your own interests, likes, dislikes ▶ Share your own sensory needs for when you go out in the public together or spending time together ▶ Feel comfortable with him ▶ Have spontaneous conversations ▶ Might be a classmate or someone from a group you participate in 	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Get together (for activity, to share an interest, be together) ▶ Phone/email/text ▶ Invite to an activity or to your home ▶ High five, handshake, smile, give compliment 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching private body areas ▶ Hugging or kissing ▶ Sexting
	Conversations	
	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he is doing ▶ Start to have conversations on controversial topics but always leave being supportive to one another (agree to disagree, if needed) 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation

Friendship Shade: Close friend

Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Know each other well, feel comfortable, can be yourself, do activities together, have over to your home ▶ Nurture, take care of each other ▶ Trust each other ▶ Support each other ▶ Know for a long time ▶ Might have one or two close friends ▶ Has seen you on your worst day and still wants to be your friend ▶ Have seen your friend on his/her worst day and still want to be his/her close friend ▶ Expect your friend to be considerate of your sensory needs when together 	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite over to your house ▶ Share favorite activities together ▶ Phone/email/text ▶ Spend time together ▶ Hugs 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching private areas of body ▶ Kissing ▶ Sexting
	Conversations	
	👍 Dos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his/her thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he/she is doing ▶ Share your hopes and dreams ▶ Disclosure of ASD diagnosis and characteristics of ASD 	👎 Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation ▶ Only talk about yourself



There can be a progression to friendships, which is illustrated by the Shades of Friendship diagram. This visual can help to understand where people fall in the shades as well as how an acquaintance might become a casual or close friend. However, it is very important to help your adolescent with ASD understand that friendship progression is not always a given. Some friendships progress, some do not, and some might end or change. So, while following steps to get to know a casual friend may ultimately lead to an everyday friend, it is not a given or a rule. It can be easy for adolescents with ASD to assume that if they follow all of the steps and rules, they will have a close friend in a short period of time. There is no timeframe for developing friendships; some happen fast, and many take time and effort. This can be a challenging concept for your son or daughter to understand.

These shades also do not address that it takes two people to make an effort to create a relationship. While your adolescent with ASD may follow the guidelines for being a casual friend to someone, it also takes consent from that other person to want to engage in a friendship with your child. There does not need to be a specific conversation, such as: “Do you want to be my everyday friend?” Picking up on the often misunderstood cues from another person can take practice and support. Your child also has rights—he or she may be completely comfortable being a casual friend to others right now but not ready to move forward as an everyday friend. Of course, how he or she feels should always be respected.

Ultimately, it comes down to being his or her own best friend. Your child knows him or herself the best and can decide who to be friends with (with consent from the other person). When ready to move forward, he or she has many strengths to bring to any friendship.

Friendship Skills

Developing friendship skills may take more time, practice, and support than what you can offer. Often, the help of a peer mentor and/or an organized social skills group can be a huge benefit to supporting your adolescent with ASD in developing and practicing friendship skills. In addition, this section talks about other skills you and your child can practice together.

Friendship skill strategies

Groups—Often, the structure of a regular group meeting can feel safe and comfortable for adolescents with ASD. For kids who have had some negative social experiences, having a few positive experiences can really help build confidence and interest in developing friendships.

Social Skills Groups—Groups specifically targeting social skills development can really benefit adolescents with ASD. Role-playing scenarios to decipher nonverbal behaviors, expressions, emotions, and opportunities to practice friendship skills can give extra chances to build confidence and skills for maintaining friendships.

Presentation—Maintaining personal hygiene, such as wearing clean clothes, showering every day, and shaving (as needed) makes a difference in maintaining friendships. Tell your child that being well groomed creates a good impression with friends.

Use Interests—Use their favorite movies, television shows, and music videos to teach friendship skills. Ask peers for input on what media is popular to watch. Most individuals with ASD want to see how they should act instead of how they should not behave socially. Therefore, expose your adolescent to different ways of being a friend that can provide learning opportunities by using positive social situations.

Strengths—As always, reinforcing strengths and talents can help. Encourage and practice confidence, and friendships will benefit, too.

You are one of your child’s best teachers in terms of learning about social interactions and maintaining friendships. Know your child’s friends, talk about any issues that may come up, or answer questions he or she may have about friendships. You can work together to understand ways to better develop and maintain friendships, as well as brainstorm ways to address misunderstandings or inappropriate behavior. You may even see if your child is interested in writing down or talking about interactions that may not have gone the way he or she wanted. You can brainstorm, role play, and practice together.

Initial friendship skills

There are certain basic skills that can support your adolescent as he or she makes friends.

Behaviors

- ▶ Smile
- ▶ Make eye contact (minimum amount that is comfortable)
 - ▶ If eye contact is really a challenge for your child, encourage him or her to look at the friend’s ear lobe; it will look like he or she is looking at the person’s face.
- ▶ Be honest, yet polite
- ▶ Respect personal space
- ▶ Practice good hygiene
- ▶ Be aware of others’ body language messages

Communication

- ▶ Say hello, introduce yourself, and greet others
- ▶ Speak clearly
- ▶ Listen to the other person
- ▶ Avoid insults or strong opinions
- ▶ Take turns in a conversation (give and take or reciprocity—both share information)
- ▶ Show interest in what a person is saying (nod your head or say “yes”; show you are listening)
- ▶ Be able to start a “small-talk” conversation that is not about your interest
- ▶ Know how to end a conversation and when to walk away

Maintaining friendships

Taking good care of friendships is an important part of enhancing them. Beyond the initial “creating a friendship” stage, there are skills that will help maintain and keep friendships growing for more months or years.

Getting to know a friend—Learning more about his or her other interests, personality, and values are also important ways to get to know a friend. Getting to know a friend helps not only to know if their friend is a good match, but it also shows their interest in the friend.

Stay in contact—To maintain a friendship, your adolescent needs to initiate opportunities to contact friends. It may be really hard to even think of contacting a friend on the phone, but maybe sending an email or seeing them at school might help. Friendships are mutual, and the effort to maintain a friendship should come from each party. Making the effort to see each other or talk to each other strengthens friendships and keeps them growing. Often, telephone skills do not come naturally to adolescents with ASD. Practicing the greeting, chitchatting,

talking about the goal of calling, and ending a call through role plays or practice calls can help.

Have other friends—Often, adolescents with ASD can fixate on one friend and expect him or her to only be friends with them. Having more than one friend can take pressure off of a friend, and it also gives more options and opportunities for activities and learning how to nurture more friendships. Your adolescent may have more than one interest. Explain to him or her that having a friend for each interest will be more enjoyable.

Accept other opinions—Adolescents with ASD often have specific opinions about certain topics and have trouble seeing another person's point of view. Practicing flexibility and respect with regard to other people's insights and ideas can strengthen friendships.

Be flexible—Flexibility and change are two qualities that are difficult for adolescents with ASD. Give them rules, and they will follow them and expect everyone else to follow as well. Yet, people and life do not always do what you expect. Friends may break rules, plans may change, and disappointments may occur. These are all normal and to be expected. Preparing for change, as early as possible, can help manage their expectations as well as their attitudes toward friends while being open to new possibilities.

Create opportunities to maintain—Friendships take effort and time, and finding opportunities to get together and to nurture a friendship are important. Friendships are most often cultivated through shared interests. Finding and supporting opportunities to connect with others through a particular interest that your child has can serve to develop and also maintain friendships. Some ideas might be:

- ▶ Volunteering with an organization or group
- ▶ Participating in a community event or activity
- ▶ Getting involved in a group at school
- ▶ Joining an organization related to a particular hobby or interest
- ▶ Starting a group related to an interest

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure, unfortunately, may be something that your adolescent with ASD will encounter at some point. With difficulties interpreting nuances, social cues, and nonverbal behaviors or body language, your adolescent may be a target or unintended recipient of peer pressure or bullying. Given the serious interest and striving that may happen when your adolescent wants to make a friend, he or she may also accidentally pressure someone else.

Peer pressure can involve the following:

- ▶ Feel like having to do something to fit in or for people to like you
- ▶ Hard to stand up for yourself
- ▶ A group of people smiling and being really nice to try to get your adolescent to do something for them that has alternative motives
- ▶ May be teased, pressured to wear certain things, try certain things, or do things
- ▶ Feel like having to do things not interested in or feel uncomfortable about

Peer pressure has many degrees. Giving your adolescent concrete examples (maybe from movies, TV, or real life) can help them apply their understanding of peer pressure. Your child does not need to be uncomfortable to fit in and to sacrifice him or herself and what is important to make friends. Help him to know his strengths and build confidence through


activities, topics, and relationships at which he excels. Then, you can work together to identify the types and examples of peer pressure. Also, help your child to know who to talk to if he or she feels pressured to do anything he or she is not comfortable with.



**BOARDWALK
ADVENTURE** Game

Beach game

Pizza Parlor game



Learning How Worksheets

Being a Friend versus Acting Friendly, page 139

Shades of Friendship: Behaviors, page 143

Attraction and Interest in Others

Attraction to someone else and wanting to be more than friends is a natural progression in sexual development. As relationships become more complex during adolescence, adolescents begin noticing and exploring these feelings of attraction toward others.

All individuals develop an attraction or interest in others at different times. While adolescents with ASD may develop an interest in others a bit later than peers their age, most adolescents with ASD do express attraction and wanting to connect as more than friends. However, with fewer interactions with peers and less inclination to pick up social cues related to attraction, adolescents with ASD need help learning these skills.

Deciphering the small details that make up liking someone can be demanding. Teens, even adults, have trouble with this. The subtleties of liking someone and expressing this attraction can easily be missed. Like a game where they do not know the rules, adolescents with ASD may not notice specific social cues (like brushing past someone a little close) and need extra support understanding appropriate behaviors.

Attraction and Interest

Attraction (or interest) refers to being physically and emotionally attracted to someone. Physical feelings of interest might feel like:

- ▶ Heart beating fast
- ▶ Palms, underarms sweating
- ▶ Dry mouth
- ▶ Face blushing
- ▶ Feeling excited all over your body
- ▶ Butterflies in the stomach or stomach clenches
- ▶ Breathing faster

Emotional feelings of interest might include wanting to be near this person, thinking about him or her all the time, and feeling you like him or her so much. Feeling nervous is common, as is not knowing what to say or how to act. When you like someone, you might like how they look (face, body), how they act, what they say, or what their opinions are.

Friendly teasing might be a good way to describe flirting. When flirting, your adolescent might show off (just a little), brag a bit, and ask about what the other person likes. Sometimes the other person flirts back, which is a sign of interest. Flirting may also be giving compliments to someone, body language (like leaning in), smiling, giggling, wide eyes, brief touching (grazing the arm), or showing interest in what the other person is saying.



KEY MESSAGES

Attraction and Interest

- ▶ Attraction to another person includes physical, mental, and emotional feelings.
- ▶ There are behaviors and conversations that communicate interest.
- ▶ Expressing interest in someone takes practice.

Even if your adolescent has not shown interest in another person yet, he or she may notice peers flirting or expressing interest in others. Your adolescent may get a vague sense of how the relationships are shifting around them and wonder what is going on. Yet, flirting and expressing interest in someone else can be a tricky concept to identify and even harder to practice. The difference between flirting and just being nice is often picked up in small social cues that your adolescent with ASD may not be able to see.

So first, for your child, there's noticing when someone is interested or uninterested. Then, your adolescent also needs to practice communicating interest or disinterest to others. This often takes learning these cues and practicing them through role plays and different situations. You can help your child know that this nervous, anxious feeling often goes along with really being interested in someone else.

Whether or not your adolescent is interested in another person, you can support him or her by routinely talking about or pointing out different kinds of attraction or interest in relationships and appropriate ways to be in those relationships. Often, adolescents with ASD (and their peers, too) can misinterpret acting friendly as a sign of a deeper level of interest. Your adolescent might also misinterpret his or her feelings and think that interest in another person really means he or she loves that person. It is common for adolescents with ASD to exaggerate their feelings, even to the point of becoming obsessed with thinking about, talking about, or wanting to be with the focus of their interest. Practicing appropriate ways to express interest and attraction can help.

Right now in this initial interest stage, appropriately showing interest and interpreting another's interest or disinterest are a lot of ground to cover. If your adolescent has trouble picking up the signs that someone is not interested, he or she can risk pushing forward, obsessing, even stalking the object of his or her affection. Of course, these behaviors are often not meant intentionally, but serious implications can result.

Expressing Interest


There are many ways to show someone you like them. Here are some ideas to share with your adolescent:

- ▶ Spend time together, finding an activity you both enjoy
- ▶ Call, text, email, or talk outside of school
- ▶ Share and give small gifts (just as a token of how you feel)
- ▶ Touch lightly on the arm (only if you know the person well and feel comfortable with its appropriateness)
- ▶ Smile
- ▶ Make eye contact periodically during a conversation
- ▶ Ask about his or her interests, show an interest in what he or she likes
- ▶ Compliment him or her
- ▶ Go out together as a group (more in the next section)

These things say that you aren't interested:


- ▶ Arms crossed
- ▶ Looking down
- ▶ Turning away from a person
- ▶ Speaking angrily
- ▶ Not speaking at all
- ▶ Only talking about yourself
- ▶ Not listening

Flirting a lot, giving lots of gifts, and overdoing displays of interest are not effective ways to show feelings and can be annoying to another person. If your child is not sure of the signals he or she is sending or receiving from others, maybe you, a friend, or a mentor can work together with him or her to figure it out.



Game

- Tunnel of Love game
- Haunted House game



Learning How Worksheets

- Noticing and Expressing Attraction, page 163
- Exaggerated Feelings, page 171

Progressing Relationships

Like friendships, adolescents learn from their relationships with other people about social skills, feelings, and how to create positive healthy relationships. As relationships progress, attraction and interest come into play, and sometimes relationships may turn into something more serious or romantic.

Adolescents with ASD express that they do want and need to connect with others, often as more than friends, yet are not sure how. The language of relationships (behaviors, words, physical sensations) is unknown territory. The concept of liking or loving and different expressions of these emotions in various relationships takes a complex understanding of social relationships.

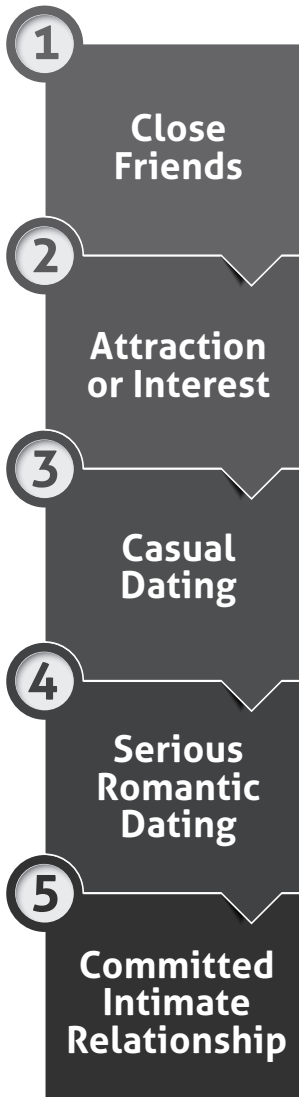


KEY MESSAGES

Progressing Relationships

- ▶ Understanding where a person falls in a relationship can help frame behaviors and words used.
- ▶ There are behaviors, conversations, and feelings that characterize healthy relationships.
- ▶ As relationships progress to dating, there are appropriate ways to get ready for a date.

Defining Shades of Relationships



As with friendship, or interest in others, your adolescent may or may not be ready or interested yet in dating or a romantic relationship. On the other hand, maybe he or she is already really into girls or boys and needs to fully understand the progression of more serious relationships. Whichever the case, understanding the progression of relationships, appropriate behaviors, conversations, and skills for each level is important.

Of course, your teenager does not have to date, or your family may have certain values as they relate to dating and relationships. Understanding relationship progression is one factor; actual dating is another decision. You can support and prepare your teen, and he or she can use the information as or when he or she is ready.

A visual representation of progressing relationships (such as above) makes relationships seem linear or that they have a natural fluidity and progression. There are certainly elements that do reflect this, certain steps to follow, and ways to build relationships. At the same time, we know that relationships are not always linear, that if you have an attraction or interest and start to casually date, you will not automatically be in a serious dating relationship. There will be changes and learning along the way. Helping your adolescent see that while understanding the basics of how relationships grow is important; yet, at the same time, there is no timeline to developing relationships, and it is not as easy as following certain steps to have a happy, healthy relationship.

Characteristics of the Shades of Relationships

Friendship Shade: Close Friends

- ▶ Share similar interests
- ▶ Like being together or doing activities together
- ▶ Can talk about interests
- ▶ Trust each other
- ▶ Have fun together
- ▶ Do not feel attracted or interested in one another in a sexual manner

Friendship Shade: Attraction or Interest

- ▶ Like another person
- ▶ Like how they look, act, talk
- ▶ May have been friends and now find person attractive as more than friends
- ▶ May have just met
- ▶ Might feel nervous
- ▶ Feel attraction feelings (e.g., excited, nervous, thinking about)
- ▶ Realize attraction does not equal love

Friendship Shade: Casual Dating

- ▶ Getting to know each other better
- ▶ Dating might be in different forms (supervised, with friends or adults as a group)
- ▶ Still feel interested, attracted
- ▶ Want to be with him or her all the time
- ▶ Flirting
- ▶ Talking
- ▶ Spending time together
- ▶ Doing things both enjoy
- ▶ Seeing if the other person feels the same way through behaviors or conversations
- ▶ Wanting to get to know the person better and help him or her get to know you

Friendship Shade: Serious Romantic Dating

- ▶ Feel more comfortable with this person
- ▶ Can be yourself
- ▶ See each other frequently
- ▶ May date only each other
- ▶ Physical contact may progress (touching, holding hands, kissing)
- ▶ May go on individual or group dates
- ▶ If sensory challenges, can talk about them

Friendship Shade: Committed Intimate Relationship

- ▶ Been in a relationship for a long time
- ▶ Comfortable together
- ▶ Want to be together
- ▶ Feeling is mutual
- ▶ Relationship built on respect, trust, honesty, fun, comfort, love
- ▶ Support one another
- ▶ Show feelings through words, behaviors (physical expressions as well as small gestures like making dinner or giving gifts)
- ▶ Feelings of love and respect
- ▶ May be willing to discuss contraception methods
- ▶ May progress to wanting to express yourself and feelings through sexual intercourse

Relationships do not have to progress. A friend does not need to become a casual date. Many relationships, while fun, respectful, and healthy, may not end up as a committed relationship. While some relationships may not last, they can be great practice for social skills, can be fun, and

can provide awesome opportunities to get to know another person, as well as for your adolescent to know him or herself in a relationship.

Your adolescent may want to go from friends to a committed relationship in one interaction, or may see his or her peers seeming very serious in their behaviors toward another person. Support your teen in practicing to get to know another person and always being comfortable in any stage of a relationship. You can give encouragement to follow the shades of relationships, in order, and to spend plenty of time in each shade before moving forward. A strong foundation is necessary for a relationship to grow and be healthy.

Healthy Relationships and Healthy Views of Relationships

Boundaries in relationships have a number of levels. There are physical boundaries, respecting personal space (maybe at arm’s length). There are communication boundaries, such as not asking really personal questions of someone you just met or sharing way too much information about yourself. There are boundaries with the amount of attachment—maybe your adolescent forms a very quick, almost obsessive, attachment to someone he or she just met. Boundaries can be practiced related to understanding the shades of relationships.

Without experience and practice in relationships, your teen may need extra support to know what behaviors, conversations, and feelings are appropriate for healthy relationships. Being able to decipher a healthy versus unhealthy relationship will not only keep your adolescent safe, but it can also help him or her act in appropriate ways.

Here are some characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships:

Healthy Relationships	Unhealthy Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conversation where both people share they want to be in a relationship with each other ▶ Feel comfortable ▶ Can be yourself ▶ Want the other person to be him or herself ▶ Trust ▶ Honesty ▶ Fun ▶ Humor ▶ Respect ▶ Talk openly and truthfully (being able to express what you want and need) ▶ Share interests ▶ Support ▶ Give and take ▶ Listening ▶ Attention ▶ Feel safe ▶ Respect when you or the other person says no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pressure to do anything not comfortable with ▶ Unkind words ▶ Unkind actions ▶ No trust ▶ Always feel sad when together ▶ Unhappy together ▶ Force someone to be with you or to like you ▶ Don’t feel like you can say no ▶ Being teased or made fun of so others will laugh when you don’t think it is funny ▶ Fighting ▶ Violence ▶ Disrespect ▶ No time together ▶ Not talking ▶ Aggressive

Relationships are not about feeling pressured to do something or feeling uncomfortable. Of course, the same is the case in how your adolescent treats other people. He or she can never pressure someone to do something they do not want to do. This would not feel good, personally, and does not feel good to others.

Expressing Yourself in Relationships

When your adolescent is attracted to someone and wants to start dating, there are many ways to ease into it. He or she does not need to jump right into a traditional kind of date. Group dates, outings with adult supervision, or parent-accompanied dates may eventually lead to a traditional date out. This phasing into dating can be really helpful for practicing asking someone out or getting ready for a date, yet taking some of the social pressure off. At the same time, many adolescents are not going to be super excited to have their parent along for a date. There may be ways to compromise, or maybe another adult mentor could help, too. Dating can go slow and will certainly depend on your adolescent's understanding of appropriate behaviors and conversations, comfort in relationships, confidence, and ability to stay safe.

Asking out

Asking someone out on a date can be really scary because you like them, and you do not know if they will say yes or no. Remind your son or daughter that asking someone out on a date only happens after knowing him or her for a while, and they have worked through the shades of friendships. Stress that he or she does not ask a peer out that he or she has just met.

When your adolescent with ASD is ready to ask someone out, remind him or her that the person might say yes, no, or even maybe. Any answer is okay and should be respected. Your adolescent should have an idea of what he or she would like to do on the date—maybe going to the movies with a couple friends or trying out a favorite coffee shop. Also, it can help to have a particular day and time so the potential person can check if he or she is available. If the person says yes, your teen might say: "Great, I'll look forward to seeing you on X at X." If someone says no, say: "Okay, too bad. Maybe another time." If maybe, say: "Okay, would it be all right if I follow up with you in a few days to see if it might work out?" or "Do you want to let me know?" If your teen is not sure of the answer, it is okay to ask for clarification, such as "Would you like to go on a different day or to a different place?" It is always best to not ask someone repeatedly on a date and repeatedly be turned down. Once your son or daughter has been turned down three times, tell them to stop asking the person unless the peer is giving them a reason that makes sense (e.g., "I have been sick, but I would like to go out when I am feeling well.").

Getting ready

Getting ready for a date involves actually getting ready—showering and wearing clean clothes. Presenting yourself in a nice, comfortable, clean way is appropriate for a date. Also, getting ready means to prepare for where your teen is going to go, being comfortable with that place, planning for the money needed, coordinating the schedule, and learning how to get there. The more planning can be done ahead of time, the more comfortable your teen may be on the actual date. Your adolescent can plan some topics to talk about or some questions to ask. While the date does not need to be scripted, having some ideas will help.

Actual date

Here are some tips for during a date:

- ▶ Respect boundaries—give the person enough personal space. Also, find topics to talk about that are general and not too personal (e.g., movie, TV, school, favorite hobbies).
- ▶ Dates are about getting to know another person. So, avoid only talking about yourself. Ask about your date's interests, and you will show that you care about him or her.
- ▶ It is totally normal to be nervous, excited, scared, and happy (all kinds of feelings) on a date. Most likely, the other person feels the same.
- ▶ Keep the first date simple. Go to a place that is familiar and comfortable for a reasonable amount of time. A date does not need to be long or cost a lot of money.
- ▶ Dating behaviors—make eye contact, give compliments, listen, ask about interests, share interests, and have two-way conversations.
- ▶ If your child asked, he or she can pay for the date if the other person is open to that. If the date offers to pay, your son or daughter can politely decline; but if they still want to, that's okay.
- ▶ Topics for getting to know another person might be: *What kind of hobbies do you have? What are your favorite topics in school? Tell me about your family.*

Ending a date

At the end of the date, your adolescent does not need to commit to more dates. He or she can process how that one went (later) and then decide if going on another date feels comfortable. Whether there is another date lined up or not, your adolescent should know how to end a date nicely and politely. A sample end of date conversation might be something like: "Thank you for spending time with me. I had a fun time and look forward to seeing you again sometime." (There is no need to hug or kiss after dates.)

Your adolescent might find it useful to follow up on the date with a trusted adult or mentor. Your son or daughter can talk about how it went, how they felt, what they did, and then get feedback and ask questions. Processing and learning from a date can really help for future dates.

Remember, dating is about getting to know someone and really getting to know your adolescent in relationship to other people. Your child will learn what he or she likes, does not like, wants, and needs in relationships. Remind your child that more dates may happen, but he or she is not going to marry every date. Help him or her take some of the pressure off and just have fun!



Game

Haunted House game

Tunnel of Love game



Learning How Worksheets

Shades of Relationships: Opportunities to Practice, page 175

Realistic Views of Relationships, page 179

Conclusion

From friendships to interest to dating, relationships of any kind are an important part of growing up. With the proper tools and support, your adolescent with ASD can and will develop meaningful relationships by building on his or her strengths and talents, and by creating relationships that best serve his or her needs.

There are many nuances and hidden rules to developing strong relationships. The following section of handouts and activities gives you and your adolescent hands-on resources to practice these important skills.



Worksheets

2

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FRIENDSHIPS

Defining Friendships for Yourself

As your adolescent develops the skills to create and maintain friendships, it may be helpful for him/her to recognize the qualities he/she may want in a friend. In doing so, your child can form positive, meaningful relationships with his/her peers.

The concept of friendship varies from person to person, so your adolescent will need your support and guidance to figure out what qualities are important to him/her in friendships. This worksheet will offer some specific ways to help your child explore and develop his/her own definition of what qualities he/she would like in friends.

Activity: My Ideal Friend Job Posting

Have your adolescent list the qualities he/she may value in a friendship, as if he/she is about to post a job offer for an ideal friend in the newspaper. Review the questions together and help him/her be descriptive in the responses.

Questions to consider:

1. What interests would I like to share with a friend?
2. What do I expect a friend to do when I am:
 - a. Happy? (e.g., smile with me)
 - b. Sad? (e.g., leave me alone until I appear calm, tell me it is all right for me to feel sad)
3. What makes a friend different from a stranger or a classmate who I never talk to? (refer to the "Shades of Friendship" worksheet in the parent guide)
4. Do I see family members (siblings, cousins my age) as friends?
5. Do I want a friend who is like me? How?

To me, a friend is someone...

- ▶ Who is fun and easy to be with
- ▶ Who I enjoy spending time with
- ▶ Who likes the same things I do (music, movies, clothes, etc.)
- ▶ Who I can talk to when I feel sad
- ▶ Who I feel comfortable sharing my feelings with
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Friendship Word Bank

To help facilitate your discussion as you complete the job-posting activity, use the adjectives listed below to help identify the qualities your adolescent holds important in friendships. Depending on his/her learning needs, you may want to describe these terms in more detail or give scenarios/ examples/pictures. For instance, you can go over the advantages or disadvantages of having a friend who has any of these particular personal traits.

Accepting

Hardworking

Patient

Brave

Helpful

Polite

Caring

Honest

Respectful

Confident

Kind

Responsible

Creative

Loyal

Sensitive

Dependable

Mature

Smart

Forgiving

Optimistic

Supportive

Funny

Open-minded

Trusting

Good-looking

Outgoing

Understanding



FRIENDSHIPS

Being a Friend Versus Acting Friendly

Adolescents with ASD may have a hard time distinguishing the difference between someone who could be a friend and someone who is simply acting friendly. It can be confusing because the qualities of a friend can overlap with those of someone who just has a nice personality. This worksheet offers some ways to walk through this concept and practice by responding to different scenarios.

How to Tell the Difference Between a Friend and Someone who is Acting Friendly

Below are some qualities you can go over with your adolescent to highlight that not everyone who acts friendly and polite is a friend. Friends have additional qualities that make them more than just acquaintances, or people you recognize but do not talk to on a regular basis. Encourage your child to think about his/her classmates at school to see if he/she notices these qualities in anyone he/she might know. It can be useful to also go over the characteristics of progressing friendships in the "Shades of Friendship" worksheet.

Acting friendly may look like:

- ▶ Say, "Hi, how's it going?"
- ▶ Make eye contact
- ▶ Talk about the weather
- ▶ Show good manners

In addition to the traits listed above, a friend may also do the following:

- ▶ Show interest in what you're saying (prolonged eye contact, nodding)
- ▶ Look forward to seeing you
- ▶ Seem relaxed and comfortable when he/she is around you
- ▶ Listen to your feelings when you have a deep conversation
- ▶ Be willing to exchange contact information to arrange a time to meet later
- ▶ Want to spend time with you
- ▶ Compliment you about an accomplishment

As your adolescent observes these qualities in the people that he/she encounters, in turn, he/she can gain a better understanding of how *he/she* can become a good friend. Remind him/her that these qualities should be seen by both people in the friendship.

Scenarios

Have your adolescent practice and determine whether someone is a friend or is just acting friendly using the following chart. Use the scenarios to help think about how and why someone would be considered a friend. Additional space has been provided to add your own scenarios. You can have your adolescent write down his/her responses to help generalize the distinction between a friend and someone who is acting friendly.

Scenario	They are... ^(check one)	Why do you think so?
a. Someone lends you a pencil when you asked to borrow one.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
b. You are upset and you go to him/her to talk about your feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
c. Someone invites you to hang out with him/her at the mall after school.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
d. While shopping at the grocery store, someone looks at you, smiles, and walks past you.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
e. Someone you know from class holds the door for you.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
f.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>
g.	<input type="checkbox"/> A friend <input type="checkbox"/> Acting friendly	<hr/> <hr/>

Additional Key Points to Consider

Behaviors and conversation topics: As you and your adolescent review the different qualities of a friend and someone who is acting friendly, try to describe the different behaviors and potential conversation topics between the two. For example, your adolescent shouldn't share long stories or personal information, like where he/she lives, to just anyone he/she meets. Instead, he/she should go to a friend. For more information on this topic, refer to the "Shades of Friendship" worksheet.

Not being friends with everyone is okay: Although it is encouraged to be polite while interacting with other people, many adolescents with ASD may be more comfortable with having one or two good friends. This is perfectly fine. The key here is to help your child distinguish between friends and acquaintances.

References to movies and TV shows: Have your adolescent observe the characters in the plot interacting with one another. Together, identify the "friend" and "being friendly" qualities mentioned earlier in this worksheet among the different characters. It may be helpful to have your adolescent write down, draw, or talk out his/her observations.



FRIENDSHIPS

Shades of Friendship: Conversation Topics

Knowing what types of conversations are acceptable at each level of friendship can help your adolescent feel more confident and comfortable when talking with others. The chart below highlights some potential topics to bring up during a conversation with someone who falls in a particular shade. Refer to this chart to help you and your adolescent complete your own chart on the next page.

If I'm talking to a...	I can say or talk about...	I should NOT talk about...	Some examples of those people are...
Stranger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greetings like "hi," "have a nice day" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal information like my address and contact information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ People I see at the grocery store or at the mall, or anywhere in public
Acquaintance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Light, positive news ▶ Weather, sports, popular TV shows (small-talk conversations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ My or his/her personal problems ▶ Personal information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Students or people I see repeatedly at school or in public
Casual friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Similar interests or hobbies ▶ Class, homework, upcoming event at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal problems ▶ Religion ▶ Controversial issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Classmates who I sometimes talk to before or after class
Everyday friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal thoughts, opinions, ideas about certain issues ▶ Compliments (on clothes, new haircut), weekend plans, favorite foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Only my ideas and concerns—ask about his/hers as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Classmates who might be in the same club at school as me ▶ Classmates who I trust more than a casual friend
Close friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Our future goals and dreams that we want to accomplish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Only myself (and not ask about him/her) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Classmates who I do activities with frequently (we know each other well, known each other for a long time)

*Note:

Conversations for Different Shades of Friendship

Using the chart below, brainstorm with your adolescent some topics for individuals he/she may see on a regular basis. Practicing coming up with general topics to discuss can help prepare for future encounters with certain people. It may be helpful for your adolescent to use specific names of these people to start off.

- ▶ Your teachers:
- ▶ Your classmates:
- ▶ Your neighbors:
- ▶ _____:

If I'm talking to a...	I can say or talk about...	I should NOT talk about...	Some examples of those people are...
Stranger	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Acquaintance	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Casual friend	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Everyday friend	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Close friend	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



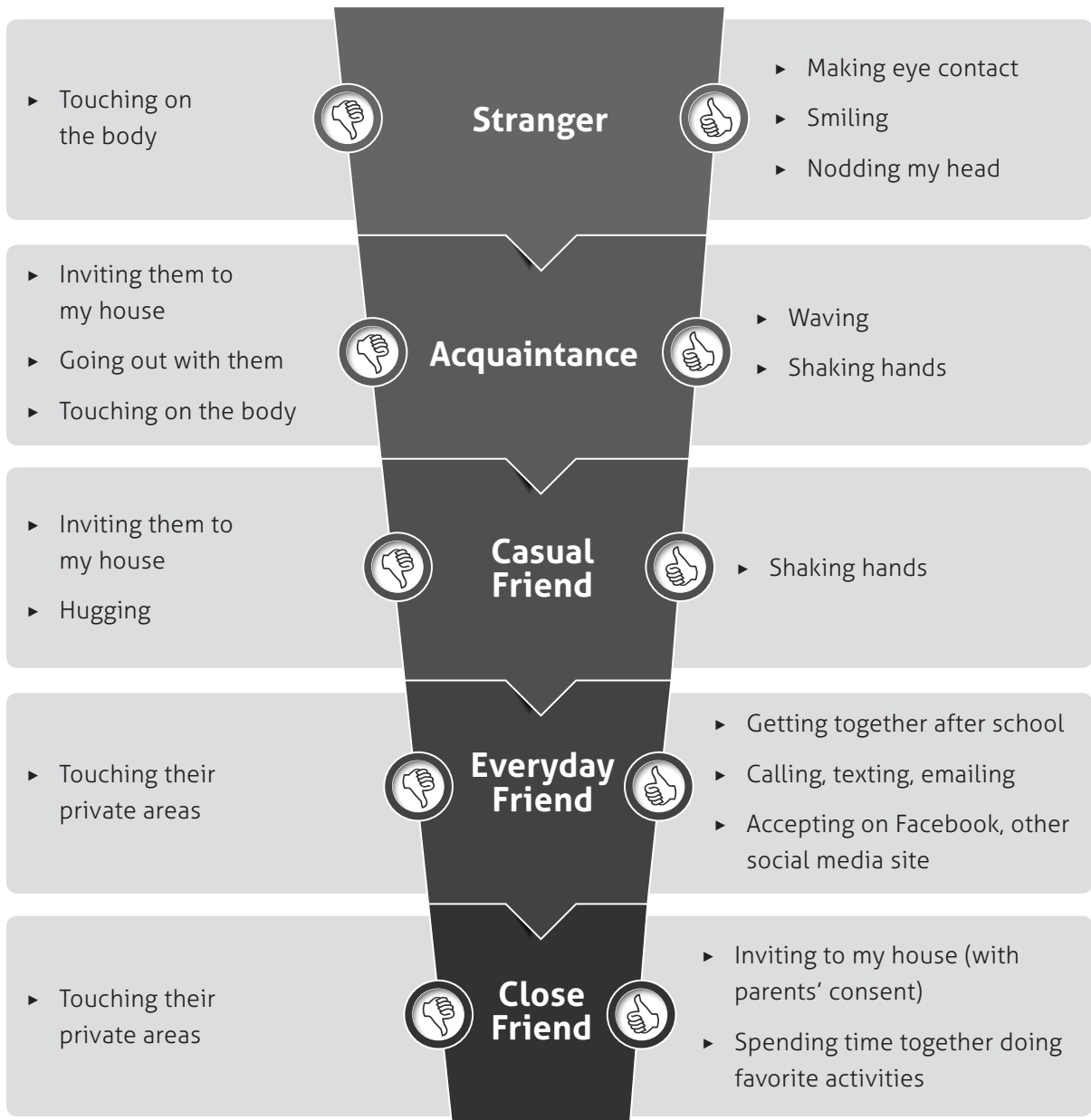
FRIENDSHIPS

Shades of Friendship: Behaviors

Along with conversation topics, it is important for your adolescent to learn what behaviors are appropriate for certain shades of friendship. With your child, review the diagram below to become familiar with some appropriate behaviors (on the right) and inappropriate behaviors (on the left) when interacting with someone who belongs in a particular shade. Start a conversation around the meaning behind the description of each behavior so that he/she can have a more concrete understanding. Your adolescent should notice that some behaviors overlap or change as he/she meets people across different shades.



Depending on your child's learning style, you may want to use pictures or drawings to help visualize these behaviors as you go over the diagram.



Using the diagram on the previous page, work together to list some behaviors that are appropriate and not appropriate for each shade of friendship. Again, you can choose to use pictures or drawings with captions to represent these behaviors. Your adolescent may have more questions as he/she encounters different people, so it can be helpful to include specific names or general descriptions of people who could fall in each shade.

The diagram is a funnel shape divided into five horizontal sections, each representing a different level of friendship. From top to bottom, the sections are: Stranger, Acquaintance, Casual Friend, Everyday Friend, and Close Friend. Each section is flanked by a thumbs-down icon on the left and a thumbs-up icon on the right. The sections are surrounded by horizontal lines for writing notes.

Stranger	Acquaintance	Casual Friend	Everyday Friend	Close Friend
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



FRIENDSHIPS

Shades of Friendship: Assigning People to Shades

Your adolescent will need some assistance in categorizing the people in his/her life into different shades. Use the following questions to help guide this process and fill out the boxes with descriptions or specific names of the people who belong in each shade.

- Where do you tend to meet? (*at school, the mall, coffee shop*)
- How often do you see them? (*randomly, a couple of times a week*)
- How frequently do you talk to them? (*only at school, texting a few times a day*)
- When you talk, what topics do you bring up? (*homework, classes, weekend plans*)
- How comfortable do you feel around them? (*spending time outside of class*)

Strangers

▶ Sometimes walk by me without any eye contact or greeting

▶ _____

▶ _____

▶ _____

Acquaintances

▶ I might run into them in the hallway at school and say "Hi"

▶ _____

▶ _____

▶ _____

Casual Friends

▶ People who I share the same class with

▶ _____

▶ _____

▶ _____

Everyday Friends

▶ Classmates who have some of the same interests as I have

▶ _____

▶ _____

▶ _____

Close Friends

▶ Someone I feel comfortable talking to and make time to meet outside of school

▶ _____

▶ _____

▶ _____

Activity: Scenarios for Assigning People to Shades

Below are some examples of real-life situations that your adolescent can practice to better understand the different shades of friendship and who may fall in each shade. Together, read each scenario and discuss which shade the person might fit into. Don't worry about the correct answer; the goal is to help your adolescent generalize his/her understanding and to get him/her to ask more questions to determine the person's shade.

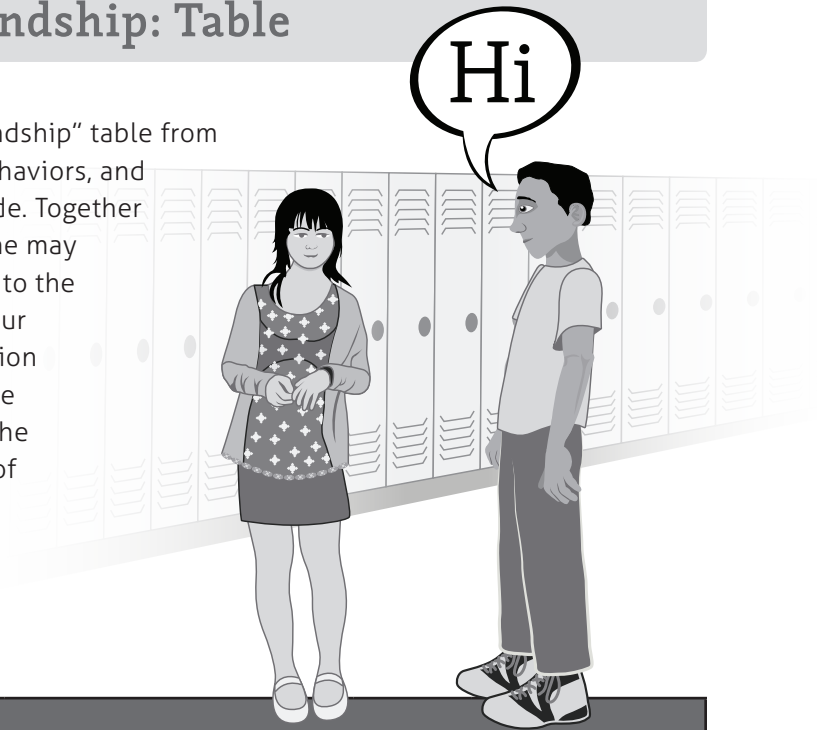
1. You walk into a new coffee shop to order something to drink. The person at the register takes your order. You would consider this person a _____.
2. You call up someone who you know from class to ask if he/she is free on Saturday to go to the movies. You would consider this person a _____.
3. You meet up with someone at the school library to study for an upcoming exam. You would consider this person a _____.
4. The person who sits next to you in class asked how you are doing. You only see this person during class. You would consider this person a _____.
5. You ran into someone at the grocery store who volunteers at the same place you do. They wave to you. You would consider this person a _____.
6. You interact with someone while playing an online video game. You would consider this person a _____.



FRIENDSHIPS

Shades of Friendship: Table

This is a handout of the “Shades of Friendship” table from Chapter 2 describing the definitions, behaviors, and conversations associated with each shade. Together with your adolescent, discuss how he/she may define a shade of friendship in addition to the qualities already listed. Take notes of your conversation in the “My Definition” section for future reference. You may want to use this worksheet as a way to consolidate the information from the previous “Shades of Friendship” worksheets.



Friendship Shade: Stranger		
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do not know this person ▶ Have never seen him before ▶ Maybe recognize him from the bus (for example) but have never talked or interacted with him ▶ May be people on the street, at the mall, working at the grocery store ▶ Some people stay strangers forever ▶ Most people are strangers My Definition: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Nod head ▶ Smile Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching (you don't touch; stranger doesn't touch you) My Behaviors: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
	Conversations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May say hi, just to be friendly ▶ Say, "Have a nice day." Don'ts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Private or personal information My Conversations: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
People I know <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>		

Friendship Shade: Acquaintance		
Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May be someone you see at the post office, in the hallway at school ▶ Might recognize an acquaintance but really do not know him ▶ May know his name but not his interests <p>My Definition:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Wave ▶ High five or hand bump 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Go out with or invite over ▶ Touching ▶ Calling or texting ▶ Following to class
	<p>My Behaviors:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	
<p>People I know</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Conversations	
	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Only positive thoughts and feelings ▶ Small-talk conversations about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Weather ▶ Movie or television show watched recently ▶ Sporting event in the news, school news 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal problems (yours or theirs) ▶ Personal information (like where you live or your contact information)
<p>My Conversations:</p> <hr/> <hr/>		

Friendship Shade: Casual friend		
Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May know from class ▶ Might know about his interests or abilities in school ▶ Talks to him ▶ Has something in common (like a class, sport, hobby) <p>My Definition:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High five ▶ Handshake ▶ Smile 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hugging ▶ Touching
	<p>My Behaviors:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	
<p>People I know</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Conversations	
	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ School topics (class, homework, upcoming activity) ▶ Interests or activities ▶ Share contact information to do a class project together after school 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personal problems ▶ Religion or political conversations ▶ Family history
<p>My Conversations:</p> <hr/> <hr/>		

Friendship Shade: Everyday Friend

Definition	Behaviors			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Begin to trust each other ▶ Know what your friend likes to do in his spare time, his special interests ▶ Share your own interests, likes, dislikes ▶ Share your own sensory needs for when you go out in the public together or spend time together ▶ Feel comfortable with him ▶ Have spontaneous conversations ▶ Might be a classmate or someone from a group you participate in <p>My Definition:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Get together (for activity, to share an interest, be together) ▶ Phone/message/text ▶ Invite to an activity or to your home ▶ High five, handshake, smile, give compliment 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching private body areas ▶ Hugging or kissing ▶ Sexting 		
<p>My Behaviors:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
<p>Conversations</p>				
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td> <p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he is doing ▶ Start to have conversations on controversial topics but always leave being supportive to one another (agree to disagree, if needed) </td> <td> <p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation </td> </tr> </table>			<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he is doing ▶ Start to have conversations on controversial topics but always leave being supportive to one another (agree to disagree, if needed) 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation
<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he is doing ▶ Start to have conversations on controversial topics but always leave being supportive to one another (agree to disagree, if needed) 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation 			
<p>My Conversations:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
<p>People I know</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				



Friendship Shade: Close Friend

Definition	Behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Know each other well, feel comfortable, can be yourself, do activities together, have over to your home ▶ Nurture, take care of each other ▶ Trust each other ▶ Support each other ▶ Know for a long time ▶ Might have one or two close friends ▶ Has seen you on your worst day and still wants to be your friend ▶ Have seen your friend on his/her worst day and still want to be his/her close friend ▶ Expect your friend to be considerate of your sensory needs when together <p>My Definition:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite over to your house ▶ Share favorite activities together ▶ Phone/message/text ▶ Spend time together ▶ Hug 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Touching private body areas ▶ Kissing ▶ Sexting
	<p>My Behaviors:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
	<p>Conversations</p>	
<p>People I know</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>👍 Dos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share personal thoughts, opinions ▶ Listen to his/her thoughts and ideas ▶ Ask how he/she is doing ▶ Share your hopes and dreams ▶ Disclosure of ASD diagnosis and characteristics of ASD 	<p>👎 Don'ts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dominate the conversation ▶ Only talk about yourself
	<p>My Conversations:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	



FRIENDSHIPS

Creating Friendship Opportunities

As your adolescent becomes familiar with the different shades of friendship, he/she will need your support in developing the skills to make new friendships and maintain existing friendships. This worksheet offers some ideas and strategies to help practice basic friendship skills and feel more comfortable when interacting with friends.

Strategies for Making New Friends

List some ideas of how to connect with new people. Try to be specific and tailor these ideas to your adolescent's life and interests.

- ▶ Join a club or camp dedicated to a special interest
- ▶ Volunteer at the local animal shelter
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Strategies for Maintaining Friendships

Review the following scenarios to get some ideas on how he/she can maintain healthy friendships.

Stay in contact :

- ▶ Amy and Tina are classmates who get along very well together. Summer is coming up, but they want to keep in touch, even when school is out. They agree to exchange contact information for talking and getting together over the summer.



Get together for activities:



- ▶ Henry and David both enjoy going to football games. When their favorite team is playing, they plan to go to the game together. Henry's parents even got them tickets for great seats!
- ▶ Christine and Kim want to try baking cookies using a new recipe they found. They decide it would be fun to meet up after school to bake together.



Getting to know a friend better:



- ▶ Jacob and Kevin learned that Caroline has a new passion for nature photography. They ask her if they can join her while she takes pictures and compliment her on her photography skills.
- ▶ Phil tells Bryan that he is interested in joining a club at school, but he is nervous about it. Bryan encourages him and says he will meet Phil at the next club meeting.



Presentation:

- ▶ Sarah is getting ready for the first day of school. Excited to meet new classmates and old friends, she wears her favorite dress and spends extra time in the morning brushing her hair before leaving for school.

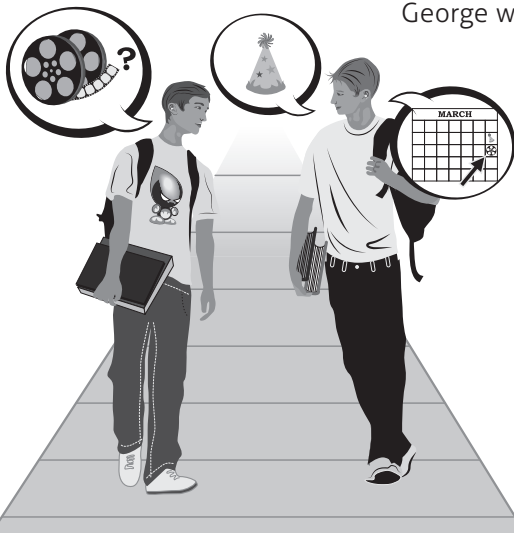
Having other friends:

- ▶ John has many hobbies, such as playing video games and reading books about animals. Even though Vincent does not play video games, John spends time with Vincent reading about reptiles since he knows Vincent enjoys learning about them.



Being flexible :

- ▶ George suggested going to the movies, but Justin said that he was busy because he was invited to go to his friend's birthday party. George was a bit disappointed, but Justin said he should be able to go sometime next week to the movies with him. George felt better knowing that Justin still wants to hang out with him on another day.





FRIENDSHIPS

Template for Ideas to Maintain Friendships

Your adolescent may have different areas of strength and challenge when it comes to maintaining friendships. For instance, he/she may have difficulty with:

- ▶ Presentation
- ▶ Getting together for activities
- ▶ Staying in contact
- ▶ Getting to know a friend

Talk with your adolescent about the areas where he/she would like some support so that he/she can better develop the skills necessary for maintaining friendships. Then use the template below to brainstorm options they could easily implement.

1. Brainstorm (scenarios need support to maintain friendship)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2. Options to try	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. Observations (from parents or other friends)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
4. Ways to improve	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5. Making a plan to practice the skill	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



FRIENDSHIPS

Interaction Debrief

Example of Interaction Debrief

Using your adolescent's experiences as a starting point, ask him/her if he/she has any questions or conversational skills they would like to address. Write down the notes of your discussion and practice having the conversation together.

Review the example below to help you fill out the template on the next page.

Interaction	A classmate complimented my new haircut. I told him the name of the barber shop I went to, the price, and other details. I was talking for about 5 minutes, but then he looked away and said he had to go.
What's Important to Adolescent	I want to try to have a comfortable conversation with him. He is a nice person, and we have some classes together.
Tips to Remember	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Make eye contact (as much as is comfortable) ▶ Take turns in a conversation (1–2 sentences per turn) ▶ Know how to end a conversation
What to Do at the Next Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Say: "Thank you, I just got it cut on Saturday." ▶ Wait for another person's response ▶ Listen and reply (keep comment brief) ▶ Say "thanks" again, smile, wave "bye"

Template for Role Play

Interaction	<hr/> <hr/>
What's Important to Adolescent	<hr/> <hr/>
Tips to Remember	<hr/> <hr/>
What to Do at the Next Interaction	<hr/> <hr/>



FRIENDSHIPS

Peer Pressure

Scenarios

The following scenarios give examples of situations in which your adolescent may feel pressured to do something he/she is not comfortable with or is unsure of. Together, go over the scenarios below and make a plan for the best way he/she can respond to each.

1. After lunch break, a few of your classmates sneak outside of the building to skip their next class. They tell you to come along with them and say, "Are you weird or something? Let's go!"

Response:

2. You are invited to a friend's birthday party. You find out that a group of people brought beer to the party to share. Everyone else seems to be drinking it and having a good time, including your friend, but you know that underage drinking is wrong. Your friend says, "Come on, try it! You want to be one of us, right?"

Response:

3. You run into some people you know from school at the mall. They want you to take the blue sweatshirt from the clothing store (without paying for it) to give to them. They say to you: "Just do it this one time, and I won't ask you ever again!"

Response:



Tip: For more practice, you and your adolescent can research some more examples of peer pressure in television shows, movies, or books aimed toward young adults, such as:

- ▶ "Lord of the Flies" by William Golding (Fiction)
- ▶ "Boy Meets World" (TV Show)
- ▶ "The Sandlot" (Movie)

What to Do if Peer Pressure Happens

To help your adolescent identify that he/she is experiencing peer pressure, here are some cues to look for:

- ▶ Teasing about the clothes you wear
- ▶ Asking you to do something to be their friend
- ▶ Insisting that you skip class when you don't want to
- ▶ Convincing you to do certain things that make you feel uneasy to "fit in"
- ▶ Making it difficult to speak up for yourself in front of a group

Brainstorm some things your adolescent can do to cope with peer pressure:

- ▶ Stay calm
- ▶ Walk away from the situation
- ▶ Say "no" or "I'm busy"
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

How to Not Pressure Others

It is important for your adolescent to be aware of when he/she might be pressuring others. Let your child know that he/she could be pressuring someone else if:

- ▶ He/She seems hesitant (not willing to do something the first time you ask)
- ▶ He/She says things such as "No," "I don't know," or "I'm not sure about this"
- ▶ He/She looks nervous (looking down, not smiling, shaking head)
- ▶ He/She physically tries to distance himself/herself from you

List some ways your adolescent can avoid pressuring others:

- ▶ Ask them how they feel or if they feel uncomfortable
- ▶ Avoid teasing
- ▶ Be willing to do activities that others want to do instead of always doing what he/she is interested in
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Who to Talk to

It's always a good idea to have a few people in mind who you can trust to talk about peer pressure issues. List specific individuals in your adolescent's life he/she would feel comfortable opening up to about his/her concerns:

- ▶ My parent(s)
- ▶ Teacher
- ▶ Guidance counselor
- ▶ Older sibling
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Decoding Attraction

To help your adolescent understand and recognize attraction, we have broken the concept down into three separate experiences. With your child, review the definitions for the physical, emotional, and behavioral feelings associated with attraction.

Physical: Noticeable changes that occur within the body or in your appearance.

Emotional: Changes in thoughts or mood because of that person.

Behavioral: Difference in how you act around that person.

Matching Activity

Together, identify the examples below as physical, emotional, or behavioral signs of attraction, and list them in the chart provided.

- A. Sweating palms, underarms
- B. Thinking about the person multiple times throughout the day
- C. Blushing, face turning red
- D. Breathing more quickly
- E. Thinking that he/she looks nice, attractive
- F. Wanting to be around him/her
- G. Fast heartbeat
- H. Nervousness (cannot think of what to say to him/her)
- I. Wanting to ask about the things he/she likes

Examples of Attraction		
Physical	Emotional	Behavioral
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Liking Etiquette

It is important to go over which behaviors and language are appropriate and inappropriate when your adolescent discovers that he/she likes someone. Below are some examples that you may want to go over with your adolescent. Try to incorporate pictures and video clips, as seen in the next worksheet, "Noticing and Expressing Attraction," in your discussion to help develop a more concrete understanding of these behaviors.

You may also like to add your own descriptions in the space provided of both appropriate and inappropriate ways to act when liking someone more than a friend.

It is good to:

- ▶ Compliment how he/she looks ("You look nice today!")
- ▶ Share, offer gifts on his/her birthday (e.g., small items like books, games, or movies he/she is interested in)
- ▶ Ask if he/she is available to meet up later

- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____



It is NOT okay to:

- ▶ Follow him/her without her permission
- ▶ Grab the other person forcefully
- ▶ Push the other person
- ▶ Saying things like "I love you" (it can make her feel uncomfortable if not in a serious dating relationship)



- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

Justifying My Behaviors

The purpose of this activity is to help your adolescent understand why certain behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable when it comes to expressing his/her interest in others. Brainstorm some examples together and describe the outcome or consequence of each behavior.

	Example	Outcome or Consequences
Appropriate Behaviors	1. Inviting him/her to lunch on the weekend 2. Giving him/her a small gift on his/her birthday _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	1. I can plan an opportunity to get to know him/her better. 2. He/She might like the gift and remember me. It's a nice way to show that I care about him/her and care about his/her interests. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Inappropriate Behaviors	1. Prolong touching without his/her consent 2. Saying serious things like "I love you" _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	1. It will make him/her feel uncomfortable because I am invading his/her space. 2. It's not something I should say when I am not in a serious relationship with him/her. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Noticing and Expressing Attraction

You and your adolescent can look for examples in media showing different types of attraction. Storylines that include the main character having a love interest usually have good examples of various types of attraction.

You can try looking at:

- ▶ TV shows (teen dramas)
- ▶ Movies
- ▶ Books
- ▶ YouTube clips
- ▶ Child's experience in school (observing peers)

Have your adolescent describe the different types of attraction he/she observes. Write them out in the spaces provided below.

Physical Attraction:

- ▶ Example: John sees Kim wearing a new dress today. During lunch, he goes up to her, smiles, and says "That dress looks nice." She smiles back at him, and he turns bright red.

Emotional Attraction:

- ▶ Example: Pam daydreams in class about spending the whole day with Brandon at the mall. She writes his name in her notebook sometimes when she thinks of him.

Behavioral Attraction:

- ▶ Example: Kevin is thinking about getting Natalie a present for her birthday that is coming up next week. After class, Kevin asks what she likes (sweets, movies, music, etc).

With your adolescent, have him/her list some physical, emotional, and behavioral feelings he/she notices when he/she is around someone he/she likes more than a friend. Then, talk about any worries your adolescent may have and what he/she can do to improve on how to express those feelings. Use the template to help organize your conversation.

Feelings of Attraction in My Life		
Physical	Emotional	Behavioral
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
My concerns: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	My concerns: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	My concerns: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Next Steps: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Next Steps: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Next Steps: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Starting a Conversation with Someone You Like

Your adolescent probably is really good about discussing his/her interests for hours. However, when starting to develop a relationship with another person, it is imperative to start sharing the conversation. Explain to your son or daughter that the progression of a relationship in regard to someone you like involves learning to start conversations with someone you know. Small talk is when both people talk about the same subject (e.g., weather, sports, movies or television shows, favorite restaurant) with little judgment or opinion, just facts. For this exercise, your adolescent can use the following conversation starters as guidelines to help think of what to ask at least two people he/she would like to talk to this week.

Music: Ask a question about his or her favorite music.

- ▶ What kind of music do you listen to?
- ▶ I really like everything on the radio right now.

Sports: Ask questions about a game you saw over the weekend with highlights.

- ▶ "Did you watch any college football games this past weekend?" "My favorite highlight was _____ (tell about your favorite). What was your favorite play?"
- ▶ "Do you like to watch hockey?" If yes, "what is your favorite team?"; then you can share by saying, "My favorite hockey team is the _____ (state your favorite team)."

Movies/Television: Ask questions about the most recent movie or television show he/she liked.

- ▶ "What is your favorite movie seen in the past month?"
- ▶ "What did you like about the movie?"
- ▶ "Do you have a favorite television show? Tell me about it."

Food like: Ask questions about favorite foods or restaurants he/she likes to go to when eating out.

- ▶ "I was wondering, what is your favorite food?"
- ▶ "Do you have a favorite restaurant?"



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Rules of Conversation When Attracted to Someone

When your adolescent is talking to someone he/she is interested in, it is essential to be an active listener. Being an active listener involves following a list of unspoken rules related to body language and how you acknowledge that you are listening to the person.

Share these rules below with your adolescent and consider implementing these practice activities as a way to build these skills of having an active listening, reciprocal conversation.

Suggested Rules

Rule 1: Periodically, look at the person's face or in the direction of his/her head.

Rule 2: Sit up and face the person talking.

Rule 3: Nod your head to show you are listening.

Rule 4: Repeat back what you heard (but not ALL of what you heard).

Rule 5: Ask a question about the topic. This shows you want to learn more about what the person is sharing with you.

Practice Activities

- ▶ Watch a favorite movie with your adolescent, pausing at scenes where two actors are using Rules 1–5 in a conversation. When the video is paused, establish who is the talker and who is the listener. Then identify signs of body language you saw in a scene that shows the person was listening related to rules 1–5. Finally, what questions did the listener ask to show interest in the conversation?
- ▶ This next activity has two parts for your adolescent:
 1. Practice telling a person about your own interest for 2 minutes. Then let the other person share about his/her interests for 2 minutes. Practice rules 1–4 during this exercise.
 2. Reverse who goes first by having the other person start this time. Have the person talk for 3 minutes about a topic of his/her interest. Then using steps 1–5, reflect what you hear and ask him/her a question to clarify or ask for more information about the topic. When the person is done talking, you can then take 3 minutes to talk and have the other person use rules 1–5 with you.

Practice these two activities every day with someone in your family or a trusted friend until you feel more comfortable with having a reciprocal conversation. Then, you can approach the person you want to date to ask him/her to tell you about an interest he/she has so you can learn something new about this person.



ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Cues for Uninterested

Many people with ASD find it difficult to actually know when a person is not interested in them because of their lack of social skills and understanding subtle body signals. If your adolescent has trouble picking up the signs that someone is not interested, he/she can risk pushing forward, obsessing, even stalking the object of his/her affection. Of course, these behaviors are often not meant intentionally, but serious implications can result. Stress to your adolescent it is crucial to be aware of the other person's body language and to what degree he/she is engaged in the conversation.

- ▶ Some of these signs include the person :
 - ▶ Yawning several times without explaining why he/she is yawning
 - ▶ Crossing his/her arms in front of his/her chest (unless the room is chilly or cold)
 - ▶ Having an open mouth like he/she is about to say something, but you don't allow him/her time to talk, so he/she is constantly trying to interrupt what you are saying
 - ▶ Looking around the room to see who else is in the area to talk to you besides you
 - ▶ Attempting to talk to someone else while you are still talking to him/her
 - ▶ Repeatedly looking at his/her watch to show he/she can't wait to leave from listening to you
 - ▶ Ending the conversation or date short by making an excuse to leave early
 - ▶ Moving away from you talking when you start to move closer; may be a sign that the other person thinks you are in his/her personal space
 - ▶ Not making eye contact and also stops responding or asking questions
- ▶ To practice noticing other people's body language, go into a public place (e.g., park, restaurant, or mall) where you and your adolescent can observe how other people are engaged in conversation. With a list of these signs (written on an index card or notebook), evaluate whether two people are interested in one another using a scale of 1 (definitely yes), 2 (maybe, see some of the signs but not all of them), or a 3 (not at all interested). This of course will be a guess based on what you see or hear. Do your best to make your best guess. Do this exercise every day for a week or until your adolescent feels more comfortable identifying the signs of someone who is not interested.
- ▶ Implement this practice: Have your adolescent start a conversation with the person he/she is interested in. Have him/her pay attention to the person's body language when talking. Then, when your adolescent comes home, talk about the exact signs he/she noticed that showed the other person was interested or uninterested in what he/she said.





ATTRACTION AND INTEREST

Exaggerated Feelings

Whether or not your adolescent is interested in another person, you can support him or her by routinely talking about or pointing out different kinds of attraction or interest in relationships and appropriate ways to be in those relationships. Often, adolescents with ASD (and their peers, too) can misinterpret acting friendly as a sign of a deeper level of interest. Your adolescent might also misinterpret his/her feelings and think that interest in another person really means he/she loves that person. It is common for adolescents with ASD to exaggerate their feelings, even to the point of becoming obsessed with thinking about, talking about, or wanting to be with the focus of their interest. Practicing appropriate ways to express interest and attraction can help.

Here is a chart that displays two ways to interact with another person. The column to the left is "appropriate feelings or interactions to have when you like someone," and the column on the right is "not appropriate or exaggerated feelings when you like someone." Look at the chart to decide which of these factors are mostly like your son or daughter with ASD. Take time to discuss the best solution to incidents you know about and generalize how your adolescent can handle them differently in the future with these examples.

Appropriate Feelings or Interactions to Have When You Like Someone	Not Appropriate or Exaggerated Feelings When You Like Someone
Be friendly and casual by wanting to spend time together doing an activity you will both enjoy. For example, you could say: "I am going to the football game Friday night; do you want to go with me?"	Tell a person what you will do. For example, "I am picking you up Friday night." This means you think you are in control. This is rude to think you have all of the ideas. Everyone likes to have a choice in the decision about what he/she likes to do.
Be positive and honest without divulging too much personal information. For example, you could say: "Some friends of mine are going to the movies tonight; I would like to join them. Do you want to come along, too?"	Avoid giving negative comments about his/her personality. This will give a negative impression and show that you only see the bad side of your friends.
Share and give a small gift (just as a token of how you feel) on a specific occasion like Valentine's Day or 6 months after you have dated.	Give gifts daily, weekly, or monthly. This is too many gifts; the person won't take you seriously when you give a special gift. It is also too much money to spend on someone.
Smile, but must be a natural smile.	Don't smirk or smile constantly.
Give one compliment on what the person is saying (e.g., "That's impressive that you give so much time to volunteering.>").	Constantly give compliments to the person. No one likes to be doted on constantly. It can be embarrassing to some people.
If complimenting the person's looks, mention only body parts above his/her neck (except for feet or shoes) like, "You have a great smile."	Avoid complimenting private parts, such as breasts, buttocks, hips, thighs, or genitalia.
Be friendly. You might say: "It's great to see you." or "You look great in that dress."	Put the person down by telling him/her his/her hair looks bad or he/she is overweight, even though, in your opinion, these comments might be true. These are topics no one wants another person to be honest about unless he/she asks you to be.

Appropriate Feelings or Interactions to Have When You Like Someone	Not Appropriate or Exaggerated Feelings When You Like Someone
Talk about "safe subjects," including news events, popular culture, books, movies, friends, and classes in common.	Avoid topics that are controversial like sex, past partners, politics, religion, or personal information (like how you are managing your ASD symptoms).
Be positive when talking to the person.	Avoid negative outward thoughts or being whiny. No one likes to be around a person who complains often.
Be polite.	Being obscene by making crude remarks or gestures
Ask the person out once; then wait for a response.	Constantly asking the person to go out with you is annoying and close to harassing the person. Stop and wait until the person gets back to you with an answer.
If the person you are interested in says no to going out with you, just say: "Thanks for letting me know" or "If you change your mind, let me know."	Tell him/her what he/she is missing by not being with you, being rude about the turndown, or constantly calling, emailing, or texting until he/she gets angry. Stop this behavior; you are harassing the person, which is illegal.
Call, text, email, or talk outside of school once a day.	Calling, texting, emailing, or talking outside of school more than once a day is rude and intrusive to a person's life.
Touch lightly on the arm (only if you know the person well and feel comfortable with its appropriateness).	Touch a person's thigh, breasts, buttocks, lower back. These are all places you can only touch if you are in an intimate relationship.

Use the chart above to help fill in the spaces below.

Currently, I am having appropriate interactions with the person I am interested in, in the following ways:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I need to stop doing these inappropriate interactions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Shades of Relationships: Assigning People

While not always clear-cut, it is important for adolescents to understand the characteristics of different relationships and to be able to assign people to these shades. While your teen may not be at an age that is appropriate for dating or serious relationships, perhaps there are other examples in his/her life (a big brother, a family friend, a character in a television show) who have entered into these types of relationships and can help him/her to understand the different shades.

Below are some guiding questions that can help to figure out the characteristics of these relationships. Using these questions for guidance, have your teen fill out the boxes with a second characteristic of each shade, as well as the specific names of people who belong in that shade, either as it applies to him/her or to other people in his/her life.

- How much time do you/they spend together? (*weekly, almost every day*)
- What do you/they like about this person? (*shared interests, his/her looks*)
- How well do you/they know this person? (*pretty well, more than most*)
- How does this person make you/them feel? (*comfortable, nervous, excited*)
- What types of things do you/they do together? (*talk, hang out, hold hands*)

Close Friends

Characteristics:

1. Like hanging out or doing activities together.

2. _____

Real-life example: _____

Attraction or Interest

Characteristics:

1. Like how the person looks and acts.

2. _____

Real-life example: _____

Casual Dating

Characteristics:

1. Like to talk and flirt with each other.

2. _____

Real-life example: _____

Serious Romantic Dating

Characteristics:

1. See each other frequently and feel comfortable.

2. _____

Real-life example: _____

Committed Intimate Relationship

Characteristics:

1. Feelings of love and respect.

2. _____

Real-life example: _____

In addition to being able to identify the characteristics of each shade of relationship, it may be helpful for your teen to be able to identify some key visual signals that can better distinguish and identify each shade.

For the following activity, have your adolescent find pictures, from family photos, pictures in a magazine or newspaper, or images on the Internet, of people who appear to belong to each "shade." You can even have him/her create a poster board to display each shade with these pictures. Use the examples below, if needed, and remind your teen that some pictures can fit into multiple categories.

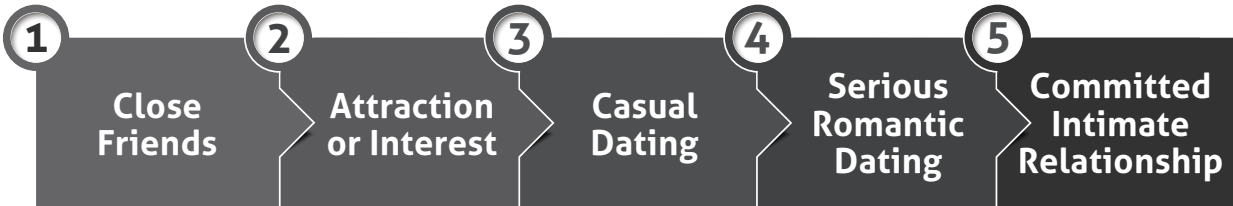
- ▶ **Close Friends:** Two people working on homework together or playing video games.
- ▶ **Attraction or Interest:** People smiling at each other, people leaning in close to one another.
- ▶ **Casual Dating:** Two people holding hands or hugging, spending time together.
- ▶ **Serious Romantic Dating:** A couple going to a school dance together, two people on a date at dinner or the movies.
- ▶ **Committed Intimate Relationship:** A couple getting engaged, a person consoling his/her partner during a time of stress.



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Shades of Relationships: Opportunities to Practice

Below are some examples of relationships that can help your adolescent practice his/her understanding of the different shades of relationships. Together, read each scenario and discuss into which shade the relationship might fit. Do not worry about having the correct answer; the goal is to help your adolescent generalize his/her understanding of each shade and how it applies or may apply to current or future relationships.



Friendship Shade: Close Friends

- ▶ Share similar interests
- ▶ Like being together or doing activities together
- ▶ Can talk about interests
- ▶ Trust each other
- ▶ Have fun together
- ▶ Do not feel attracted or interested in one another in a sexual manner

Friendship Shade: Attraction or Interest

- ▶ Like another person
- ▶ Like how they look, act, talk
- ▶ May have been friends and now find person attractive as more than friends
- ▶ May have just met
- ▶ Might feel nervous
- ▶ Feel attraction feelings (e.g., excited, nervous, thinking about)
- ▶ Realize attraction does not equal love

Friendship Shade: Casual Dating

- ▶ Getting to know each other better
- ▶ Dating might be in different forms (supervised, with friends or adults as a group)
- ▶ Still feel interested, attracted
- ▶ Want to be with him or her all the time
- ▶ Flirting
- ▶ Talking
- ▶ Spending time together
- ▶ Doing things both enjoy
- ▶ Seeing if the other person feels the same way through behaviors or conversations
- ▶ Wanting to get to know the person better and help him or her get to know you

Friendship Shade: Serious Romantic Dating

- ▶ Feel more comfortable with this person
- ▶ Can be yourself
- ▶ See each other frequently
- ▶ May date only each other
- ▶ Physical contact may progress (touching, holding hands, kissing)
- ▶ May go on individual or group dates
- ▶ If sensory challenges, can talk about them

Friendship Shade: Committed Intimate Relationship

- ▶ Been in a relationship for a long time
 - ▶ Comfortable together
 - ▶ Want to be together
 - ▶ Feeling is mutual
 - ▶ Relationship built on respect, trust, honesty, fun, comfort,
- love
 - ▶ Support one another
 - ▶ Show feelings through words, behaviors (physical expressions as well as small gestures like making dinner or giving gifts)
- ▶ Feelings of love and respect
 - ▶ May be willing to discuss contraception methods
 - ▶ May progress to wanting to express yourself and feelings through sexual intercourse

1. Jacob likes Samantha a lot, and they have been spending time getting to know each other over the past couple of months. Jacob hopes that Sam feels the same way about him.

How would you categorize this relationship? _____

What facts helped you to make this decision? _____

2. Aasha and Raj have a lot in common and enjoy hanging out and talking. Even though they recognize that not everyone has friends of the opposite sex, they are comfortable with their friendship the way it is.

How would you categorize this relationship? _____

What facts helped you to make this decision? _____

3. Mia and Kobe know each other well and like to frequently hang out together after school at the mall or on weekends going to the movies. They are usually seen holding hands and sometimes kissing.

How would you categorize this relationship? _____

What facts helped you to make this decision? _____

4. Nikita has been noticing Stephen a lot lately; she thinks his haircut is really cute, but he makes her so nervous that she is having trouble telling him how much she likes it.

How would you categorize this relationship? _____

What facts helped you to make this decision? _____

5. Anthony and Jess have been in a relationship for over a year and are very comfortable with each other. Last summer, Anthony went on vacation with Jess's family to the beach, and Jess was a source of support and comfort when Anthony's grandfather passed away in the fall.

How would you categorize this relationship? _____

What facts helped you to make this decision? _____

Watch with your adolescent the scenarios from his/her favorite television shows and movies, or listen to songs that demonstrate different shades of relationships and the various ways and speed that relationships can progress. As you watch or listen together, discuss the following questions about those relationships and write about it in the space below. This is a great way to get your teen thinking about how relationships are not always clear-cut and linear.

- a. What type of relationship do you think the people have? Into what “shade” would their relationship fall?
- b. How did this relationship start? Did it progress naturally from friendship or did they always have feelings of attraction toward each other?
- c. Did this relationship fall into different “shades” at different points in time? If so, how quickly or slowly did it move from one shade to another?

Example 1: Pick two people in a relationship from one of your favorite television shows and write or talk about the questions above.

Example 2: Think of a movie that involves a relationship between two people and write or talk about the questions above.

Example 3: Pick two people in a relationship from one of your favorite television shows and write or talk about the questions above.



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Realistic Views of Relationships

It can sometimes be hard to distinguish between different “shades” because the characteristics can overlap. This can especially be true for a friendship that progresses to a dating relationship. But, it’s important to remember that while there is overlap, the “shades” are different.

For this activity, have your adolescent fill in the characteristics of each outer box (Close Friends, Attraction). Then see if he/she can find some similarities the two relationships share to fill in the overlapping section.

Close Friends	Close Friends or Attraction	Attraction

Casual Dating	Casual Dating or Serious Dating	Serious Dating

Casual Dating	Casual Dating <i>or</i> Serious Dating	Serious Dating
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Boundaries

It is important to be able to realize and act appropriately in response to social, physical, and communication boundaries that exist in all relationships. In the spaces below, brainstorm with your adolescent about some things that would be OK versus not OK to talk about and physically do in the presence of people with whom he/she has different relationships. Be sure to focus on all types of boundaries and use the words already listed (or switch them out with your own) to help him/her get started.

With someone who is a **close friend**, I may talk about...*video games, a shirt I just got at the mall, a problem I'm having with another friend,* _____

I may also...*stand at an arm's distance, keep my hands to myself,* _____

I would not... *try to kiss him or her on the mouth, talk to him or her about my genitals,*

With someone who I am **attracted to**, I may talk about...*a class we are both in, how much I like his or her new hair cut,* _____

I may also...*feel nervous, want to touch him or her on the arm while talking,* _____

I would not...*be angry if he or she was talking to another boy/girl, touch him or her in private areas,* _____

With someone who I am **casually dating**, I may talk about...*my likes and dislikes, how much I enjoy spending time with him or her,*

I may also...*hold his or her hand, kiss him or her, spend a lot of time with him or her,* _____

I would not...*get undressed in front of him or her, tell him or her personal secrets about my friends,* _____

With someone who I am in a **serious relationship** with, I may talk about...*anything I feel comfortable with, my goals and dreams,* _____

I may also...*spend time with his or her family, want to talk about sex with him or her,* _____

I would not...*pressure him or her to do anything, use unkind words or actions,* _____



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Timeline to Relationships



The Opportunities to Practice (page 175) worksheet asked your adolescent to think about what “shade” certain relationships may fit into, and also to start thinking about how different relationships can start in different ways and move at different speeds.

This worksheet is designed to help your teen learn about having realistic views of relationship timelines when moving from one shade to the other. Using the “Shades of Relationships” graphic and relationship scenarios below, have your child think about where the relationships in these scenarios might be heading next. Point out that there may be more than one right answer.



1. Geoff and Monique are attracted to each other as more than friends; they spend a lot of time flirting and talking in school, but do not see each other outside of class.

What shade would you currently give Geoff and Monique’s relationship? _____

What shade do you think their relationship could become? _____

2. Nikita is interested in Stephen, but she recently found out that Stephen is dating another girl at their school. Nikita and Stephen have a lot of friends in common and share a lot of extracurricular activities, and Nikita still enjoys hanging out with Stephen and even finds she likes talking to his girlfriend.

What shade would you currently give Nikita and Stephen’s relationship? _____

What shade do you think their relationship could become? _____

3. Berto and Ava have really enjoyed going on dates with each other to the movies and the mall on the weekends for the past several months. Ava has no romantic interest in other guys at her school.

What shade would you currently give Berto and Ava’s relationship? _____

What shade do you think their relationship could become? _____

4. Jess and Anthony have been a couple for almost 2 years. They were once very close and had a lot of fun with each other. More recently, Jess has been experiencing some unhappiness dating Anthony, and they have been arguing a lot.

What shade would you currently give Anthony and Jess’s relationship? _____

What shade do you think their relationship could become? _____

In thinking about timelines, it is also important for adolescents to consider communication and behavior timelines that can exist in relationships. For example, it is likely that it will be appropriate to hug a person before you kiss him/her, or to discuss homework with someone before you talk about where you enjoy going on a date. Help your adolescent put the following lists in numerical order of what may come first to last. Some may be less clear than others, so try to communicate that there may not be only one "right" order.

Scenario 1:

- Hugging
- Holding hands
- Touching arms
- Kissing on the cheek
- Open-mouth kissing

Scenario 2:

- Noticing someone
- Sharing, giving gifts
- Asking out on a group date
- Putting arms around each other
- Asking out on an alone date
- Getting to know each other

Scenario 3:

- Talking about a homework assignment
- Discussing a problem you are having with your friend
- Talking about your body
- Sending a friendly text message to say hello
- Asking someone personal questions about his/her feelings or beliefs
- Sharing funny stories about your friends

Scenario 4:

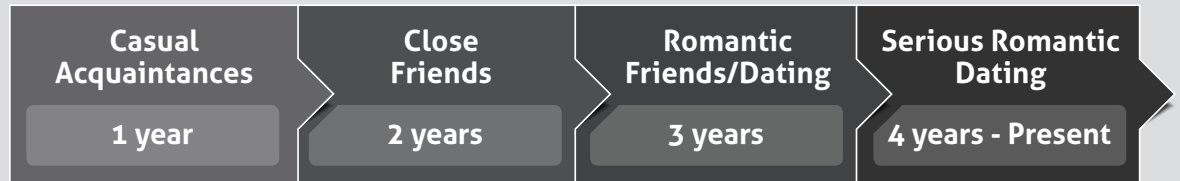
- Giving someone your phone number or home address
- Asking someone to be your friend on Facebook
- Sending someone a card for Valentine's Day
- Asking someone to come to your house to have dinner with your family
- Offering to give someone a backrub
- Giving someone an expensive gift, like jewelry



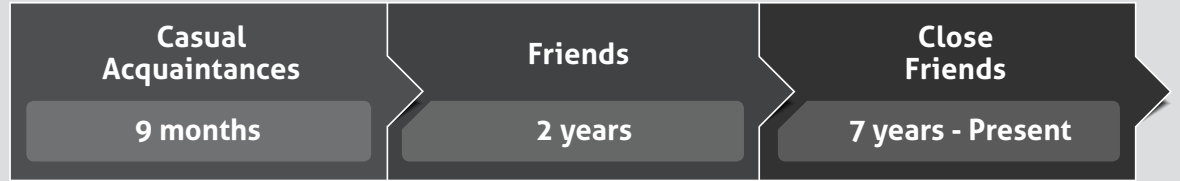
Create Your Own Timeline

How much time do relationships take? This is an important question with no clear answer. Look over the three relationship timeline examples with your adolescent. You will notice that each couple spent different amounts of time in each “shade” of their relationship and not all progressed through each “shade.” Help him/her complete a fourth timeline by identifying a person he/she has a relationship with (or would like to have a relationship with).

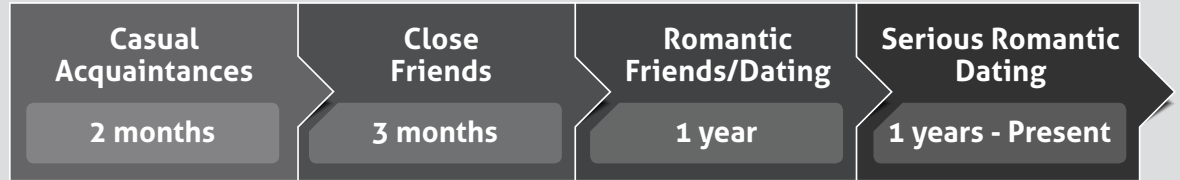
Tomas and Alexandra met at ages 19 and 20



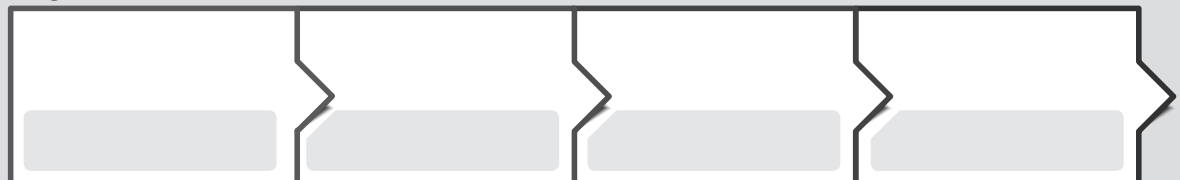
Mariah and Antonio met at age 15



Olive and Daniel met at ages 25 and 29



My Personal Timeline





PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

When Rules Change

From the Timeline to Relationships (page 183) worksheet, you started to think about how relationships may progress through the “shades” at different speeds or in different ways. Read the relationship scenarios below and ask your adolescent to think about what “shades” each relationship went through, and which ones they might have skipped. Try to emphasize that while these relationships may seem unusual, that doesn’t mean they are not normal or right for the people involved.



Ted and Josephine went on only two dates, then immediately began spending a lot of time together and becoming serious about each other. A year later, they are still a couple.

Circle the shades their relationship went through and put an “X” through the shades they skipped:

CLOSE FRIENDS

ATTRACTION/INTEREST

CASUAL DATING

SERIOUS ROMANTIC DATING

COMMITTED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Roberto and Alisa met at the mall and became good friends before they decided to take their relationship to the next level. After going out on a few casual dates, they decided they would both prefer to just remain friends.

Circle the shades their relationship went through and put an “X” through the shades they skipped:

CLOSE FRIENDS

ATTRACTION/INTEREST

CASUAL DATING

SERIOUS ROMANTIC DATING

COMMITTED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Nikita has been having feelings for her good friend Stephen that are more than friendly. She’s been noticing how cute he is and feeling nervous around him. When she told Stephen how she felt, he got quiet and didn’t approach her for a few days. Now, Stephen and Nikita are spending time together as friends again.

Circle the shades their relationship went through and put an “X” through the shades they skipped:

CLOSE FRIENDS

ATTRACTION/INTEREST

CASUAL DATING

SERIOUS ROMANTIC DATING

COMMITTED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Being Flexible when Rules Change

While following the Shades of Relationships may be a good general guideline, it's important to be flexible when the "rules" change. Have your adolescent consider the following situations that may break the rules of the shades and ask your adolescent how he/she can be flexible about this change. Use the examples to get you started.

Change in the "Rules"	How I Can Be Flexible
▶ I have a crush on my friend, but he/she does not	▶ Ex: Try to understand his/her point of view and be accepting of his/her decision.
▶ My older brother just started dating this girl, and now he's already spending all of his time with her.	▶ Ex: Try to realize that maybe things are moving fast because he really likes this girl. If you miss spending time with him, talk to him about it in private.
▶ I asked someone at my school out on a date. I thought I liked him/her as more than a friend, but after spending some time talking on the phone, I realize I just don't.	▶ _____ _____ _____
▶ I just met someone who became a friend. Even though we haven't known each other for long, I feel so comfortable and at ease in his/her company.	▶ _____ _____ _____
▶ I have been dating someone off and on for several months now. I enjoy his/her company, but I don't see this relationship moving forward.	▶ _____ _____ _____

Can you think of any exceptions to the rules? If your teen needs prompting, ask him/her to think about specific examples from his/her life, from television, or movies he/she enjoy where a relationship may have been unique or "rule-breaking." You can use the chart below to fill in his/her responses.

Change in the "Rules"	How I Can Be Flexible
▶ _____ _____	▶ _____ _____
▶ _____ _____	▶ _____ _____
▶ _____ _____	▶ _____ _____
▶ _____ _____	▶ _____ _____
▶ _____ _____	▶ _____ _____



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy Relationships

Without having a lot of experience or practice in relationships, it may be important for you to work with your adolescent to understand what characterizes a healthy relationship and what behaviors may indicate an unhealthy one. Work together to fill in the blank spaces in the chart below. Have him/her consider the healthy or unhealthy “alternatives” to the characteristic already listed in that row. If he/she is having trouble thinking of the opposite behavior to that which is listed, you might use the information from the Parent Guide or your own experiences. Use the first examples below to get started.

Healthy Relationships	Unhealthy Relationships
▶ Both partners feel comfortable together	▶ Partners feel “on edge” or uncomfortable when together
▶ Partners always respect each other’s decisions	▶ One partner pressures the other to behave in a way that makes him/her uncomfortable
▶ Both partners can trust each other	▶ Partners are unhappy spending time together
▶ Partners share some common interests	▶ Partners argue all the time
▶ Both partners can talk openly and truthfully	▶ Partners do not talk to one another
▶ There is a give-and-take balance in the relationship	▶ Partners use unkind words or actions with the other
▶ Partners support one another	▶ One partner feels uncomfortable telling the other person no
▶ Partners listen and pay attention to one another	▶ One partner always trying to change the other
	▶ One partner uses physical violence during fights

Read through the scenarios below and ask your adolescent to indicate whether he/she thinks it sounds like healthy or unhealthy relationship behavior.

Relationship Scenario	Healthy or Unhealthy?
▶ Lisa and Tim both want to be in a relationship together.	
▶ Sara uses mean words when speaking to her boyfriend.	
▶ TJ tries to convince his girlfriend Sharday to stop hanging out with her best friend.	
▶ Jamal and Josie are happy when they are together.	
▶ Lisa and Tim take turns listening to one another when they talk.	
▶ Anthony sometimes makes Jessica feel pressured to do things she does not want to do.	
▶ Danielle knows her partner has some faults, but accepts them and does not try to change him.	
▶ When Josie shares personal information with her boyfriend, she trusts him to keep her secret.	
▶ Sean does not trust Monique to go anywhere without him.	
▶ Olivia does not spend much time with Bart; when they are together, they rarely talk.	
▶ Tomas always feels safe and secure with his girlfriend.	
▶ Raquel shares common interests and activities with her partner.	
▶ Lori feels that her partner teases her too much in front of his friends, and she doesn’t find it funny.	
▶ Justin and Clara fight all the time.	

Healthy Relationship Collage

It's not always clear when a relationship is unhealthy. Healthy couples may argue, from time to time, and can resolve and move past problems that are unhealthy. Have your adolescent think about other ways to tell a healthy relationship apart from an unhealthy one.

What might a healthy relationship look like? How might someone in a happy relationship look or act toward others? Look through magazines and photographs to find some physical examples of people or words that demonstrate or characterize what a healthy relationship would look like for you. Use the rest of this page or your own paper/poster board to create a collage.

My Healthy Relationship Collage



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Dating Tips

Has your adolescent begun to think about dating? How does he/she know when he/she is ready to start dating, either a particular person or dating in general? Go through the items below and ask your adolescent to identify whether each statement applies to him/her. Then, go over the whole list and help your adolescent to identify which items he/she thinks are the most important for dating and whether he/she thinks he/she is ready, or if some things would need to be worked on first.

Physical Hygiene

- I have a “getting ready” routine that I follow daily.
- I am comfortable presenting myself in a clean, hygienic manner on a regular basis.

Confidence and Comfort Level

- I feel confident about the way I look and in my thoughts and feelings.
- I would feel comfortable getting to know another person and sharing personal information about myself.
- I would be polite and responsive on a date with someone, even if the date was not going as well as I wanted it to.

My Time

- I am OK spending time getting to know another person.
- I am willing to do some things that another person enjoys or is interested in (like going to a movie or to a restaurant that’s not my favorite), even if I’m not very interested in it.

Openness and Honesty

- I know who I am and can present myself in an honest way with others.
- I do not have a problem being honest, but also polite, to my date at all times.

Appreciation and Consideration of Others

- I am considerate of others’ opinions, even when they differ from my own.
- I choose my words carefully and thoughtfully when I interact with someone new, and always when I am in a disagreement with another person.
- I can appreciate that people are different from me, and I try to understand their perspective.
- I feel OK about not always “getting my way” in a friendship or dating situation.

Knowing What I Want

- I have an idea of some qualities that I would want a dating partner to have, both physical and personality traits.
- I only want to date someone who has qualities that I like and enjoy.

Boundaries

- I think I can recognize “signals” when someone is interested in me.
- I think I can recognize that someone is not interested in talking to me.
- If I ask someone out, any answer he/she gives is OK, and I should accept it.
- If I am unsure about whether I should ask someone out or how a date went, I have a trusted adult (parent, sibling, teacher, aunt/uncle, friend) who I can talk to.

Now, pose some of these questions (below) to your child. Make sure you emphasize that the items in the checklist are things he/she should continuously be working on and that there is never a true “end” point. He/She may not feel completely prepared to date, but these items are important for healthy dating and relationships.

What items have you checked above? What items do you think you need to work on? Do you think the items you did not check are important or necessary steps to take before you start dating? How can you work on the items?

When to ask someone on a date

Maybe your adolescent feels attracted to someone he/she knows, a good friend, an acquaintance from school, or a person he/she just met. Help him/her understand when, and in what situations, asking someone out on a date is appropriate. Read the scenarios below and ask your teen to decide whether the timing, person, or environment is appropriate or inappropriate for asking for a date.

- ▶ Your friend noticed a girl at the mall that he does not know and said he was going to go up to her and ask her out on a date.

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What would you tell him to do? _____

- ▶ Someone just started a new job and has been flirting with his/her coworker.

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What would you tell this person to do? _____

- ▶ There is a boy or girl at school that you have been talking to a lot in the hallways. He/she makes a lot of eye contact with you and smiles often.

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What would you do? _____

- ▶ Your brother just moved in to a new apartment building, and there is a cute girl who lives next door to him. They are friendly to each other in the hallway, but your brother is worried about asking her out. If he doesn't like her, he would have a hard time avoiding her (and an awkward situation) later.

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What would you tell your brother to do? _____

- ▶ A boy in your class stood up and asked a girl out in front of the entire classroom and the teacher.

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What would you have done? _____

- ▶ There is a boy or girl who hangs around with your friends often. You have a crush on her but feel too nervous to ask him/her out on an “alone date.” What if you have nothing to talk about?

Is this an appropriate situation to ask for a date? Yes _____ No _____

What could you do to get to know him/her better? _____



PROGRESSING RELATIONSHIPS

Dating Preparation

Dating Checklist

Asking someone out and planning a date can be a scary thing for anyone to do. Be sensitive to the fact that your teen may feel uncomfortable about the situation and talking it over with you. Give him/her this checklist to read through, or read it over together, to help your adolescent prepare to ask the question and plan the date.

- I have someone in mind who I am interested in and who I want to ask out.
- The person I want to ask out is someone I know and feel comfortable talking to.
- I think the person I want to ask out shares some interests with me, and we like spending time in similar places.
- I know my parents are fine with me dating.
- I have thought about an appropriate time and place to ask this person out on a date—in private, not during class or in front of other friends.
- I have thought about a few options for where we can go and what we can do on our date, and I can suggest one of these options to him/her when I am asking him/her out.
- I have made sure that my date and I will have a way to get to our destination by making sure one of my parents or a trusted adult can drive us, we can walk, or we can take public transportation with our parents' permission.
- I am prepared to respect the answer if the person says no.
- I have thought about how to respond to the person I am asking out:
 - ▶ If he/she says yes, I will respond positively and make plans to call him/her to discuss the details.
 - ▶ If he/she says no, I will respond positively by saying, "That's OK; maybe another time."
 - ▶ If he/she says maybe, I can present another option or time for our date, or I can say, "Sure, maybe there's something else we can plan to do. Do you want to give me your number so I can text you?"
- I have prepared myself for the emotions that I may experience if the person I am interested in says no. I might feel embarrassed, awkward, and disappointed. I will not let the experience keep me from pursuing dates with other people in the future or make the person feel bad about not being interested in me.

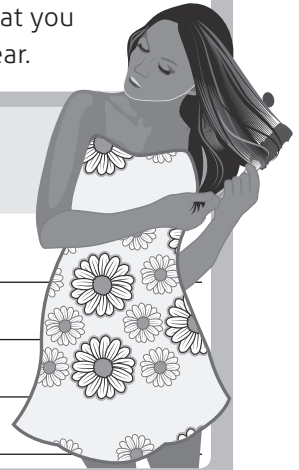
Preparing for a Date

Getting ready for a date involves multiple steps. Your teen should make sure to take care of his/her physical appearance he/she does during the morning routine. He/She will also want to plan the specifics—where to go, what to do. He/She may also want to think ahead about some possible conversation topics just to ease his/her mind and make him/her more relaxed during the actual date. Use the following topics to think about what things your adolescent may want to do before a date. Have him/her read over the suggestions listed and write in other things to do before a date.

Take Care of Physical Appearance

1. Go through my morning “getting ready” routine and decide what I need to do to get ready.
2. Some examples of things you may need to do to get ready for a date would be to shower, put on deodorant, and choose a nice, clean outfit. Make sure you know what you will be doing on the date so you can choose the appropriate clothes to wear.

Personally, what are the specific steps you need to take to ensure you are prepared for your date?



Plan the Date

1. Pick an activity you enjoy and would like to share with your date. That way, he/she can learn about you and you can have fun on the date.
2. Decide whether you want to go on a group date or an alone date. Will you be more comfortable in a group, or are you comfortable enough to get to know the person better alone?
3. Plan to go to a place where you can talk some and get to know each other.
4. Figure out who can drive you if either of you cannot get to the location of your date by yourselves.
5. Talk over the plan with your date to make sure both of you agree on the details prior to going out on your date.

What steps above are important to you? Write down here what you and your date agree to do.

Think Ahead About the Conversation

1. Brainstorm some ideas for small talk. You don't have to plan out what you will say, but try to think of some topics to discuss during any "awkward silences" that may come up.
2. What types of things do you want your date to know about you? Ask your date the types of questions that you would want to answer.
3. Some conversation examples can be about your favorite subject or class in school, what types of things you do on the weekends and after school, your favorite type of music, whether you have siblings and what they are like.



What are some other conversation topics you can discuss with your date?

Dating Do's and Don'ts

It is important to help your teen learn about dating etiquette and how it may differ from etiquette around a friend or at home with family. Tell him/her there is no "right way" to have a date, but that there are some important things he/she should remember to do and not to do while in the company of someone he/she is interested in getting to know in a romantic way. Below are lists of Dating Do's and Don'ts. Go through the lists with your teen before the date and see if he/she can fill in any other Do's or Don'ts that are specific to him/her.

DATING DO'S	DATING DON'TS
Do ask your date some questions.	Don't only talk about yourself.
Do respect your date's physical and personal boundaries. Give him/her plenty of space and be respectful of his/her privacy.	Don't stand too close to your date or be too "intense" by asking a lot of personal questions or pressuring him/her in any way.
Do compliment your date; think of true, positive things to say about your date's appearance or personality. Try to keep the compliments general; for example, "you look nice this evening."	Don't compliment your date's specific body parts, unless it is about his/her face. Don't "spoil" a compliment: "I like your hair better the other way" is not a compliment. Instead, it will sound like a critique: "I don't like your hair that way."
Do be positive and pleasant, and smile while you are doing so.	Don't be overly negative or critical. Try to avoid being confrontational or too assertive.
Do remember that it is normal to feel nervous or excited. Remember your date probably feels that way as well.	Don't let your nerves keep you from talking or being friendly. Don't only talk about how nervous you are.
Do keep the conversation on safe topics (topics that are light and fun).	Don't talk about controversial or serious topics.
Do keep the date simple and go to a place that is familiar.	Don't feel like you need to spend a lot of money or time on your date.
Do make eye contact for brief periods of time. If you have trouble with this, practice with a family member or in a mirror, making eye contact for several seconds, then looking away and looking back.	Don't forget to make eye contact with your date. If you do not look at your date, he/she might think you do not like him/her.
Do feel free to flirt, make eye contact, lean forward, smile, touch your date on the arm, and make jokes with your date.	Don't force yourself to behave in a way that makes you uncomfortable. Just act natural as you would with a friend if you don't feel comfortable flirting, or know how.
Do offer to pay on the date if the date was your idea. If your date offers to pay for all or half, and you would like him/her to, then graciously accept.	Don't expect your date to pay. Always be prepared with your own money.
Do try to hold your date's hand, or give him/her a goodnight hug or kiss ONLY if both you and your date want to.	Don't feel that hugging, kissing, or hand holding is necessary. Don't try to hold hands or hug or kiss your date if he/she says no. Don't invade his/her personal space if he/she does not want you to be physically close.
Do end the date on a positive note by saying you had a good time and wish him/her a nice night. You can casually ask your date out again if you think it went well. Tell him/her you will call or text later with details.	Don't be rude or impolite if the date did not go well, or if your date does not want to go out again.

Can you think of any other Dating Do's and Don'ts that are specific to you and your dating situation?

Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't
Do	Don't

3

CHAPTER

Sexual Feelings and Behaviors

Sexual feelings and behaviors occur throughout one's life and are a normal part of being human. As individuals with ASD grow and develop, and their interest in committed relationships deepens, it is imperative that they understand how their own bodies feel sexually. Individuals with ASD need to be specifically taught each step of these sexual feelings and behaviors in a concrete manner.

Talking about sexual feelings or sexual behaviors may be difficult. This is completely normal! However, you are your teen's best resource for sexual education information. You will be working together to give him/her knowledge about his/her body and to develop key skills for positive and safe relationships.

Teaching about sexual feelings and behaviors is not about teaching how to have sexual intercourse. You are teaching your adolescent about sexual feelings to equip him/her with knowledge about his/her body, keep him/her safe, and help him/her make informed decisions. These are personal lessons that will be grounded in your family's cultural, religious, and social values.



KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ The human sexual response cycle can be a concrete way to understand physical, emotional, and interpersonal sexual experiences.
- ▶ Masturbation is a common way to explore the body. Giving guidelines and information can benefit individuals with ASD.
- ▶ Shared sexual behaviors require responsibility and understanding of the progression of the intricacies in relationships, as well as good decision-making skills and communication.

Getting to Know Sexual Feelings and Behaviors

While it is natural to have sexual feelings and to express them, your adolescent may need extra support in learning how to interpret these feelings and knowing the appropriate ways to express them. Of course, sexual feelings and behaviors are about far more than just sexual intercourse. They are about getting to know yourself, your body, and, ultimately, connecting with another person in a committed intimate relationship when your teen is ready and if he/she should choose to do so.



KEY MESSAGES

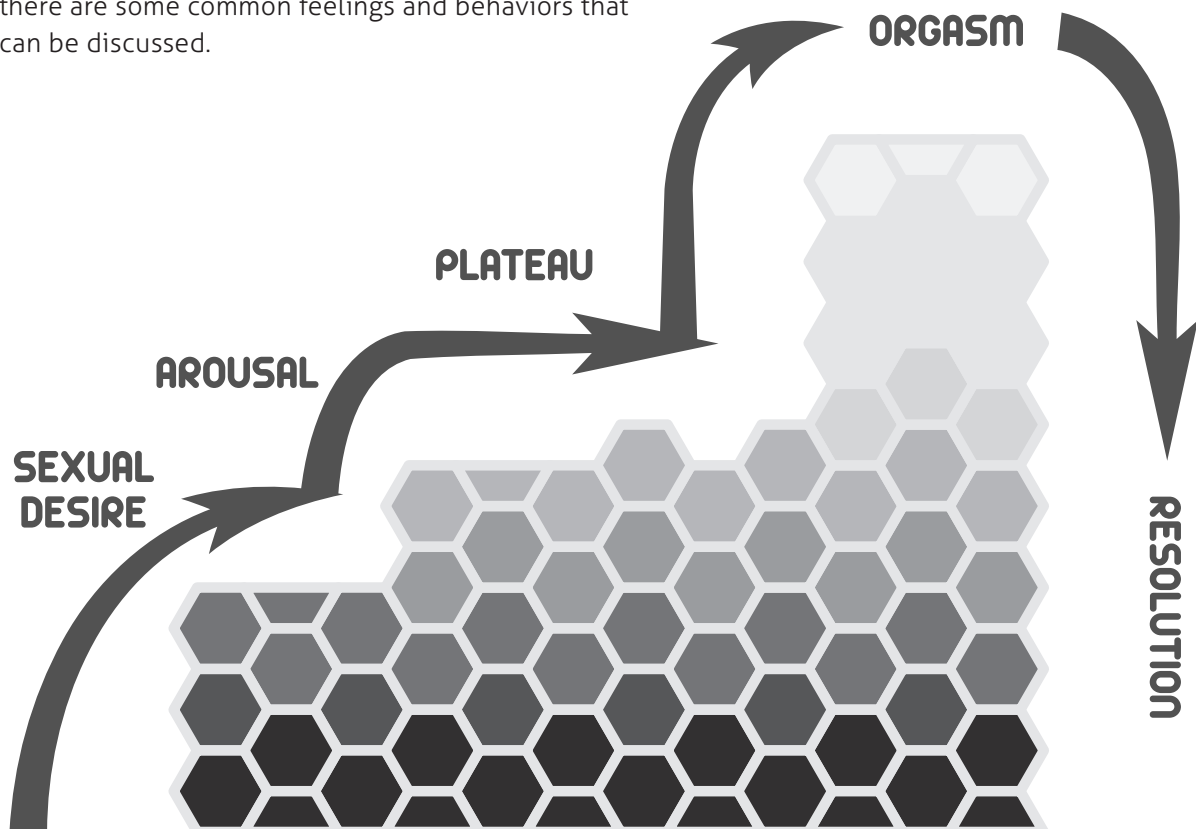
Sexual Feelings and Behaviors

- ▶ The human sexual response cycle is a way to explain sexual feelings and behaviors.
- ▶ The human sexual response cycle can be experienced alone or with a partner.
- ▶ It takes time and practice for an adolescent to get to know his/her body and how the stages of the human sexual response cycle feel to him/her.

Human Sexual Response Cycle

The human sexual response cycle is a way to explain and understand sexual feelings and behaviors, whether they are experienced alone or with another person. It is a concept and model that can make the idea of sexual feelings more concrete and understandable. It can also help parents be more specific in offering their children guidelines and instruction about the progression of feelings, behaviors, and physical responses in sexual experiences. Using medical facts about the experience as well as concrete examples that apply to your adolescent can also make the concepts more approachable.

Of course, the experience of physical sexual response is different for every person and for every sexual experience, whether alone or with a partner. Yet, there are some common feelings and behaviors that can be discussed.



Sexual Desire

What it is

- ▶ The desire or need to want to experience some type of sexual activity (physical contact with someone, such as kissing, touching, lying close together, touching breasts or genitals, sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex).
- ▶ Sexual desire is not something everyone feels all of the time.
- ▶ Someone might desire to be with another person for a long time (months even) without progressing in a relationship or having any physical contact.
- ▶ Desire is not always felt just physically; it can also be felt through all of the senses, emotions, and thoughts.
- ▶ People might describe it as “feeling horny” or “turned on.”
- ▶ Everyone has different attributes he/she may find attractive in another person or different things that make him/her feel “horny.” For example, one person may find someone wearing tight pants sexy. Another person may feel “turned on” when dancing closely to someone.
- ▶ The body might feel pleasurable, excited, and tingly in the sexual parts and/or in other parts of the body.
- ▶ An individual might have sexual thoughts about another person without wanting to fulfill his/her desire by acting on them.

What might happen

- ▶ Nothing might happen—you can desire someone or have sexual feelings without acting on them.
- ▶ An individual may decide to pursue his/her sexual desire alone, by touching themselves in a sexual way. This behavior is called masturbation. While masturbating, he/she may choose to progress through some or all of the stages of sexual response (arousal, plateau, orgasm, and resolution).
- ▶ If in a relationship with another person, two people may decide to experience sexual behaviors together, like kissing, touching, or sexual intercourse.
- ▶ However, deciding to engage in some of these behaviors when someone feels “horny” does not at all necessarily mean that he/she will actually progress to have sexual intercourse. If someone is feeling “horny” and is in a relationship, he/she might choose only to kiss, for example, if that’s what he/she or the other person is comfortable with or ready for at that time.

Arousal

What it is

- ▶ Messages sent to the brain are getting the body ready for sexual activity.
- ▶ Heart rate increases, skin flushes, body feels more sensitive. For men, they experience an erection, while women may notice wetness in their vagina.
- ▶ Arousal can happen without physical touch. Sounds, words, or pictures can also be part of arousal.
- ▶ Some people call this “foreplay,” meaning sexually arousing each other before having intercourse.

What might happen

- ▶ More blood flow to genitals, nipples, breasts
- ▶ Individual may kiss, snuggle, or touch different parts of the partner’s body.

- ▶ An individual may touch his/her own genitals, breasts, and bodies.
- ▶ An individual does not have to progress past arousal; he/she can always stop at this stage.
- ▶ Behaviors may progress (depending on level of relationship and interest) to touching genital areas through clothes or to beginning to take clothes off. Some individuals may move to naked kissing or oral sex.
- ▶ This stage does not need to progress to being naked. Expressions during arousal can include kissing or simple touching. Deciding to move forward with more intimate behaviors (taking clothes off, touching naked bodies) comes after being in a relationship for a long time, talking to the partner, feeling comfortable, and planning for the next steps (like contraception).

Plateau

What it is

- ▶ Sexual stimulation from the arousal stage continues.
- ▶ Individual may feel much more physically excited and sensitive.

What might happen

- ▶ Continued sexual excitement of the body
- ▶ Muscular tension of the body and increased breathing rate
- ▶ Plateau can last a long or a short time.
- ▶ Individual may choose to stop here (may experience some discomfort due to extra blood in genitals and sexual and emotional excitement that has built up).
- ▶ Individual may continue physical stimulation of the body and genitals (behaviors may be similar to or progress from the arousal stage).
- ▶ Individuals may progress to vaginal or anal intercourse.

Orgasm

What it is

- ▶ Peak of sexual response, accompanied by a brief but very intense period of sexual pleasure.
- ▶ Men experience muscle contractions in the penis and ejaculate semen from the penis.
- ▶ Women experience rhythmic contractions of the vagina, uterus, and pelvic muscles.
- ▶ The feeling of orgasm can be achieved alone (masturbation) or with another person.

What might happen

- ▶ Individual typically feels intense feelings of pleasure.
- ▶ Individual will experience a brief increase in muscle tension in and around his/her genitals and then relaxation of this tension.

Resolution

What it is

- ▶ Body returns to normal heart rate, normal breathing, and normal muscle tension.
- ▶ Even if no orgasm occurs, the body will gradually return to this unaroused state in a few moments.

What might happen

- ▶ Individual may feel tired, out of breath, and relaxed.
- ▶ If with a partner, both partners might feel closer emotionally.
- ▶ Do not have to have an orgasm to come back to resolution.


Key Points About the Human Sexual Response Cycle for Your Adolescent

- ▶ It is not necessary to progress through every stage every time you feel desire.
- ▶ Individuals do not need to progress through each stage; you can stop at desire, arousal, or plateau.
- ▶ The stages are not necessarily connected to certain sexual behaviors.
- ▶ Every sexual experience is different, so you may not always experience every stage of arousal each time. There are definitely no guarantees that you will progress through the stages with every sexual experience. What you experience depends on your emotions, health, stress, fatigue, comfort, partner, and many other factors.
- ▶ You can experience these stages by yourself (masturbation) or with another person.
- ▶ It takes time and practice to get to know your body and what feels good, as well as what these stages might feel like.
- ▶ Every sexual behavior requires responsible decision making, including knowing what feels good to you and/or the other person, and what you and the other person are comfortable with.
- ▶ Just because you feel desire does not mean you need to act on the desire.
- ▶ The goal is not necessarily to progress through the stages to get to the end. There can be pleasure and enjoyment in each stage.

When to Act on One's Sexual Feelings


Teaching this concept is difficult because of the intricacies of social situations. Try to be as concrete as possible with examples of the shades of relationships and what behaviors might be appropriate for each human sexual response cycle stage and relationship (Chapter 2, as well as the "Learning How" worksheets, have ways to do this). Try to talk to your teen a lot about his/her relationships or relationships he/she desires. Many of these conversations will also include sharing your own values regarding the expression of sexual feelings with another person.

Sexual feelings and behaviors can also be experienced alone. Encourage your adolescent to begin getting to know his/her body. The next section covers ways to do this. Once your adolescent understands how his/her body works when it comes to the human sexual response cycle, he/she will know how to enjoy the time and incorporate it as a healthy part of his/her life, both alone and with others.



Game

- Video Arcade game
- Pier game



Learning How Worksheets

- Human Sexual Response Cycle and Options, page 219
- Using Flashcards to Learn about the Human Sexual Response Cycle, page 223

Masturbation

Masturbation is a normal behavior, when a person touches his/her own genitals so that it feels good when having sexual thoughts or sensations. Individuals with ASD can and do masturbate, and can do so safely and appropriately when they have information, understanding, and guidelines.

Beyond masturbation being a normal and healthy sexual behavior, there are many benefits to it, including:

- ▶ Relaxation
- ▶ Relief and release from sexual or general tension
- ▶ Physical pleasure
- ▶ Helpful for falling asleep

In addition, masturbation is a way for adolescents with ASD to learn about their body, to learn what feels good and what does not, and to learn what brings them pleasure. With an understanding of their own physical response and sexual needs, they can make safer, better informed decisions in the future when they share sexual experiences with a partner. When individuals with ASD learn about their body and their needs, they can also become better able to communicate about their body.

Basics

Masturbation is self-stimulation of the genitals in response to sexual thoughts or feelings. When boys masturbate, they generally hold their penis in their hand and rhythmically move their hand up and down. For girls, masturbation generally involves using their fingers to rub or softly touch their clitoris. Both experiences, for boys and girls, feel good and may bring some of the benefits listed above.

Masturbation is a way to experience self-pleasure. When engaging in masturbation, boys and girls may feel their sexual feelings build, and they may experience some of the human sexual response cycle stages. However, orgasm may not happen every time when a person is masturbating, which is normal (although may feel frustrating).

Steps to Teaching Masturbation

1. Stay calm—carry on

Masturbation is a private topic; because of this, it is often not discussed regularly. It can feel awkward and uncomfortable to talk about masturbation—that's normal! Some parents find it helpful to think of masturbation as a behavior. Like many behaviors, you can teach your child how to express it appropriately and safely.

While you do not need to feel completely comfortable talking about masturbation, it is helpful to talk calmly, clearly, and convey acceptance to your adolescent during your explanations and discussions. Masturbation is a normal, healthy behavior, and conveying that in a calm, clear voice can help teach that there's nothing to feel ashamed or bad about. Your conversations about masturbation do not have to be made into a big deal. Keep the tone light, informative, and



KEY MESSAGES

Masturbation

- ▶ Masturbation is a way to experience self-pleasure and get to know your body.
- ▶ There are straightforward ways to teach adolescents with ASD appropriate masturbation behaviors.
- ▶ Visual guidelines and tips can help teach about masturbation.
- ▶ Because masturbation can become repetitive, guidelines, schedules, and reinforcement can help direct individuals to an appropriate balance in their behavior.

accepting, and you will encourage learning and opportunities to ask questions and talk more in the future. Also, keeping your conversations matter-of-fact, while giving concrete information and examples that your adolescent can relate to (“Remember the time you touched your penis in public, and I asked you to wait until we got home?”), can make the topic more approachable.

2. Time to start talking

You’ll likely know, on some level, when it is time to start discussing masturbation with your adolescent. It is time to start explaining when:

- ▶ Your adolescent starts spending more time in his/her bedroom (may already be masturbating or experimenting with touch)
- ▶ Your adolescent starts to put his/her hands inside his/her pants while watching TV, at school, or when bored.
- ▶ You notice any signs that he/she is trying to secretly masturbate or rub his/her genitals.
- ▶ Your adolescent reaches puberty. It is helpful to start discussions early so your teen knows what the house rules are regarding certain behaviors at home. You can let him/her know that his/her bedroom is the safest, most private place to explore his/her body (rather than anywhere in public).

3. Give a clear explanation and definition

Be straightforward and to the point. Give your adolescent a clear and accurate description of what masturbation is. You might say:

- ▶ Masturbation is when you touch your genitals in response to a sexual feeling or thought.
- ▶ It is a way to express yourself sexually.
- ▶ It is a common and normal behavior.
- ▶ It feels good.
- ▶ It is okay to touch your genitals in private, when you are alone.
- ▶ It is a private behavior and topic for private conversation only with most trusted adults.

It can be hard to know where to start such a conversation. To begin, you can start by explaining the benefits of masturbation, and why someone might engage in it. Some of the benefits are listed above, and others also include:

- ▶ Relieves stress and tension
- ▶ Provides a sexual outlet when feeling aroused
- ▶ Alleviates pre-menstrual cramps
- ▶ Helps to feel calm
- ▶ Teaches how to use a condom

4. Move into visuals/videos/narratives

When teaching about masturbation, using pictures, videos, and social narratives can give specific, clear, and appropriate information to your adolescent about how to masturbate safely. Visuals and narratives can also help you to set guidelines for masturbation, show a private location for private time, as well as illustrate that it is a private conversation.

Visuals you might use:

- ▶ Identify appropriate private locations (bedroom, bathroom)

- ▶ Schedule/calendar for private time (knows when he/she can masturbate if he/she wants to)
- ▶ Identify places where it would be inappropriate to masturbate
- ▶ Videos showing “How to”
- ▶ Steps to masturbate—go to room, close door, masturbate, clean up, time limit
- ▶ Steps to cleaning up (wash hands, clean sheets)

5. Guidelines

Setting specific guidelines as they pertain to masturbation can really help. However, you want to make sure you are being really clear. Individuals with ASD need concrete rules to masturbate safely and privately. Yet, given the fact that they commonly interpret rules extremely literally, they sometimes draw very rigid conclusions. For example, if you say, “do not ever touch your genitals in another bathroom besides the one at home,” your teen may not be able to relieve himself/herself in any bathroom outside the home.

Guidelines can be set as to where and when it is appropriate to touch genitals. You might say:

- ▶ You can have private, alone time every day.
- ▶ Masturbation must take place in a private space, like your bedroom at home.
- ▶ It should never happen anywhere in public, including public bathrooms.

Of course, the guidelines that you set with your teen will depend on your teen and your family.

Setting guidelines is not only for behavior, but also for the topic of conversation. Masturbation is a private topic, one that your adolescent needs to know he/she can talk to you about, another trusted adult, or his/her doctor. Your adolescent can talk about it at home, when he/she has questions, but should ask to have a private conversation with you (rather than talking about it at the dinner table).

Any individual may masturbate a lot, a little, or not at all. An individual who is masturbating a lot may be having trouble reaching orgasm or may need more information on how to masturbate properly. The frequency does not generally matter as long as the appropriate guidelines are being practiced, and the behavior is not interfering with daily life and activities, or injuring the individual’s genitals.

Dealing with Repetition

It is common for individuals with ASD to become focused on self-stimulation or repetitive behaviors, such as masturbation, if they are not given guidance. The goal is to be able to masturbate safely, while keeping their genitals and themselves healthy. If masturbation is interfering with daily activities, your teen is missing activities or getting sore from masturbating too much; then it’s time to revisit the lessons on masturbation as well as guidelines.

If your adolescent’s masturbation habits are inappropriate, or he/she is excessively focused on it, you might:


- ▶ Revisit the guidelines you’ve set. Masturbating should only take place in the privacy of a bedroom (or private bathroom) with the door locked when no one will disturb you. Everywhere else in the house and outside of the house is public. If the bedroom is shared, then you can designate another private area, perhaps a bathroom.
- ▶ Make a visual schedule to show where it is appropriate to masturbate and where it is not appropriate. You might take pictures of rooms in your house and label them, or write a social narrative with pictures.

- ▶ If your adolescent starts to masturbate in a public area of the house, physically guide him/her to his/her bedroom and simply say, "Only masturbate in your room." Use a calm voice and keep it simple.
- ▶ Provide reinforcement, like a reward, for when he/she does masturbate in his/her bedroom and nowhere else.
- ▶ Build a schedule to show your teen when he/she has private, alone time that could be used for masturbation.
- ▶ Remember to try not to overreact, to stay calm, and to keep your voice steady.

If masturbation behavior happens in public, you might:


- ▶ Interrupt the behavior
- ▶ Remind your teen of an appropriate time and place to masturbate
- ▶ Redirect your teen to another activity, especially an activity for which he/she needs to use both hands for or physically move something. Try an activity that requires focus or movement, or redirect him/her to a private area, like a bedroom or bathroom

Remember, it is normal for teens to masturbate frequently; but when masturbation becomes an obsession, it is not healthy.



BOARDWALK ADVENTURE Game

- Video Arcade game
- Pier game



Learning How Worksheets

- Steps to Teaching about Masturbation, page 231
- Creating Masturbation Guidelines, page 235

Shared Sexual Behavior

Sharing sexual experiences is part of being human, part of connecting and nurturing yourself and others. Not all individuals want or feel ready to share sexually with another person, and that's fine. Having the resources to understand the responsibilities required when sharing sexually with another person and knowing what's appropriate (and not) for different types of relationships can help individuals make good decisions when and if they feel ready for sexual experiences.

For parents, it can be scary and overwhelming to think of your child moving into more intimate and serious relationships. For individuals with social and communication difficulties, the fear of them being taken advantage of, of them taking advantage of others unknowingly, or just knowing when they might be ready for a more serious relationship are big challenges—not to mention that these are hard topics to talk about!

You are giving your adolescent tools and resources to be prepared for healthy and happy intimate relationships with others. Together, you'll practice social intricacies, have many conversations, and use real-life learning opportunities to go over how to be responsible and safe in intimate relationships.

Sometimes when two people like or love each other, they want to express themselves in physical ways that feel good. These expressions are called shared sexual behaviors. Expressing yourself sexually with a partner is more than just sexual intercourse. There are many ways to be intimate with someone. This section will be talking about the progression of intimate sexual behaviors, determining appropriateness and readiness, making responsible decisions, and the importance of communication in relationships.



KEY MESSAGES

Shared Sexual Behavior

- ▶ Understanding the progression of sexual behaviors with another person is also tied to understanding the progression of relationships.
- ▶ When a relationship progresses, however, shared sexual behaviors do not need to progress.
- ▶ Engaging in shared sexual behavior requires determining readiness and making good decisions.
- ▶ Communication is necessary to engage in shared sexual behaviors.



Shade of Relationships

Let's review the concepts discussed in Chapter 2 on what is involved in a serious romantic dating relationship compared to a *committed* intimate relationship.



Serious Romantic Dating

- ▶ May only date each other
- ▶ Physical contact may progress (touching, holding hands, kissing)
- ▶ May go on individual or group dates

Committed Intimate Relationship

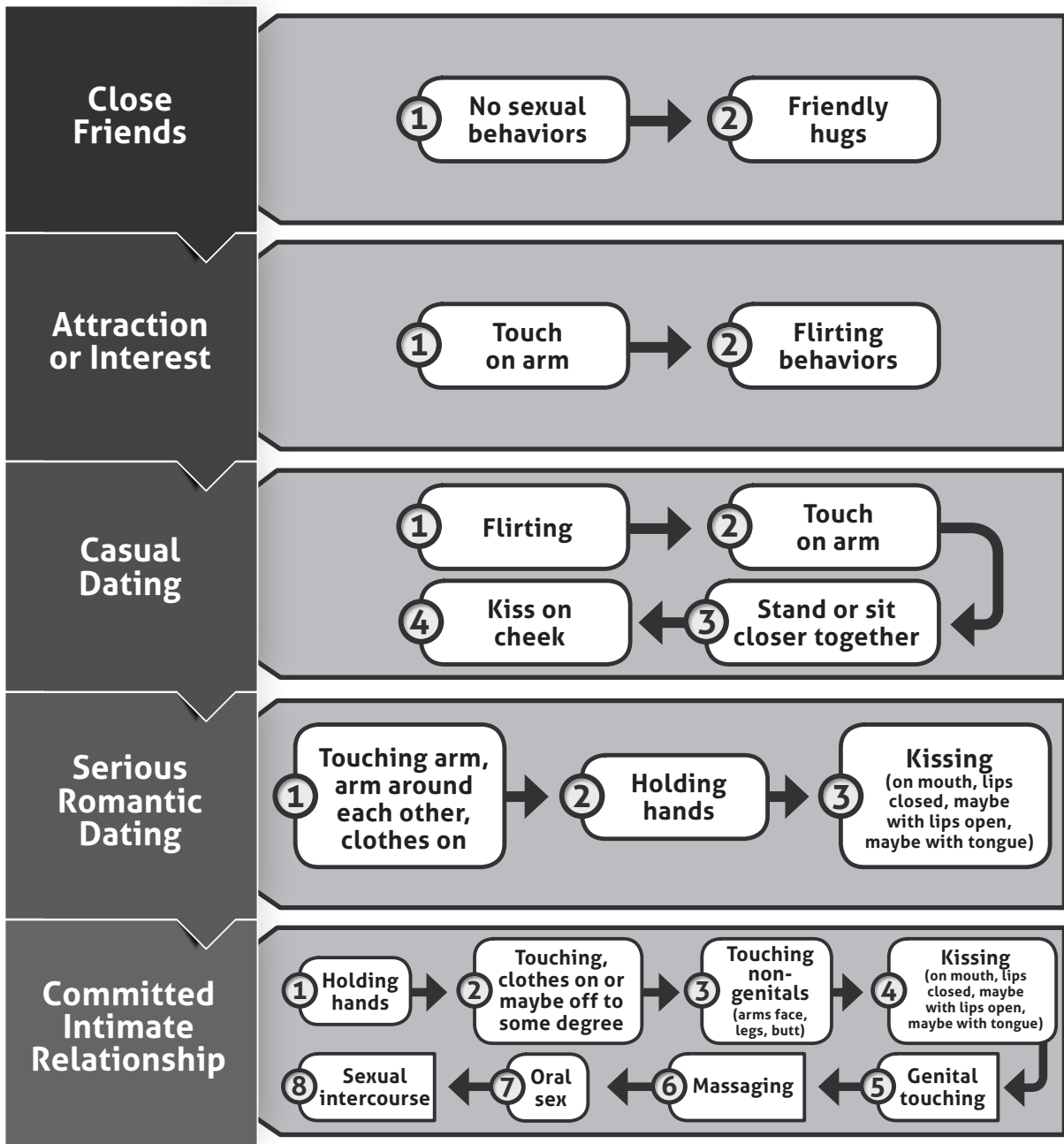
- ▶ Been in a committed relationship for a long time
- ▶ Want to be together exclusively
- ▶ Feelings of love and respect
- ▶ Willing to discuss contraception methods
- ▶ May progress to wanting to express your feelings through sexual intercourse

Progression of Sexual Behaviors

As relationships progress to serious romantic dating and committed intimate relationships, shared sexual behaviors may also progress. With more serious and committed relationships come natural feelings and desires to express sexual behaviors with another person.

As helpful as it would be to provide a clear set of overall relationship rules and expectations to young people with ASD, relationships are far too complex to understand and manage within a very specific set of guidelines. However, what can make it easier for an adolescent with ASD is to learn a concrete set of guidelines for what is appropriate and inappropriate *behavior* in different kinds of relationships. For instance, setting the standard that your teen should wait until at least being in a committed, intimate relationship before expressing shared sexual behaviors can be a clear guideline. The standards and guidance that you provide will, of course, come directly from your beliefs and values related to expressing sexual behaviors with another person. The chart shows examples of shared sexual behaviors in the context of different types of relationships.

It is natural that as relationships progress, individuals may want to touch each other or express their feelings in a physical, sexual way. Yet, knowing when to express these feelings, how to express them, or even if they are ready for these behaviors at a specific stage of a relationship requires information, good decision making, and an awareness of their own and their partner's desires and comfort.



Possible Progression of Shared Sexual Behaviors

Of course, there are appropriate behaviors for different shades of relationships. For instance, your teen would not start French kissing someone he/she just started dating. However, your adolescent also does not have to share sexual behaviors to progress in a relationship or because he's/she's been in a relationship for a long time. Your adolescent also needs to understand that you cannot share sexual behaviors with someone you just met (like asking someone to have sex when you've just gone out for ice cream). Progress in sexual behaviors comes with progress in relationships. You may want to reinforce behaviors like getting to know someone, spending time together, going on dates, getting comfortable together, developing a relationship, learning about what you want and do not want, learning what the other person wants, and progressing toward shared sexual behaviors with careful decision making.

This progression of shared sexual behaviors is meant to simply give an idea, a guideline for how behaviors may progress as relationships become more serious. It is never required to share a particular behavior at any stage of a relationship, and certainly not until the individual and his/her

partner are comfortable, ready, and interested. Just because your adolescent likes someone or may have been in a relationship with someone, it does not mean that he/she needs to progress in his/her sexual behaviors in the relationship. Sharing sexually with another person is based on what feels good and what is comfortable for both people involved. Sharing sexually is, most especially, about being responsible to yourself and to your partner.

Giving your adolescent with ASD a sequence of potential steps in a relationship can help connect relationship progression to shared sexual behavior progression. You can work together to develop steps that make sense to your teen to make the concept more personal and concrete. The “shades” diagram of relationship progression from Chapter 2 may come in handy here, as will the “Learning How” worksheets.

Potential Sequence of Steps:

1. Get to know as friends
2. Ask out and go out on dates over a long period
 - ▶ Get to know each other
 - ▶ Learn about interests, share your interests
 - ▶ Get to know what he/she likes, what you like
 - ▶ Get comfortable
 - ▶ See if relationship is comfortable and both people listen and learn from one another
3. Sharing sexual behaviors only happens after you have known someone for a long time (and are in a committed intimate relationship), have gone on many dates, and both are ready to progress in the relationship and with behaviors.
 - ▶ Sharing sexually with someone does not mean having sexual intercourse immediately. You may start with touching on the arm or kissing on the cheek. There is a gradual and intentional progression to sharing sexual behaviors with another person.

Readiness and Decisions

Sharing sexual behaviors requires your adolescent to be responsible and make healthy and good decisions. Not only does sharing sexually with another person involve physical, intimate behaviors and emotional feelings, but also can have potential physical consequences, like getting pregnant or contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

Learning appropriate ways to share sexual behaviors is intimately connected with understanding relationships. Given social challenges, adolescents with ASD tend to have unrealistic or misinterpreted expectations of encounters and relationships in their life. For instance, a teen with ASD may believe that the barista at the local coffee shop wants to date him because she says hi every morning. All lessons in shared sexual behaviors start with understanding the progression of relationships, appropriate behaviors in different types of relationships, and accurately interpreting social cues and situations.

Check in and talk with your adolescent as he/she expresses interest or embarks on relationships. See what he/she is thinking about a relationship or wanting from each stage of a relationship. Your teen may know that he wants a girlfriend, for instance, but may also think that upon immediately having a girlfriend, he will have sex. Understanding your teen’s expectations about relationships and shared sexual behaviors can help your teen to refine and practice his/her social and relationship skills. It can be helpful to use the “Learning How” worksheets to make these discussions more concrete and accessible.

You will not be there to coach your adolescent during an intimate physical encounter or through every interaction with potential love interests. However, you can do a lot to prepare your son or daughter to make good, healthy decisions related to relationships and shared sexual behaviors. Establishing clear and appropriate guidelines for shared sexual behaviors can help. Guidelines you and your teen may work on together may include:

- ▶ Specific and concrete definitions of the types of relationships and the behaviors appropriate in different types of relationships (The “Learning How” worksheets in Chapter 2 offer concrete ideas for these discussions.)
- ▶ Specific skills needed to prepare for relationships and shared sexual behaviors. Practicing conversation, social, and/or hygiene skills can all be related to success in relationships.
- ▶ Guidelines on the length of a relationship prior to engaging in any shared sexual behaviors or specific age of consent to shared sexual behaviors. While giving adolescents with ASD detailed, concrete guidance can make concepts more accessible (such as age 21 being a good age to engage in a particular shared sexual behavior), they can also become inflexible and perhaps inappropriate standards for teens. For instance, setting age 21 as the age to potentially engage in sexual intercourse may lead an adolescent with ASD to expect to have sex the minute he/she turns 21.

Am I ready for sex? Am I ready for sexual behaviors with another person?

These are big questions. How do you know when you are ready for a committed intimate relationship? How do you know when you are ready to share sexually with another person?

Your adolescent may *want* to have sex and so might equate this desire with being *ready* for sex. On the other hand, your teen might simply want to kiss, touch, or be more physical with someone, regardless of being in a relationship or not. Wanting to share sexually is very different than being ready to share sexual behaviors with another person. This is an important point to help your adolescent to understand.

Of course, there are a variety of factors to know when you are ready to progress sexually with a partner. The first step is to be in a committed intimate relationship. Your adolescent will need to understand that you cannot just expect people to have sex with you—this is not appropriate in any instance.

As parents, you might wonder when your adolescent is ready to move forward in relationships. You might see progress in his/her relationships or a change in interests, such as being more interested in looking at girls or boys than other usual interests. Maybe your teen is talking about sexual behaviors more or watches TV shows that are more mature.

While it is hard to break down readiness for committed intimate relationships and shared sexual behaviors into concrete steps or lists, there are many factors that are needed to show readiness. A checklist (like in worksheet X) can come in handy, not necessarily as a “test” to see if your teen is ready to move forward, but as a starting point for conversations and skills to practice and understand before jumping into any serious relationship.

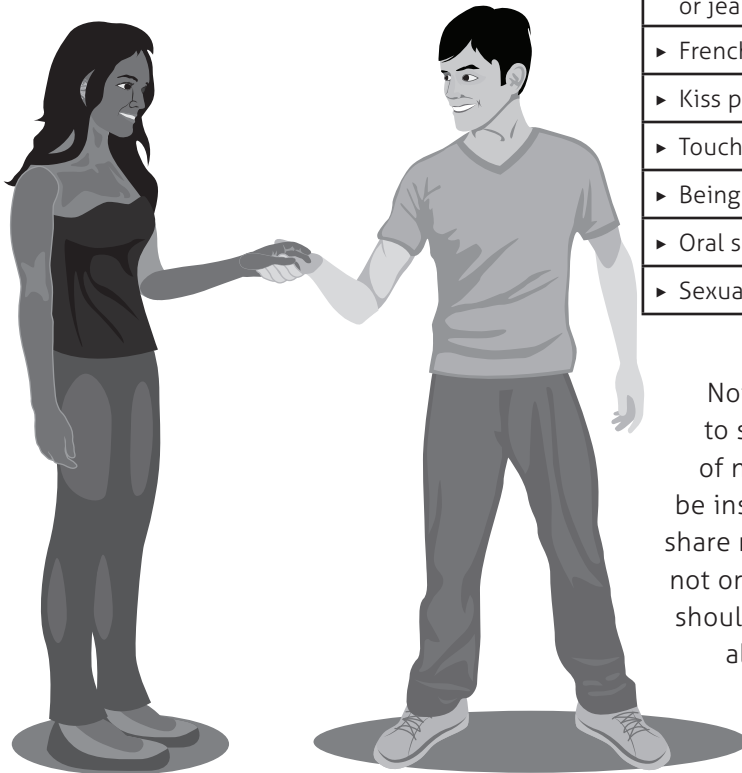
Of course, it is so important to help your adolescent know that you do not just share sexual behaviors because other people are, because you see them on TV, or even just because you want to. Progressing into shared sexual behaviors is based on wants, needs, readiness, and comfort, and always takes into account the needs and desires of your partner. Sharing sexually with another person is based on making a healthy, informed, responsible decision.

Appropriateness

Almost all types of shared sexual behaviors are private. Casual behaviors, such as holding hands or light kissing on the cheek, might be done in public. Yet, intimate expressions of sexual behaviors, like oral sex or sexual intercourse, are of course private behaviors that happen in the privacy of a locked bedroom.

Help your adolescent know what kinds of acts are allowed in public and what are allowed in private related to intimacy. Here are some examples:

Public Interactions with Partner	Private Interactions with Partner
▶ Kiss cheek, face, mouth, hand	▶ Kiss neck, arms
▶ Touch or caress shoulder, arm, hand, cheek, knee	▶ Kiss genitalia, breasts, buttocks
▶ Hold hands	▶ Kiss thighs, feet, stomach
▶ Touch each other's back and torso with shirt on	▶ Touch or caress thighs, feet, stomach, genitalia, breasts, buttocks
▶ Nuzzling or stroking hair, shoulders, arms	▶ Rub another person's genitals over his/her pants or jeans
	▶ French kiss (kissing w/tongue)
	▶ Kiss partner from toes all the way to his/her neck
	▶ Touch each other's back and torso with shirts off
	▶ Being naked by self or with partner
	▶ Oral sex
	▶ Sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal)



Not only is privacy an important guideline to stress, but equally important is the idea of never forcing sexual behaviors. There may be instances where your adolescent wants to share more sexually, but his/her partner does not or maybe vice versa. Sexual behaviors should never be forced. Your teen should always ask before touching anyone, and be asked in return. Both partners need to want to share sexually together, giving mutual consent that they are comfortable with progressing behaviors.

Key points to emphasize with your adolescent are:

- ▶ Sexual behaviors are always private.
- ▶ Always ask before touching and wait to be sure the person says he/she wants to be touched.
- ▶ Always give your consent before someone touches you.

Because picking up on the cues of whether someone wants to be touched or not can be difficult for individuals with ASD, asking and listening are very important, as is being able to communicate well with his/her partner. More information on sexual harassment is covered in Chapter 4.

Sensory Needs

While learning about sharing sexual behaviors, it is a good time to talk to your adolescent about having a keen awareness of his/her own sensory sensitivities. Does he/she know if he/she is hypersensitive (crave) or hyposensitive (hate) to any of his/her own five senses (hearing, seeing, touch, smell, and taste)? In this way, your adolescent can plan how to approach shared sexual behavior situations or experiences, keeping in mind his/her unique sensory needs.

Sensory sensitivities take understanding your adolescent's body and its needs, and sharing sexually with these types of sensory needs takes good communication. Your adolescent can and should develop a plan or brainstorm ideas of what he/she needs to make sharing sexual behaviors comfortable for him/her. For example, if your son or daughter does not like specific areas of his/her body touched, he/she will want to consider ways to communicate this need to a partner. Knowing and understanding particular sensory sensitivities, having strategies for approaching these sensitivities, and working together with a partner are key skills for sharing sexual behaviors.

Clear and careful communication with a partner is essential. Communicating what feels good and what does not, sexually and sensory, is an important aspect of sharing sexually with another person. Of course, there are a lot of unknowns when learning about expressing yourself sexually with another person. It is possible to pre-plan and prepare as much as possible (related to sensory needs), all while stressing the importance of going slowly and communicating clearly with his/her partner before moving forward to any new stage.

Communication

Communication is a key factor in having healthy relationships and sharing sexual behaviors. To be ready to share sexual behaviors, your adolescent needs to be able to talk to his/her partner about:

- ▶ What he/she likes
- ▶ What he/she does not like
- ▶ What feels good and what does not
- ▶ What he/she is comfortable with, what he/she is uncomfortable with
- ▶ Particular sensory sensitivities
- ▶ Safe sex—making decisions together about contraception
- ▶ Exposure, testing, and prevention for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

These can all be difficult topics for anyone to bring up, but these topics showcase the responsibility that is required to share sexual behaviors. Your adolescent also needs to be able to listen to and talk about these same issues with his/her partner. Yet, reciprocal conversations and taking another person's perspective may be challenges for your teen and can make these discussions even more difficult.

To communicate well, your teen can practice being clear about what he/she wants and needs. A partner will not just "know" or be able to tell what feels good to your teen. Sharing sexual behaviors is also about sharing this information between two people. A partner cannot know what your teen is feeling unless he/she tells them. At the same time, your adolescent needs to be able to truly listen to what a partner is saying—hearing what the partner needs as well. This give-and-take in perspective and finding compromise in relation to two people's needs may be a challenge for your adolescent as he/she embarks on more serious relationships.


Communication and relationships take time and practice. These skills do not happen overnight and must continually be put into practice in ways that make them accessible for your adolescent. Given communication challenges for adolescents with ASD, practicing and understanding shared sexual

behavior communication skills may come from more than just talking about these topics. Video clips, role playing, social narratives, and other concrete ways that have worked for your teen in other situations can help, too. Some key communication skills for your son or daughter to practice in relation to shared sexual behaviors might be:

- ▶ Give-and-take in conversations
- ▶ Listening to what a partner says without judgment
- ▶ Reflecting and clarifying a partner’s points back to him/her
- ▶ Negotiating a compromise for the needs of both people in a relationship
- ▶ Finding ways to share and express needs (both for your adolescent and his/her partner) in a way that both can understand


Of course, these are all good topics for you to talk about with your son or daughter as well. You can brainstorm together how to talk about specific sensory sensitivities—from what feels good for a particular sense to what might feel painful or uncomfortable. Touch is one of the sensory sensitivities your adolescent may have, which will be important to talk about with regard to intimate relationships. For example, there are ways to make a touch from another person more comfortable if your adolescent craves deep pressure. You can also work together to talk about contraception options so your son or daughter is informed and can make choices together with his/her partner (see Chapter 4). Help your teen to know that he/she can always talk to you or another trusted adult to get guidance and feedback.

Your teen may have a loving partner who is already capable of giving feedback on shared sexual behavior and can help them work together to see what feels good, what does not, and how they can improve their relationship. Your teen can also find other trusted adults in his/her life to review partner encounters to identify what worked and what did not, and to help create a plan for future situations. Feedback and communication, whether with a partner or with another trusted adult, can help your teen grow in all kinds of relationships.



Boardwalk Adventure Game

- Video Arcade game
- Pier game



Learning How Worksheets

- Starting Conversations about Sexual Behaviors and Relationships, page 239
- Sensory Needs and Sexual Behaviors, page 245



Worksheets

3

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GETTING TO KNOW SEXUAL FEELINGS

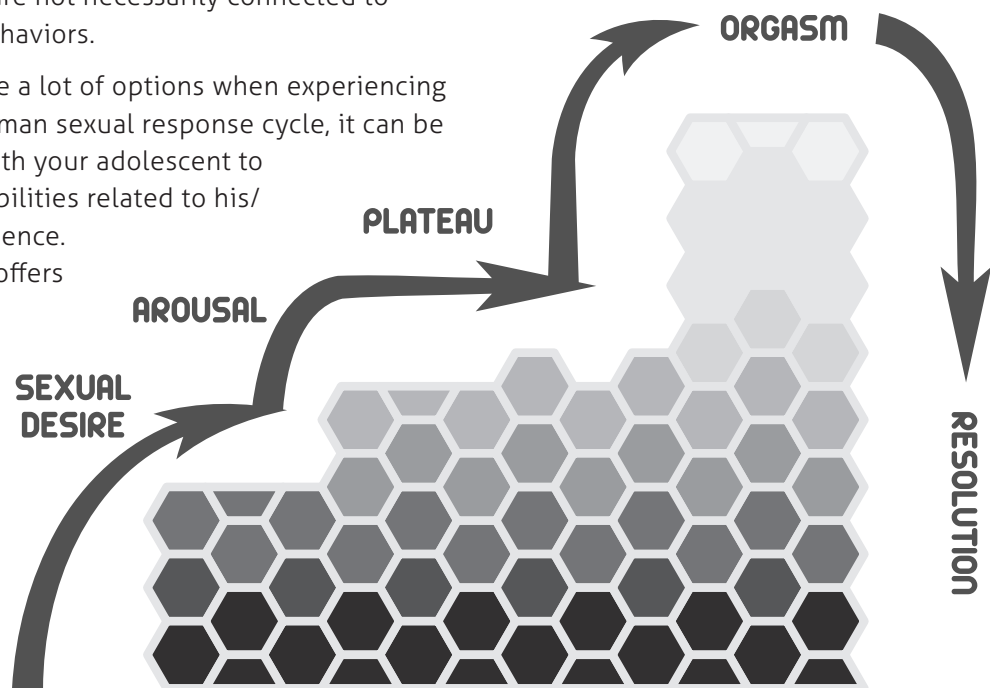
Human Sexual Response Cycle and Options

The human sexual response cycle is one way to explain and understand sexual feelings and behaviors. Yet, because the cycle has a linear component where the stages seem to progress one from the other, it can be natural for individuals, especially adolescents with ASD, to believe that one stage has to follow the other. In fact, while stages can and do build on each other at times, an individual often may experience one or two stages and then stop. It is not necessary to progress through every stage, every time, nor is it advisable.

Also, the stages are not necessarily connected to certain sexual behaviors.

Because there are a lot of options when experiencing a stage of the human sexual response cycle, it can be useful to work with your adolescent to brainstorm possibilities related to his/her sexual experience.

The chart below offers a starting point, and you can work together to fill in additional ideas in the space provided.



Human Sexual Response Cycle Stage: Sexual Desire

What You Might Feel

- ▶ Tingling in own genitals
- ▶ Self-excitement
- ▶ Desire to be close to another person but not touching:
 - ▶ The desire or need to want to experience some type of sexual activity (might be contact with someone, kissing, or progressing to sexual intercourse)
 - ▶ Sexual desire is not something everyone feels all of the time
 - ▶ Someone might desire another person for a long time (months even) without progressing in a relationship or having any physical contact
 - ▶ Desire is not always felt just physically; it can also be felt through all of the senses, emotions, and thoughts
 - ▶ People might describe it as "feeling horny"

What You Might Do

- ▶ Choose to do nothing – you can desire someone or have sexual feelings without acting on them
- ▶ Think about another person you're attracted to
- ▶ Think about touching own genitals
- ▶ If in a committed relationship, desire may progress to arousal

Human Sexual Response Cycle Stage: Arousal

What You Might Feel	What You Might Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Heart rate increase ▶ Erection ▶ Wetness in vagina ▶ More sensitive to touch on skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask partner if he/she is ready for the "arousal" stage – must be mutually agreed on ▶ Can choose to not act on feelings ▶ Touch own genitals in private place ▶ Kiss, snuggle, or touch different parts of partner's body ▶ Touch partner's body ▶ Touching may take place on the outside of the person's clothing or under his/her clothing ▶ Do not have to progress past arousal—can always stop at this stage
<hr/> <hr/>	

Human Sexual Response Cycle Stage: Plateau

What You Might Feel	What You Might Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Physically excited and sensitive ▶ Breathing rate increases ▶ Muscular tension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kiss longer, deeper ▶ Touch partner's body, genitals ▶ Progress to vaginal intercourse or anal intercourse ▶ May progress to oral sex ▶ Do not have to progress past plateau—can always stop at this stage
<hr/> <hr/>	

Human Sexual Response Cycle Stage: Orgasm

What You Might Feel	What You Might Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Muscle contractions in penis and ejaculation from penis ▶ Muscle contractions in vagina, uterus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Experience brief feeling of increase in tension and then release/relaxation
<hr/> <hr/>	

Human Sexual Response Cycle Stage: Resolution

What You Might Feel	What You Might Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Return of heart rate and breathing to normal rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fall asleep ▶ Relax ▶ Cuddle (with partner)
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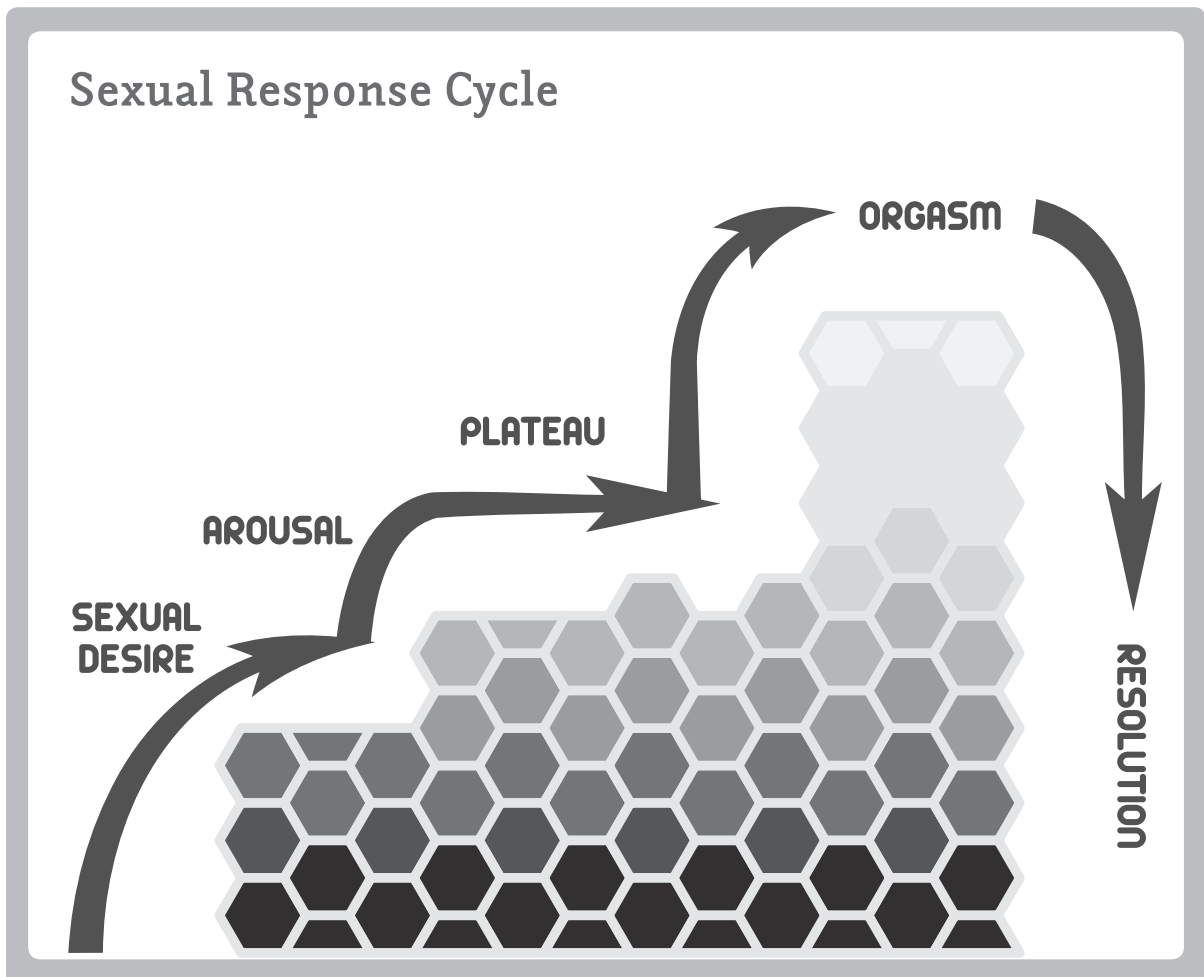
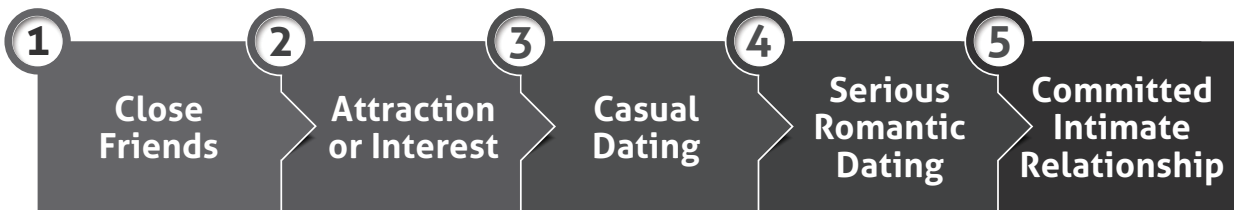


GETTING TO KNOW SEXUAL FEELINGS

Relationships, Behaviors, and Human Sexual Response Cycle

There are many ways to experience a relationship, and many ways to express yourself in a relationship. With this worksheet, you are helping your adolescent learn appropriate ways to connect sexual behaviors with different types of relationships.

The scenarios below showcase different types of relationships and behaviors within a relationship. Work together with your adolescent to identify the type of relationship, the type of behaviors they are practicing, and the human sexual response cycle stage(s). You may want to use this activity with real-life situations with your son or daughter as well. For instance, you might use it while watching a favorite TV show or listening to a favorite song.



Scenario 1

Genevieve and Ryan have been together for 2 years. After the movies one night, they sat in Ryan's car and French kissed and touched each other's bodies, with their clothes on.

Type of relationship:

Type of behaviors:

Human Sexual Response Cycle stage(s):



Scenario 2

Ricardo thinks about Tonya all of the time. He daydreams about touching her body, about kissing her lips. He hopes to ask her on a date soon.

Type of relationship:

Type of behaviors:

Human Sexual Response Cycle stage(s):



Scenario 3

Mika and Tammy love each other and have been together for 2 years. After making dinner together one night, they move into Mika's bedroom, kiss on the bed, and begin removing their clothes and touching each other's body.

Type of relationship:

Type of behaviors:

Human Sexual Response Cycle stage(s):





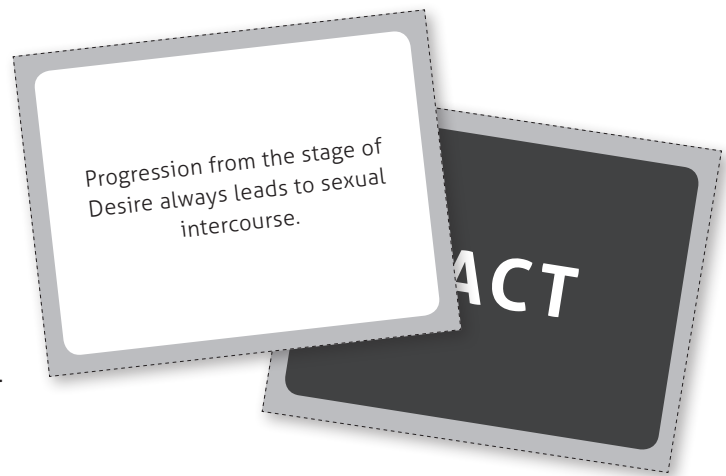
GETTING TO KNOW SEXUAL FEELINGS

Using Flashcards to Learn About the Human Sexual Response Cycle

Materials: Fact Cards

The cards below are double-sided. The white side contains text that is either a fact or a myth. The shaded side indicates whether the card is a fact or myth card; if the card contains a myth, the shaded side will also state the myth correction.

This game can be played alone or in groups. Cut the cards out along the dotted lines and mix them up. Place in a stack with the white side facing up. Take turns drawing cards from the pile and read the sentence aloud as you pick them up. Each person playing should indicate whether they believe the statement is a fact or myth and each person who guesses correctly gets a point. If the card is a myth card, be sure to read the myth correction aloud and discuss.



<p>Sexual feelings and behaviors occur throughout one's life and are a normal part of being human.</p>	<p>Sexual desire is the first of five steps of the human sexual response cycle.</p>
<p>Sexual desire is the longing a person feels to have a sexual experience, either through masturbating or by having sexual contact with another person. For most people, desire begins with visual stimulation (something a person looks at that makes their sexual parts feel tingly or "horny").</p>	<p>If in a committed relationship, the Desire stage may progress to the Arousal stage, sharing different sexual behaviors like kissing or touching one another.</p>



FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

The second step in the human sexual response cycle is Arousal.

When a person is in the Arousal stage, he/she experiences several body changes: the heart rate increases, the skin flushes, and his/her body feels more sensitive to touch. At this time, boys and men will experience an erection, while girls and women may notice a feeling of wetness in and around their vagina.

During the Arousal stage, individuals may kiss, snuggle, or touch different parts of partner's body, either with their clothes on or partially or completely off.

During the Arousal stage, a couple does not need to progress to the point where they remove their clothing. Deciding to move forward with more intimate behaviors (taking clothes off, touching naked bodies) comes after being in a relationship for a long time, talking to a partner about contraception options, and starting contraception options before intercourse.

The Plateau step is the third step in the human sexual response cycle.

At the Plateau stage, sexual arousal continues and becomes intensified. The head of the penis swells slightly for men, and the women's labia and clitoris swell. Both sexes experience muscular tension in their bodies, and their breathing becomes heavier.

At the Plateau stage, individuals continue to physically touch the sensitive parts of each other's bodies, including their genitals. They may also choose to progress to oral sex, or to vaginal or anal intercourse.

Having an Orgasm is the fourth step in the human sexual response cycle.

FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

FACT

The Orgasm occurs at the peak of sexual arousal. Men experience muscle contractions in the penis and ejaculate semen from the opening at the end of the penis. Women experience rhythmic contractions of the vagina, uterus, and pelvic muscles when they reach orgasm. Both men and women experience extremely pleasurable sexual feelings when orgasm occurs.

Resolution is the fifth step of the human sexual response cycle.

There is no need to learn about your own sexual feelings.

There are no benefits in learning about your sexual feelings.

All men find looking at their partner's tight jeans to see their buttocks as sexy.

Progression from the stage of Desire always leads to sexual intercourse.

A person is aroused before he or she has sexual desire.

Physical touch always occurs during the Arousal step.

FACT

FACT

MYTH

Knowing about your sexual feelings will equip you with the knowledge of your own body, keep you safe, and help you make informed decisions.

MYTH

As you grow and develop and your interest in a committed relationship deepens, it is important that you understand how your own body feels sexually.

MYTH

If someone is feeling a desire to be with another person sexually, he or she may decide to share a kiss but nothing more if that's all he or she feels comfortable with or ready for. On the other hand, he or she may not feel ready for any sexual experience at all with a particular person, even though he or she may be feeling sexual desire. A person can always tell his/her partner he/she is not ready right now, but will let the partner know when he/she is (which might take weeks, months, or even years).

MYTH

Every person is attracted to another person for different reasons. Some men have a sexual desire by looking at a person's tight shirt to see the lines of their partners' breasts/chest, tight jeans to see buttocks, their beautiful eyes, etc. What individuals find sexually desirable in others is different for each person.

MYTH

The fact is, arousal can happen without physical touch. Sounds, words, or pictures can be part of arousal.

MYTH

There has to be attraction (sexual desire) before a person's body becomes aroused.

The Arousal stage only happens when someone is with a partner.

When a person is masturbating alone and reaches the Arousal stage, she or he will always progress to the Plateau step.

If a woman's body is not aroused to the point where her vagina has become moist, it is still OK to engage in sexual intercourse.

Everyone moves from the Plateau stage to experiencing an orgasm.

Only men like to have oral sex during the Plateau stage.

Anyone can move to any of the stages in the human sexual response cycle in any order.

Women experience orgasm in the same way as men.

The Resolution step can be skipped every time.

MYTH

The fact is, some people enjoy just rubbing their genitalia (penis, scrotum, clitoris, breasts) because it feels good, without the need to move on to the Plateau stage, and that is perfectly OK. People should do what makes them feel the most comfortable and relaxed. This is a personal and private choice.

MYTH

The Arousal stage can occur either when a person is with a partner or when he/she is masturbating by him/herself.

MYTH

Individuals may stop at the Plateau stage for many reasons, including feeling some sort of genital discomfort, feeling ready to stop or not comfortable continuing, or when for some reason the man's penis stops being erect and returns to its un-erect state. This may result from fatigue, recent alcohol or other drug use, fear of someone walking into the room, etc. Almost all boys and men at some time in their life experience having their penis become soft unexpectedly during sexual behavior. It is not something to worry about.

MYTH

A woman needs a lubricated vagina to engage in sexual intercourse. It is important for a woman's body to be sufficiently aroused before engaging in intercourse. The moistness has the effect of lubricating the walls of the vagina so that inserting the penis will be easier. If the area is not moist, she may experience intercourse as painful and not enjoyable. The lack of moistness may be a sign that she is not really feeling ready for intercourse, and she may want to rethink her decision. It also may mean that she and her partner have not communicated well about what behaviors each finds most arousing. There are also lubricants that may be purchased in a pharmacy or supermarket that can help.

MYTH

Sexual experiences can be enjoyable at any stage of sexual arousal. To reach the Orgasm stage, however, the body needs to progress in order through the Desire, Arousal, and Plateau stages first.

MYTH

The fact is that females as well as men enjoy oral sex during the Plateau stage.

MYTH

The Resolution stage is the period of time when the body returns to its sexually un-aroused state. The body does this on its own, and the stage cannot be skipped.

MYTH

The fact is when men ejaculate, the muscle contractions that occur are intense at first and then diminish after semen is released. Women's orgasms may range from a mild feeling of muscle contraction and relaxation to very intense feelings of warmth and sensitivity. They may also experience several muscle contractions in a row.



MASTURBATION

Steps to Teaching About Masturbation

It is tricky to know when and how to start talking to your adolescent about masturbation. Even though it can feel embarrassing for you or your son or daughter to talk about, it can be helpful to think of masturbation as simply a form of behavior. Like many behaviors, you can teach your son or daughter how to masturbate appropriately and safely. When the time is right, you can help your adolescent understand what masturbation is, why he/she might do it (e.g., to relieve stress, to explore his/her body), and specific guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behavior related to masturbation.

Use the steps below to support you as you teach your son or daughter about masturbation:

1. Stay calm

Explaining masturbation in a calm, clear voice can help teach your son or daughter that there is nothing bad or wrong about it if it is done at an appropriate time and place. It is especially helpful to keep your talks to the point and to give concrete and specific information (e.g., a clear definition, specific times and location for masturbation to take place appropriately).

2. Talk about it often

Most likely, it's up to you to bring up the topic of masturbation. However, you do not have to have a big, sit-down discussion about it. In fact, the best way to teach your son or daughter about masturbation is to have many conversations, lessons, and reminders about it to reinforce the knowledge and guidelines you provide.

If you are thinking that you need to talk about this topic, more than likely, you have probably noticed some signs from your son or daughter. Maybe your son has been touching his penis at inappropriate times, or your daughter has been looking at pictures of boys in magazines. These instances can become opportunities to start talking about masturbation with your son or daughter.

You might start a conversation about masturbation by saying:

- ▶ I noticed that you were touching your penis/vagina/genitals. I'd like to talk to you about that.
- ▶ I noticed that you were touching your genitals in front of other people. I want you to understand that this should be a private activity. It's fine if done when you are alone in your bedroom, for example, but not in front of others. I'd like to give you more information about masturbation so you can understand it better.

3. Give a clear explanation and definition

Here are some ideas of simple, straightforward explanations of masturbation to begin your discussion. Pick or choose one(s) that might work for you:

- ▶ Masturbation is a normal, healthy behavior.
- ▶ Masturbation is a way to experience self-pleasure.
- ▶ Masturbation is when a person stimulates his/her own genitals in response to sexual thoughts or feelings.

- ▶ Masturbation is when a person uses his/her hand to touch his/her genitals in a way that feels good.
- ▶ Masturbation has benefits like relaxation, relief of stress and tension, and physical pleasure.
- ▶ A person might masturbate when he/she feels sexual feelings, like noticing tingling in genitals or feeling “turned on.”

Next, you’ll want to explain or show (using a visual aid) that masturbation is a private activity, a behavior that should only happen in a private location, such as your son’s or daughter’s bedroom. Masturbation should never occur in any public setting.

4. Use visuals and narratives to teach how to masturbate safely and appropriately.

Visual aids and narratives can really help to teach the proper way to masturbate as well as appropriate times and locations to masturbate. The following worksheet has ideas for visual resources to help. Depending on the resource, you might ask your teen to look over the resource first (after you have reviewed it) and then go over it together at a separate time.

5. Set clear guidelines

Set clear guidelines with your son or daughter about appropriate and inappropriate times and places to masturbate. You might want to work together with your son or daughter to create the guidelines. The worksheet on page 235 offers suggestions for how to establish guidelines.



MASTURBATION

Visual Resources About Masturbation

Clear and appropriate visual resources and narratives can teach your son or daughter about masturbation, guidelines regarding masturbation, and appropriate ways to masturbate.

Of course, the topic of masturbation can be sensitive, and the images you might want to use can be uncomfortable to look at. It's helpful to realize that masturbation is just another subject, among many others, that you need and want your child to understand. Here are some examples of images you might want to use:

- ▶ Medical illustration of penis, clitoris, testicles, and vulvas
- ▶ Picture of son's or daughter's bedroom (or other private location)
- ▶ Pictures of inappropriate locations (maybe locations that masturbation behavior has occurred, or common public areas in your son's or daughter's life)
- ▶ Schedule or calendar with specific time for private time

You may want to use the following headings as you create the visual resource:

- ▶ Masturbation is:
- ▶ Private locations to masturbate:
- ▶ Locations that are not appropriate for masturbation:
- ▶ Private time is:
- ▶ Time of day scheduled for private time:
- ▶ Length of time allowed for private time:
- ▶ Times when you might masturbate:

You might also choose to create a "How to Masturbate" resource, which can list all of the appropriate steps to take leading up to masturbation as well as after. It may include such ideas as:

- ▶ Go to private location
- ▶ Close the door
- ▶ Get into a comfortable position (maybe on bed, in a chair)
- ▶ Access genitals (may leave pants on or off)
- ▶ Boys—rub penis rhythmically up and down shaft
- ▶ Girls—rub the clitoris or the area around the clitoris rhythmically
- ▶ Do for as long as it feels good, until you reach orgasm, or until the end of your allotted private time
- ▶ Stop masturbating
- ▶ Clean up
- ▶ Wash hands



Any visual resource can be made as specific as necessary for your son or daughter.

Here are some other resources that you and your young adult may find useful:

▶ **Planned Parenthood—Planned Parenthood.org**

When you visit the website of Planned Parenthood, type in the search term “masturbation.” You will find a useful overview of what masturbation is, the benefits, and how to masturbate. You will also find a short video answering common myths about masturbation.

▶ **Diverse City Press—www.Diverse-city.com**

Diverse City Press offers two useful book and video combinations to teach girls and boys about the appropriate way to masturbate. “Hand Made Love” for boys and “Finger Tips” for girls can be good resources.



MASTURBATION

Creating Masturbation Guidelines

Creating guidelines can help your son or daughter to know and practice appropriate times and places for masturbating. These guidelines can provide a set of concrete rules for your young adult to follow to be able to masturbate safely and privately. Because masturbation could become repetitive or inappropriate, you can revisit these guidelines as many times as is necessary with your son or daughter. Of course, the specific guidelines that you set will depend on your teen and your family.

Here are some things to think about as you brainstorm your guidelines:

Frequency of masturbation to avoid repetitive behaviors:

Specific private locations for masturbating:

Who to talk to about masturbation:

When to talk about masturbation:

After you have thought about the guidelines regarding masturbation that would work well for your family and son or daughter, then you can work together with your adolescent to complete the worksheet on the next page.



MASTURBATION

Masturbation Guidelines

You may find that working together with your son or daughter can help when establishing guidelines for masturbation. Using methods that work for your adolescent (i.e., visual, audio, checklist), you can create a format for the guidelines that is personalized.

Use this worksheet with your teen to first fill in the appropriate responses to each category (such as locations, times). Then, using a visual method that works best for him/her, add pictures, a checklist, or steps to visually convey the information. Place these guidelines in a private location where your son or daughter will remember to reference them.

PRIVATE LOCATION

FREQUENCY- HOW OFTEN IS APPROPRIATE AND HEALTHY

WHO TO TALK TO ABOUT MASTURBATION

WHEN TO TALK ABOUT MASTURBATION



SHARED SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Starting Conversations About Sexual Behaviors and Relationships

You and your young adult can use the list below to start a conversation about different types of shared sexual behaviors and relationships. You might start by asking your son or daughter to match each behavior below with the appropriate type or stage of a relationship. While there are not specific “right” answers, certain behaviors are considered more appropriate for different types and stages of relationships. For example, touching someone’s face might be appropriate for a serious romantic dating relationship but not for close friends.

Behaviors

Friendly hugs
Touching on arm
Kissing on cheek
Holding hands
Kissing on mouth
Kissing with lips open (using tongue)
Sexual intercourse
Rubbing arm, leg
Touching face
Touching buttocks
Kissing on different parts of the body
Touching another person’s genitals

Type of Relationship

Close friends
Attraction or Interest
Casual Dating
Serious Romantic Dating
Committed Intimate Relationship

This activity is meant as a starting point for your conversations with your young adult about sexual behaviors and relationships. You may choose to use it as a way to start conversations about:

- ▶ Your parental values related to behaviors and relationships
- ▶ Guidelines for when behaviors should or should not occur in particular relationships
- ▶ Guidelines about the appropriate progression of behaviors in relationships
- ▶ The idea that young adults do not necessarily need to progress with sexual behaviors in relationships
- ▶ The need for careful decision making regarding behaviors and relationships
- ▶ The need for making certain that both partners consent to sexual behaviors
- ▶ How to maintain realistic expectations about relationships



SHARED SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Creating and Setting Guidelines Together About Sexual Behavior

Work together with your adolescent to establish a clear, concrete set of guidelines about sexual behavior. Creating them together can build opportunities to discuss these complex ideas as well as give your adolescent ways to incorporate the guidelines into his/her life.

Setting guidelines might start with a discussion, or maybe you can brainstorm ideas for different kinds of guidelines together. You can use the prompts below as a way to start this brainstorming list. You might then work together to make your guidelines more visual, using pictures, or more concrete, using real examples from your son's or daughter's life.

These guidelines are meant to give a framework to help your adolescent and facilitate appropriate behaviors in different kinds of relationships. They will reflect your family's and your adolescent's beliefs about relationships. Also, these guidelines should be routinely revisited. They are not "laws" that cannot be changed. As needs and skills change, the guidelines may change as well.

You might consider thinking about and writing down your own ideas about these guidelines prior to working with your son or daughter. In this way, you can be clear about what is important to you and your family, and be able to communicate that clearly to your son or daughter.

Sexual behaviors are private

- ▶ Define what private means (some examples below)
 - ▶ Sexual behaviors happen in a private place, like a bedroom.
 - ▶ Sexual behaviors are not talked about with strangers.
 - ▶ Talking about or asking questions about your genitalia or sexual feelings happens at home only, in a private place.

Ask and wait to be sure a person wants to be touched

- ▶ Define how you will do this—what words will you say, describe how you will know if a person wants to be touched or not.
- ▶ Script phrases to say before your son or daughter touches another person.

Give consent before someone touches you

- ▶ Define how you will give consent and how you will be clear about saying Yes/No.
- ▶ It is important to know a shrug or nothing said is not a clear message and will probably be misunderstood by the partner.

Even if in a committed intimate relationship, you do not need to share sexual behaviors

- ▶ A relationship does not equal sharing your body sexually.

The guidelines you and your young adult create might also include:

- ▶ The type of relationship to have before sharing sexual behaviors
- ▶ Skills (and practice) that will help your young adult manage relationships, which include sexual behaviors (examples might be conversation skills, being socially comfortable with each other)
- ▶ The ideal length of relationship before moving forward with sexual behaviors



SHARED SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Check in About Sexual Behaviors and Relationships

As you have talks with your son or daughter about sexual behaviors and relationships, these are opportunities to clarify any exaggerated beliefs he/she may have about relationships, or pinpoint skills and behaviors that may be practiced to enhance relationships.

You may choose to use the sample questions below as a starting point for talks with your son or daughter. You might also use them to create visual storyboards to use with your son or daughter to put pictures to their ideas about relationships.

It can sometimes be hard for young adults to talk to their parent about sexual behaviors. Help your son or daughter identify other trusted adults in his/her life to talk to about these types of issues.

Why do you want to be in a relationship? If you have difficulty with “why” questions, use a person’s name; then say, “What interactions have you had with _____ that make you think you want to be in a relationship with him/her? Or her/him with you?”

If you are in a relationship, what would you do together? What are your common interests?

How would you like someone to treat you in a relationship? (Looking for answers like be honest, respectful, kind, considerate of your opinion, sharing, etc.)

What types of behaviors (such as go on dates, hold hands, kiss, etc.) would you like to do with another person in a relationship?

What is important to you in a relationship (e.g., liking the same activities or food, same values)?

To be in a relationship, what do you need to do (e.g., have clean hygiene, willing to talk and do what the other person wants to do half of the time)? What does the other person need to do?

Let’s think of examples related to your own life about who you have different shades of relationships with. Then, what actions do you want to take to progress to another shade in one or more of the relationships? (Refer back to the Shades of Relationships, Chapter 2, and Learning How worksheets for concrete examples.)

What type of relationship would you like to have with a person (casual dating, serious romantic dating, committed intimate relationship)? What signs have you experienced to help you make this decision about choosing this shade of the relationship?

Would you like to touch/kiss another person? What shade of relationship do you need to be working toward to touch/kiss a person you like?

Why do you want a girlfriend/boyfriend?

What types of sexual behaviors do you expect when in a/this relationship? What shade of relationship do you need to work toward to have sexual interactions with a person you are interested in?

Have you talked about your personal likes/dislikes, politics, religious beliefs, morals/values, contraception options, sexually transmitted infections, particular sensory sensitivities? Tell me what your partner said about each of these topics.



SHARED SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Sensory Needs and Sexual Behaviors

Having an understanding and awareness of your own and another person's sensory sensitivities is important when sharing sexual behaviors with a partner. Does your young adult know if he/she is hypersensitive (*crave*) or hyposensitive (*hate*) to specific experiences involving their five senses (hearing, seeing, touch, smell, and taste)? In Chapter 1, we talked about understanding sensory sensitivities with regard to the body and to developing a personal hygiene routine. We'll use the same chart and idea as before for brainstorming ways to understand sensory needs in relation to sexual behaviors.

Together with your young adult, complete the Sensory Sensitivities Chart. Also, you can brainstorm ways to make a sexual experience with a partner more comfortable based on a particular sensitivity. This activity can support your young adult, when he/she is ready, in talking with a partner about body sensitivities in relation to shared sexual behaviors.

Sensory Sensitivities: Smell	
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Distressed by smell of other's perfume or cologne ▶ Sensitive to smell of candle or room deodorizer ▶ Sensitive to smell of condom ▶ Sensitive to smell of lubrication gel 	Possible Ideas to Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask partner to not wear perfume/cologne ▶ Try different brands of condoms ▶ Try different brands of lubrication gel ▶ Talk about what smells you like, don't like with partner
Degree of Sensitivity (Check One) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	Ideas to Try <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Sensory Sensitivities: Sound	
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Super sensitive to noises in the environment ▶ Sensitive to music ▶ Sensitive to complete quiet 	Possible Ideas to Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Wear headphones or ear plugs ▶ Listen to or don't listen to music
Degree of Sensitivity (Check One) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	Ideas to Try <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Sensory Sensitivities: Oral/Taste	
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sensitive to taste of certain toothpaste or mouthwash (own or partner's) ▶ Sensitive to lotion partner uses (if kissing body) ▶ Sensitive to taste of partner's mouth if smokes 	Possible Ideas to Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Try different toothpaste (or ask partner to) ▶ Talk to partner about taste preferences regarding lotions ▶ Ask partner to brush teeth after having a cigarette or cigar
Degree of Sensitivity (Check One) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	Ideas to Try <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Sensory Sensitivities: Touch	
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sensitive to touch on certain parts of body ▶ Sensitive to light/hard pressure touch ▶ Sensitive to feel of certain sheet fabrics ▶ Sensitive to feel of facial hair or leg hair ▶ Sensitive to feel of condom 	Possible Ideas to Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Try to cuddle with clothes on, touch each other with clothes on ▶ Explain types of touch that feel/don't feel good ▶ Find comfortable sheets ▶ Try different textures and brands of condoms
Degree of Sensitivity (Check One) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	Ideas to Try <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Sensory Sensitivities: Sight	
Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sensitive to certain types of lights ▶ Prefer lights on/off when with partner ▶ Sensitive to eyes being open when kissing partner 	Possible Ideas to Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Talk to partner about sight preference (eyes open/closed) ▶ Find different light bulbs
Degree of Sensitivity (Check One) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitive <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Under-sensitive 	Ideas to Try <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



SHARED SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Awareness and Communication

Your son or daughter needs to be aware of what feels good to him/her and what does not, and to be able to clearly communicate this information to a partner. Good communication is the foundation of a healthy relationship, yet some of these topics can be difficult to talk about, especially for individuals who experience communication challenges. The first helpful step is to be aware of their own body and selves and to know what feels good to them and what does not. The next step is to practice talking about these issues with you, a partner, or with another trusted adult.

The table below can be used as a starting place to write in thoughts and ideas in reaction to the prompts. Your young adult may use it as an opportunity to brainstorm and prepare for conversations with a partner or just to become more aware of his/her own preferences.

Things to talk about

What kind of touch feels good?	
What kind of touch does not feel good?	
What smells feel good?	
What smells do not feel good?	
What tastes feel good?	
What tastes do not feel good?	
What sounds feel good?	
What sounds do not feel good?	
What sights feel good?	
What sights do not feel good?	
What behaviors you feel comfortable doing	
What behaviors you feel uncomfortable doing	

Tips for talking to partner

- ▶ Being clear about what you want and need is an important part of a relationship, as is listening to a partner's wants and needs. Your young adult will need to practice listening to and sharing with his/her partner.
- ▶ It is important to help your son or daughter to know that talking and sharing with a partner builds trust, confidence, and comfort in a relationship.
- ▶ If a young person is not able to talk with a partner or potential partner about intimate issues, then he/she is not ready to engage in intimate sexual behaviors.
- ▶ If your son or daughter is in a relationship, he/she may start a conversation by saying:
 - ▶ "I really like you. I think we want to move forward with sexual behaviors, and I have some things I want to talk about before we do this."
- ▶ Conversations with a partner need to happen at the right time and place.
- ▶ Conversations should always be in a private place and should happen when both people can be relaxed and express themselves. So, talking right before kissing would not be the right time.
- ▶ If both you and your partner are not willing or ready to talk about a contraception option and sexually transmitted infections, do not take off your clothes to touch each other or perform any type of sex (oral included).
- ▶ Your son or daughter should always feel confident to express his/her wants and needs, and also practice being kind with his/her words with a partner.

4

Maintaining Sexual Health

CHAPTER

Maintaining sexual health is an ongoing life process. To be informed and responsible adults, all individuals with ASD need to have an understanding of how to keep themselves, their body, and their relationships healthy. This includes knowing how to take care of the body, and how to effectively prevent unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and sexual harassment. Whether currently in a romantic relationship or not, individuals with ASD must be educated about these topics so they can experience and express their sexuality in healthy ways.



KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Knowledge and awareness of the body, along with hygiene and annual preventive doctor visits, can help to maintain sexual health.
- ▶ Individuals with ASD should understand basic information about STIs and know how to prevent them.
- ▶ Individuals with ASD can be informed consumers about contraceptive options and find the best method to fit their specific needs.
- ▶ Exploring and expressing sexual orientation and gender identity are healthy behaviors and require extra support.
- ▶ Harassment prevention strategies should be taught to and practiced by individuals with ASD.

Male and Female Sexual Health

Being a healthy adult involves many things, including maintaining sexual health. Sexual health involves taking care of the body, the reproductive and sexual organs, and practicing prevention strategies to keep the body as healthy as possible. Maintaining sexual health for individuals with ASD can be accomplished through a combination of hygiene, body knowledge and awareness, and prevention strategies.

Establishing and maintaining a hygiene routine affects many aspects of one's life, from relationships to sexual health. Chapter 1 covers ways of establishing and maintaining this hygiene process in depth. Body knowledge and awareness is another broad and important skill that not only impacts an individual's sexual health, but also plays a role in relationships and communication. Staying healthy through prevention strategies, such as going to the doctor annually, also helps maintain sexual health. Just as sexuality and sexuality education is much more than sexual intercourse, maintaining sexual health and the ability to do so impact many aspects of an individual's life.

There are many things your son or daughter can do to maintain his/her sexual health, and, most likely, they are already doing some of them. From maintaining a hygiene routine to wearing a jock strap or charting a period, maintaining sexual health is more than just going to the doctor annually.

Hygiene

Chapter 1 and its associated Learning How worksheets cover many ways to establish and maintain a healthy hygiene routine for individuals with ASD. Taking care of the body, keeping it clean, and, especially for sexual health, taking care of the genitals are all ways to keep the body healthy. Individuals with ASD may need support and practice for knowing how to routinely and properly care for their body; visual reminders of their hygiene routine steps; and an understanding of how their hygiene impacts them and their relationships with those around them.

Hygiene for sexual health includes:

- ▶ Keeping genitals clean
- ▶ Maintaining a daily hygiene routine
- ▶ Knowing how sensitivities may impact practicing a hygiene routine and adjusting steps of the routine and/or hygiene products accordingly
- ▶ For girls, understanding the menstrual cycle and taking care of their body during menstruation
- ▶ For boys, wearing protective gear (jock straps, cups) when playing sports and protecting testicles from injury.



KEY MESSAGES

Male and Female Sexual Health

- ▶ Daily hygiene impacts sexual health.
- ▶ Knowledge and awareness of the body, including body part names, functions, and typical characteristics, can support a person's ability to maintain sexual health.
- ▶ Annual doctor visits are an important prevention strategy.



Body Knowledge and Awareness

Again, your son or daughter with ASD probably already has some body knowledge. Body knowledge is knowing about the parts of your body, the correct names for body parts, and understanding how the body works (like menstruation or ejaculation for example). Knowing how to properly take care of the body through a hygiene routine can also be part of body knowledge. For maintaining sexual health, for instance, individuals should know what a healthy penis/vulva looks, smells, and feels like. As you know, having this knowledge of the body is not only important for maintaining sexual health, but also for enhancing relationships (whether friendships or more intimate relationships), understanding particular sensitivities, communicating with others about the body, and distinguishing public from private behaviors.

Body awareness is relevant and important to life in general, not simply in relation to sexual health. Being aware of the body generally in relation to other people, knowing how to establish appropriate boundaries, and knowing how and what body language communicates to others can all be considered aspects of body awareness. In maintaining sexual health, body awareness can help you know your body well enough to be able to identify what feels typical or normal in regard to particular body parts and functions and to notice when something does not feel quite right. This awareness may also include noticing when something feels good to you and when something does not. Body awareness, then, is about more than simply looking for problems. It means knowing your body well, trusting your knowledge about yourself, and asking questions or getting more information when something does not feel typical or right.

Learning about body knowledge and awareness can take place formally and informally. Formally, individuals can be instructed systematically about specific areas of knowledge, such as puberty and sexual maturity (Chapter 1). On a more informal basis, people interact with and learn about their bodies through daily experiences, such as by looking at and touching their breasts or testicles.

Prevention

Body knowledge and awareness also complement sexual health prevention strategies. Maintaining sexual health, in many ways, is about being proactive and practicing good prevention strategies. Prevention can be thought of as the combination of practicing good hygiene and developing sound body knowledge and awareness. Additional proactive prevention skills include establishing and maintaining routine doctor visits. Going to the doctor helps to maintain overall health, as well as sexual health. Doctor visits are not just for when you are sick. They have an important preventive role in maintaining good health, checking in on the body to assess how well it is functioning, and developing and maintaining a relationship with your doctor. Having a trusted person to talk to about sexual health issues is in itself an important prevention strategy.

Annual checkups at the doctor are an important way to maintain sexual health. Often, sexual health checkups are incorporated into a more general physical exam, particularly for boys and men. Typically, however, girls and women choose to see a gynecologist for their annual wellness and sexual health exam, depending on their insurance coverage and/or their level of personal comfort.

A few key pointers can support individuals with ASD as they maintain their annual doctor visits:

- ▶ *Prepare for a visit.* Knowing what to expect from a visit and preparing ahead of time for what will happen can make attending doctor visits much more comfortable.
- ▶ *Focus visits on maintaining health.* Some people, not just individuals with ASD, can become overwhelmed when they think that going to a doctor is about finding something “wrong” with their body. Annual doctor visits are about maintaining and taking care of your body and health.

- ▶ *Get to know your doctor.* Establishing a relationship with a doctor can make annual visits more comfortable. Ideally, a doctor who understands the specific needs of individuals with ASD is the best choice, but a trusting relationship with a doctor is crucial.
- ▶ *Start going to the doctor early to maintain sexual health.* Beginning doctor visits for physical and sexual health exams in early adolescence can be a big help. This strategy is perhaps not so much for acquiring a physical exam, but more for establishing a trusting relationship between doctor and patient. The physician can be a partner for you in educating your evolving adult about his/her body and can become a trusted person who can answer increasingly personal questions about body development and sexual health issues. The doctor can also be a resource for providing sexual health information of all kinds (everything from body knowledge to contraception or STIs). Establishing a relationship early can also make later visits, with perhaps more complex physical exams, more comfortable.
- ▶ *Establish routine.* Making and attending doctor appointments works best as part of a consistent, annual routine. Establishing a guideline in the family that all individuals should go to the doctor at least once a year (more if necessary for specific health needs) can help individuals with ASD remember to make and attend appointments.

Annual Visits and Prevention—Males

For men and boys, part of an annual physical exam will include an exam of the testicles, penis, along with a regular exam of other areas of the body (in addition to many other questions and topics their doctor will cover). Men should bring up any issues or questions they have with their doctor, and can also discuss testing for STIs, contraception options, sexual activity, and other important sexual health topics.

While the U.S. Preventive Task Force and American Cancer Society do not make any specific recommendations regarding testicular self-examination, good preventive care of the male genitalia may include regular self-exams of the testicles. Developing a body awareness of the testicles and getting to know what they feel like on a normal basis will help men to notice anything out of the ordinary, such as swelling, changes in the testicles' size or shape, or pain in the groin area, testicles, or scrotum. Any of these conditions should be discussed with a doctor.

Annual Visits and Prevention—Females

For females, annual sexual health visits may be with a primary care physician or a gynecologist, depending on an individual's preference and possibly on the availability of insurance coverage. An annual visit may be performed as part of a general physical exam, in which case, other aspects of her health will also be attended to by the doctor. An annual visit with a gynecologist typically will include the following:

- ▶ Preventive care—talking with the doctor about maintaining a healthy lifestyle and minimizing the risk of STIs and unwanted pregnancy
- ▶ Pelvic exam—examination of the external and internal genitals, including the vulva, vagina, cervix, uterus, and ovaries
- ▶ Pap smear—to detect cervical cancer
- ▶ Breast exams—to detect growths or lumps
- ▶ STI testing if indicated




An annual internal pelvic exam is generally recommended for all women who are 21 years of age and older. A young woman under 21 also may visit a gynecologist when an exam is indicated by special circumstances, such as medical history, the need for pregnancy or STI testing or contraception, menstrual problems, or symptoms like unusual vaginal discharge. For a teen patient, a gynecological exam also provides an opportunity to talk about hygiene, normal female development, and normal female anatomy and functioning.

It is recommended that Pap smear screening also begin at age 21 and be repeated every 3 years thereafter. Although a Pap test is not recommended for annual screenings, an annual well-woman gynecological visit is encouraged.

In addition to doctor exams, body knowledge and awareness can become a regular, informal activity. Girls should get to know what their breasts feel like during different times of the menstrual cycle (the feel of breast tissue changes at various points during the cycle). For instance, girls can be encouraged to examine their breasts while showering or getting dressed. For young women with ASD, breast awareness can become a component of their regular hygiene routine. It will be important to be specific as to what your daughter should pay attention to when getting to know her breasts. She wants to pay attention to:


- ▶ Feel of breasts (smooth, lumpy, extra sensitive)
- ▶ Look of breasts (skin, size)
- ▶ Sensations of breasts—heaviness, etc.

Young women can also learn how to perform formal breast exams. The American Cancer Society recommends breast self-awareness for teenagers and breast self-exams starting in the early 20s so that women can report changes or concerns to their physician. Awareness and self-monitoring are effective tools in the early detection and treatment of breast cancer.



BOARDWALK ADVENTURE Game

- Initial Bathroom game
- Scavenger Hunt game
- Home game



Learning How Worksheets

- Adding Sexual Health and Body Awareness to Hygiene Routine, page 267
- Preparing for Going to the Doctor, page 271

Sexually Transmitted Infection

All young people need information and education about STIs, which are also referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Anyone can acquire an STI regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion. Being informed about STIs, and how to prevent them, is part of being responsible and healthy.

STIs can be a frightening topic, and individuals with ASD may assume that sexual intercourse can never be safe. With the increased risk for sexual exploitation that individuals with ASD face, it is certainly important for them to know that they could be at risk for STIs. However, individuals with ASD can learn how to reduce their risk by understanding what STIs are and how they can be transmitted, prevented, and detected. Whether in an intimate relationship or not, all individuals with ASD should have this information.

An STI is an infection that is passed from one person to another through certain kinds of sexual contact. STI germs may be present in or on the sexual parts, in sexual fluids, and/or in the blood stream (like HIV and syphilis). STIs cannot be transmitted through everyday contact with people, unlike cold or flu germs. There are different types of STIs and different ways of acquiring them. Below are some examples:

- ▶ Bacterial STIs
 - ▶ Chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis
 - ▶ Bacterial STIs can be treated with antibiotics and most often cured.
- ▶ Viral STIs
 - ▶ Genital warts, herpes, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS
 - ▶ The symptoms or effects of viral STIs can be managed, but these STIs cannot be cured.
- ▶ Parasite STIs
 - ▶ Pubic lice (crabs), scabies
 - ▶ Treated with antibiotics, shampoo, lotions

There are many resources that provide in-depth information about these different STIs (see the Learning How worksheets). While an in-depth review of STIs is beyond the goal of this section, the important thing is for your son or daughter to know generally what STIs are, how they are acquired, and ways to protect and prevent themselves from getting an STI.

Sexual behaviors (whether or not they include sexual intercourse) are normal and healthy expressions of sexuality. The goal of educating about STIs is not to provoke fear of all sexual behavior but to provide useful prevention education. Individuals with ASD should know that not all sexual behavior can or will lead to infection with an STI. It is only possible if an individual's partner is infected.

The symptoms of STIs vary, from unusual discharge from the vagina or penis to burning during urination to the appearance of sores, growths, or rashes in or on the sexual parts. It's also common for a person with an STI to have no apparent symptoms at all. Because the absence of symptoms is common, getting tested regularly for STIs is very important.



KEY MESSAGES

STIs

- ▶ Individuals with ASD should know about the different types of STIs and how they are acquired.
- ▶ Individual with ASD should know how to protect themselves from STIs.
- ▶ Individuals with ASD should know how to talk to a sexual partner about STIs.

STIs and Individuals with ASD

A helpful way to talk about STIs with individuals with ASD is to keep discussions factual and specific. Focus on what your son or daughter really needs to know and be sure to stress the importance of safer sex, communication with a partner, and making responsible decisions.

Key Points About STIs

- ▶ STIs are infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact between parts of the body where STI germs are capable of living (Note: Body fluids are implicated only in the case of HIV.).
- ▶ A committed intimate relationship should include talking about sexual history and exposure to STIs.
- ▶ A committed intimate relationship should include both partners taking responsibility for preventing STIs.

As discussed in Chapter 3, part of any committed intimate relationship is good communication. This includes having important, sometimes difficult conversations about STIs. Anyone considering engaging in potentially risky sexual behaviors needs to be able to talk to her or his partner about sexual history and potentially be tested for STIs. These conversations are not easy for anyone. An individual may feel embarrassed to ask a partner to be tested or may take the partner's word about his/her sexual history and not insist on getting tested. It can also be easy to overlook this important discussion when an individual just wants to focus on a relationship. Yet, there is always a risk if you do not know a partner's sexual history and have unprotected sexual intercourse. Testing is recommended for any sexually active individual.

Individuals should also know ways to prevent STIs, such as:

- ▶ Abstain or avoid all sexual activities (vaginal, anal, and oral sex)
- ▶ Be in a long-term, monogamous relationship with a partner who does not have an STI
- ▶ Have both partners tested for STIs
- ▶ Always use condoms when engaging in potentially risky sexual behaviors

Important points for any individual to talk about with a partner:

- ▶ Number of sexual partners
- ▶ Exposure to STIs
- ▶ Testing for STIs (recently)
- ▶ Results of testing for STIs

For individuals with ASD, body awareness is important and related to STIs, too. Confusion or lack of information about a healthy sexual and reproductive system may impact talking about STIs or being tested. By being empowered to know about their body and to communicate about their body, individuals can have more support in preventing STIs. The goal is not to scare anyone from developing a sexual relationship, but to help him/her stay safe and be able to communicate about important topics in a healthy, proactive way.



Learning How Worksheets

STI Resources Activity, page 275

Starting Conversations with your Son or Daughter about STIs, page 277

Contraception

Whether or not your young adult with ASD is in a relationship, understanding the facts about contraception, the types, how they work, and the pros and cons of each will help him/her to be an informed consumer with the ability to choose the best option for himself/herself, with support from you and his/her doctor and partner.

Everyone has different opinions and beliefs about contraception or birth control. Your beliefs will certainly inform how you discuss and teach about the topic with your son or daughter. Learning and making an informed decision about contraception is another very serious responsibility that comes with deciding to have sexual intercourse. Being informed helps individuals make healthy and safe choices that work best for them and their partners. It's important to recognize, too, that both men and women are equally responsible for engaging in safer sex and preventing unwanted pregnancy.

Contraception refers to methods of avoiding pregnancy when having sexual intercourse. Contraception is designed and used specifically for preventing pregnancy, not avoiding STIs. Condoms are the only method of contraception that can do both—prevent pregnancy and prevent the spread of STIs. Moreover, to be effective, contraception must be used properly each and every time an individual has intercourse. Even then, no contraceptive is 100% effective. The only 100% effective way to avoid getting pregnant is to not have sexual intercourse.

There are many different types of contraception methods. The “best” method for any individual is the one that best fits his or her values and beliefs, needs, medical history, and lifestyle. Every method has its own advantages and disadvantages. An exhaustive review of contraception is beyond the scope of this section; however, the Learning How worksheets have recommendations for finding more information.

Types of contraception include:

- ▶ Abstinence
- ▶ Condoms (male and female)
- ▶ Contraceptive pill (birth control pill)
- ▶ Contraceptive patch
- ▶ Emergency contraception (“morning after” pill)
- ▶ Contraceptive injections and implants
- ▶ Contraceptive ring
- ▶ Diaphragm
- ▶ Intrauterine device (IUD)



KEY MESSAGES

Contraception

- ▶ There are many types of contraception options, and an individual with ASD can find the method (or methods) that work best for him/her.
- ▶ Learning about and choosing a contraceptive method is a personal choice that involves taking many factors into account.

Vaginal Ring



Female Condom



Male Condom



Contraceptive patch



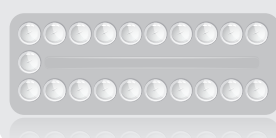
Intrauterine Device



Contraceptive Injections



Contraceptive Pill



- ▶ Spermicides
- ▶ Fertility awareness method (also called natural family planning or “rhythm” method)
- ▶ Surgery (vasectomy or tubal ligation, which are permanent forms of pregnancy prevention; all other methods are temporary/reversible)

Individuals with ASD and Contraception

The choice of contraception method is a personal one. Choosing a contraception type is about finding the best method to meet individual lifestyle and sensory needs. If taking a pill at a specific time every day will be difficult, then a daily pill may not be an option. If an individual has sensitive skin, then a patch method may not be the best option. Individuals with ASD may have sensitivities to the sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste of certain contraceptives (for instance, might not like the smell or sound of condoms), so they need to choose a method that feels comfortable, fits their individual needs, and can be used consistently and correctly.

Making a contraception decision is about finding the best option at a particular time. This decision can change as lifestyle and other needs change. It is also helpful to have two options, a first choice and a second choice. In this way, an individual will have a backup plan for contraception if the first method does not work out. The most important thing is to find a method that can be used effectively, comfortably, and consistently. Depending on life stage, relationship, personal needs, and other factors, an individual can and should periodically re-evaluate their contraception method.

Specific factors for individuals with ASD to consider:

- ▶ Ability to discuss contraception with partner
- ▶ What method fits with their sensitivities
- ▶ Ability to advocate for contraception for themselves
- ▶ Planning ahead and having a contraception plan when/if they decide to have intercourse
- ▶ How they plan to remember to use the method they choose
- ▶ Flexibility to re-evaluate the contraception choice throughout life
- ▶ Explicit training in and practice using a contraceptive method—contraceptive use needs to be broken down into steps and visually supported until it becomes an automatic routine

Contraception is another important topic for partners in a healthy, committed intimate relationship to talk about. It is the responsibility of both partners to engage in safer sex and protect against pregnancy. While contraception can and should be discussed by sexual partners so that a mutual decision can be made, it is important for each individual to come to the conversation knowing which methods will work best for them, and which they prefer. Then a compromise can be made, as necessary. It is important to reach a decision that works best for each individual as well as the couple.



Learning How Worksheets

Learning about Contraception, page 283

Choosing a Contraception Method, page 285

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Sexual orientation and gender identity can be sensitive topics to talk about. Many people may feel as if they cannot talk about or may even choose to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity, because they fear discrimination, stereotypes, or lack of support.

Exploring sexual orientation is a normal and healthy process for anyone, including individuals with ASD. Individuals with ASD can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. Just as being sexual and experiencing one's sexuality is an ongoing life process, sexual orientation is also an ongoing process of getting to know the self in relation to others. Individuals with ASD may need extra support and resources as they learn about their own sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

Sexual orientation is not just about sexual intercourse. It is about attraction and relating to another person emotionally and romantically. Individuals of any sexual orientation can and do have healthy relationships and healthy sexual experiences. As adolescents and young adults, individuals with ASD are exploring themselves in relation to other people, getting to know to what and whom they are attracted, and what feels comfortable and uncomfortable to them sexually.

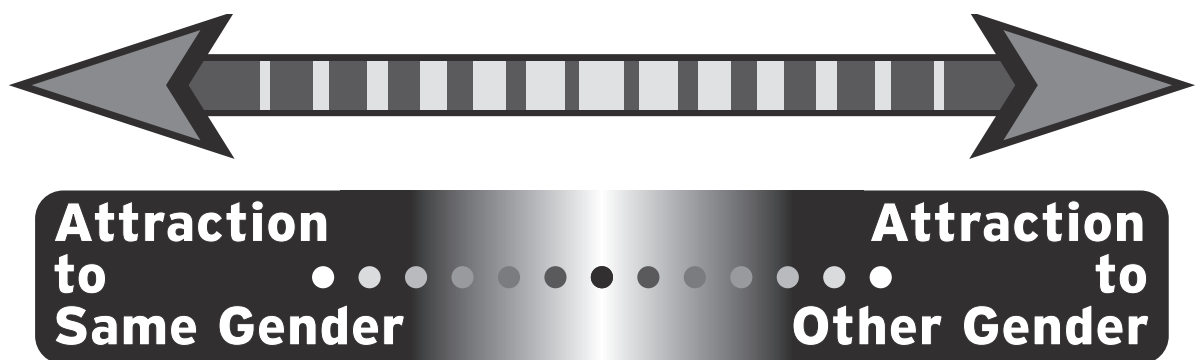
Sexual orientation refers to whom an individual is attracted, whether the other gender, same gender, or both. It can be easy to think of sexual orientation in terms of fixed "categories," such as gay, lesbian, straight, or bisexual. While these are important sexual orientation distinctions to know, just as in relationships, sexual orientation over a person's lifetime can also be thought of as a continuum or shades of experience.



KEY MESSAGES

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

- ▶ Sexual orientation is a continuum of experience, and individuals with ASD may fall anywhere along this continuum.
- ▶ Discussions of sexual orientation can be built into lessons about the body, relationships, and attraction.
- ▶ All individuals need support and respect as they explore their sexual orientation and gender identity.



On this continuum, being attracted to the opposite gender is at one end and the same gender at the other end. Individuals may experience their orientation in different places along this continuum throughout their life. There are many different ways to feel and express sexual orientation. At the same time, an individual's sexual orientation is always a part of who he or she is.

With the already ever-changing aspects of adolescence and young adulthood, such as a changing body and changing relationships, discovering and understanding one's sexual orientation can be an added challenge. This is true especially if an individual's sexual orientation is different from what is considered the norm.

Sexual Orientation and Individuals with ASD

For individuals with ASD, it can be difficult to pick up on cues of attraction and to know or understand themselves in relation to others (more information in Chapter 2). While questioning or exploring sexual orientation is completely normal and natural, it can also make learning about oneself and relationships more complex. Likewise, attraction to members of the same gender or both genders can pose difficult challenges because of societal norms, stereotypes, and/or discrimination and harassment.

Information about sexual orientation can be built into conversations and activities related to understanding relationships, attraction, and sexual behaviors. Teaching about sexual orientation (and gender identity) can use the same learning methods that work for your young adult with ASD (like showing visual examples from movies or graphs showing sexual orientation as a continuum).

Some individuals with ASD may not notice how their sexual orientation is perceived by others. Because they feel comfortable with who they are and what feels good and right to them, they may not stop to think that others might have a different point of view. This situation can be especially challenging if people begin to tease or mistreat them because of their sexual orientation since they may not pick up on potential “red flags” or warnings signs that they are being targeted.

Your young adult may have questions about sexual orientation and may express attraction to others in different ways than many other people their age. Help your son or daughter know that you (and other trusted adults in their life) are available to talk to them about these issues and that they will be supported no matter what. Also, support your son and daughter in respecting others as well. Individuals with ASD should know that you cannot tell someone’s sexual orientation simply by looking at them and that it is not something to make fun of, or even ask about, unless they know for sure that it is okay with the other person.

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to an inner sense of gender—whether an individual experiences himself/herself as male, female, both male and female, or neither male or female. Most people identify with the physical body they are born with; for example, someone born with a female body typically identifies as a female. However,

for some people, the gender they identify with does not match their biological sex. Sometimes the term “transgender” is used to describe individuals whose physical body does not feel like it matches their inner sense of gender. Gender identity develops early in life and is part of who a person is; it is not a choice or something that can be changed.

Sexual orientation is different and separate from gender identity. Whereas sexual orientation refers to the gender of people to whom you are attracted in relation to your own gender, gender identity refers to the gender or genders with which you self-identify.

Gender identity may be expressed in different ways. Some individuals may not label themselves as “masculine” or “feminine”; they may just know what feels comfortable for them. For instance, a biological female may feel more comfortable wearing men’s clothes or interact more easily with men. Expressions and experiences of gender identity are as varied as individuals. Some transgender individuals may physically transition, or take hormones or have surgery, to have their physical body match how they feel inside (or match their gender identity). Some individuals do not medically change their body, yet may express their gender identity in other ways.



There is some evidence that individuals with ASD may experience more gender identity issues. If your son or daughter is questioning his/her gender identity or talking about transitioning to a different expression of gender, it is important to seek guidance from a qualified professional who can support him/her. The timing of transitioning, as well as the emotional, social, and other aspects of a healthy gender identity can be fully supported and enhanced with guidance.

For individuals with ASD, the important thing is to support them, no matter what, and to give them ways to experience and explore how they feel. Individuals with ASD may not consider the “image” they project to others by how they act or what they wear. They may just do what they like to do and not understand or care about the perceptions of other people. For example, a girl may dress in traditionally masculine attire simply because it makes her feel more comfortable, yet be unaware that some others may consider her behavior strange because it differs from societal expectations.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are very complex experiences, with physical, social, emotional, and psychological components. Everyone’s personal experience of sexual orientation and gender identity is different, yet each one is equally valid and worthy.



Learning How Worksheets

Sexual Orientation Continuum, page 289

Defining Terms, page 293

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is not something most people like to think about, yet we need to effectively prepare and protect individuals with ASD from this problem. We want to keep individuals with ASD safe from being potential victims of harassment or abuse and also safe from taking advantage of others. Because it is difficult for individuals with ASD to interpret social cues, discern the intentions of others, or notice mistreatment, individuals with ASD are at high risk for being harassed. They may not recognize or even experience the internal cues, in their bodies or minds, which in others would set off alarm bells telling them that a situation or individual might not be safe. Teaching individuals with ASD harassment awareness and prevention strategies is imperative and can be incorporated into more general lessons related to social skills, communication, relationships, public/private behaviors, and boundaries.

Sexual harassment is defined as words, gestures, or behaviors of a sexual nature that are unwanted by the person to whom they are directed. Sexual harassment in schools and work places is illegal. It can take many different forms.

Examples of sexual harassment may include:

- ▶ Name-calling or teasing of a sexual nature
- ▶ Making comments about a person's body
- ▶ Grabbing, touching, or pinching a person's body
- ▶ Pressuring someone to do something sexual
- ▶ Making sexual jokes
- ▶ Repeatedly asking someone out on a date who has said no previously
- ▶ Showing (or being shown) sexual pictures
- ▶ Touching one's genitals in front of someone

No matter what, sexual behavior should never be forced.

Individuals with ASD Experiencing Harassment

Like everyone, individuals with ASD want to be liked and want to be valued in their relationships. They want to believe that others are trustworthy and that if they like someone as more than a friend, those feelings are returned. Individuals with ASD may want to be in a relationship, yet may lack an understanding of how one goes about engaging with another person in that way. He or she may feel excited about receiving attention from someone, even if he/she is not entirely comfortable with aspects of the relationship. Individuals with ASD may also have trouble saying "No" to behaviors they do not truly want to engage in, or may have difficulty communicating what they really need or want or don't want. If your son or daughter does not fully grasp interpersonal or social rules, or does not tend to notice the kinds of cues that indicate when a situation, behavior, or person may not be safe, he or she is at a higher risk of being victimized.



KEY MESSAGES

Sexual Harassment

- ▶ Harassment awareness and prevention strategies should be included as part of lessons in social skills, communication, and relationships.
- ▶ Individuals with ASD should always know who to talk to about any type of harassment.

Key messages for Individuals with ASD

- ▶ Your body belongs to you and only you. No one has the right to touch you without your permission, especially your genitals.
- ▶ Be as clear as you can when you say “No” when something feels inappropriate or uncomfortable to you. Say “No” loudly with your words, body (body language), and action (walk away/leave).
- ▶ You should never be physically forced or emotionally pressured to touch, kiss, or do anything you are not comfortable doing with another person.
- ▶ Be aware of what it means to be “taken advantage of.”

If your son or daughter is harassed, he/she should:

- ▶ Tell the harasser to stop immediately.
- ▶ Leave the situation or environment immediately.
- ▶ Tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- ▶ Write down when the event happened, where, and who was involved (so he/she can remember later and in case there is a need to file charges).
- ▶ Know that he/she cannot be punished for telling someone about sexual harassment. It is not his/her fault if harassment occurs, and there are people who can help.

Individuals with ASD Doing the Harassing

Because they are prone to misunderstand or misinterpret cues from others, or to have unrealistic views about how relationships work, individuals with ASD may inadvertently pressure another person to date, kiss, or do something they are not comfortable doing. For example, he or she may run into someone regularly at the library, decide that means the person likes him/her, and call, text, or ask them out multiple times a day. Even though the behavior is a result of misunderstanding, it could be considered harassment.

It is extremely important to reinforce with your son or daughter that he or she must take it very seriously when a person says “no,” “go away,” or in some other way indicates he/she wants the interaction to stop. Sometimes people may specifically say “No” using words, or they may more subtly use body language. Subtler cues are more difficult to notice, so individuals with ASD need to be made as aware as possible of the unspoken messages that other people may send.

For your son or daughter, learning about sending and receiving messages clearly is an important harassment prevention strategy. He or she should be encouraged to talk to a trusted adult if not sure about the cues he or she is receiving from another person. There can be legal consequences for harassing behaviors, so he/she needs to be very careful with words and behaviors. Parents should also continually reinforce the point that any touching, especially sexual touching, requires both people to consent or say that it’s okay.

If an individual with ASD harasses, he/she should:

- ▶ Stop immediately
- ▶ Apologize
- ▶ Talk to a trusted adult about what happened




Harassment Prevention

The most important thing to help individuals with ASD understand is that if they are harassed, it is not their fault. Any type of harassment can be painful and hurtful. They should always tell someone, even though it may not be easy. By telling someone, they can get the help and support they need.


With wider experience and an increased understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships, your son or daughter will be more able to recognize appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. This knowledge can help in deciphering cues in relationships as well as discerning how he/she feels in relation to other people and in particular situations. Ongoing mentoring about effective interpersonal communication skills will also support your son or daughter in becoming more assertive in relaying his/her likes, dislikes, and personal boundaries.

Individuals with ASD also benefit from practice in recognizing emotional feelings, so he or she can more readily identify when he or she feels nervous, scared, or uncomfortable. Learning about personal cues in his/her own body will also help to recognize when he/she is feeling uncomfortable or when he/she senses that someone or something does not feel right. Individuals with ASD also need ongoing mentoring about socially appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (e.g., someone slapping or pinching their buttocks). Of course, basic education about a range of sexual topics—including how their bodies work, how to create healthy relationships, and how to make healthy sexual decisions—is also an essential ingredient. Many of the ideas, topics, and skills generated in Charting the Course provide helpful ways to practice harassment prevention strategies.



Game

- Pier game
- Video Arcade game



Learning How Worksheets

- Signs of Harassment, page 297
- Make a Plan, page 301



Worksheets

4

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MALE AND FEMALE SEXUAL HEALTH

Adding Sexual Health and Body Awareness to Hygiene Routine

Your son or daughter probably already has a hygiene routine that helps keep his/her body clean on a daily basis. Another important component of this hygiene routine, as he/she gets older, is to add tasks related to sexual health and body awareness. While these can be daily informal practices (related to just washing and feeling parts of his/her body), formal practices may be built into the routine to take a proactive approach to monitoring his/her sexual health.

It is important to help your son or daughter know what his/her body feels like on a daily basis. This may mean learning what his testicles normally feel like, or her breasts feel like throughout her cycle. To give your son or daughter concrete ways to pay attention to these particular body areas, there are several steps you may consider working on together to add to his/her current hygiene routine.

Depending on how your son or daughter learns best and the current hygiene routine he/she currently uses, you may consider working these charts into his/her routine through additional steps on a checklist or picture schedule. (More information on modifying a hygiene routine is provided on page 103 of Chapter 1 worksheets). These charts could be incorporated into a shower routine, getting dressed routine, or a morning or evening routine. Be sure to explain the purpose of these new charts (to be aware of his/her body, what is normal for his/her body, and proactively get to know it), as well as the specific things he/she is noticing. On a weekly or monthly basis, he or she may find it useful to complete the appropriate charts as a method of tracking and remembering to pay attention to these body areas.

Males

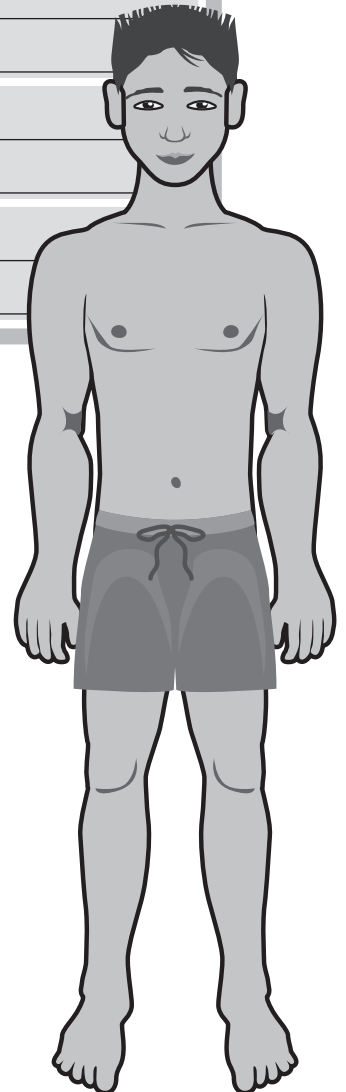
Testicles Checklist

Best time to examine is after a warm shower or bath. Hold the scrotum in your palm and use your fingers and thumb to gently feel each testicle.

Quality to Notice	Date Notice	Yes	No	Notes
One testicle hangs lower than the other (common occurrence)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
One testicle feels slightly bigger than the other (common occurrence)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Firm but not hard	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Soft tube at back of each testicle (epididymis)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lumps	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Swelling	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Penis Checklist

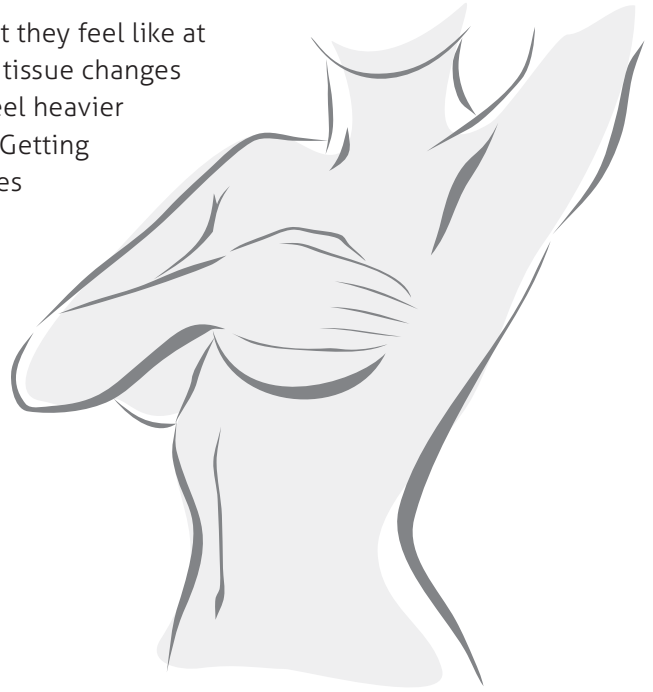
Quality to Notice	Date Notice	Yes	No	Notes
Lumps or bumps	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sores	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Blisters	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Itching	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Normal discharge (usually clear or white is normal)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Unusual discharge (thick white, yellow, green)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Redness	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Soreness	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Females

It is important to get to know the breasts and what they feel like at different times during the menstrual cycle. Breast tissue changes throughout the menstrual cycle, so breasts may feel heavier or more dense at certain times during the month. Getting to know what the breasts feel like at different times can help your daughter know when the tissue feels unusual.

Given that breasts change during her cycle, your daughter might consider adding this charting as a weekly step in her routine.

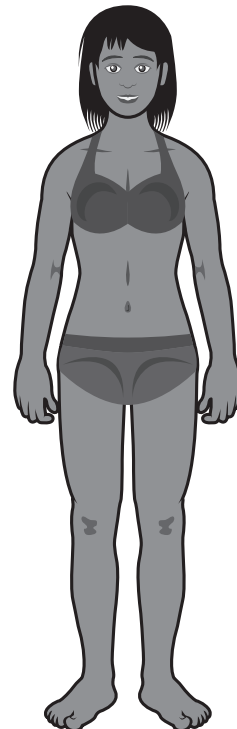


Breasts Checklist				
Quality to Notice	Date Notice	Yes	No	Notes
Soreness, pain, or tenderness (which may be cyclic. If lasts for longer time, consult doctor)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lumpy	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Smooth	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Heavy	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Light	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Firm	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Soft	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Vagina/Vulva Checklist

Quality to Notice	Date Notice	Yes	No	Notes
Vulva appears normal (color is reddish pink)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Normal discharge (typically clear to cloudy white, might be thick or thin—changes throughout cycle)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Change in color, odor, or amount of vaginal discharge (different smell, curd-like discharge, different color discharge)	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Itching	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Redness	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Genital sores or raised spots on skin of vulva	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bleeding between periods	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pain before, during, or after sex	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Odor	/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

These charts are meant to give prompts to your son or daughter of different things to notice when they examine their bodies. If they ever have questions or notice that something on their body feels different than normal, help them to know they should talk to you, another trusted adult, and/or their doctor.





MALE AND FEMALE SEXUAL HEALTH

Preparing for Going to the Doctor

Routine doctor visits have an important preventive role in staying healthy, checking on the body, and developing and maintaining a relationship with your son's or daughter's doctor. Having a trusted person to talk to about sexual health issues is an important prevention strategy.

Every doctor visit may be slightly different. Usually, sexual health doctor appointments are done annually and may be part of a larger physical exam. Preparing your son or daughter for what to expect, in advance, for a doctor appointment, can empower them as well as help them feel more comfortable.

Because every doctor and visit can be different, you may like to work with your son or daughter to talk to the doctor (or nurse or office) about typical things to expect at a visit, ways to prepare, and items needed to bring to the visit. A general template (below) can help your son or daughter start to prepare.

General Doctor Visit Preparation Template

Purpose of visit:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Procedures or exams likely to occur at visit:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Time of appointment:	
Time to arrive at appointment:	
Items to talk to doctor about:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Questions for doctor:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Items to bring to appointment:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Items or notes to bring to a doctor appointment:

- ▶ Insurance card and/or information
- ▶ List of medications currently taking
- ▶ List of any symptoms or things you've noticed that you want to talk about
- ▶ List of any questions
- ▶ Knowledge of medical history information
- ▶ Knowledge of allergies
- ▶ Notebook and/or audio recorder (to write down/record notes from appointment)

For Girls

At an annual exam, doctors usually ask some routine questions. Girls should be prepared to answer the following:

Start date of last period:	
Length of last period:	
Any issues with period (pain, heavy flow, cramps, discharge):	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Regularity of period (Can you predict on what day of the month your period will start?):	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Girls should try to schedule their annual exam for the middle of their cycle (not during their period).



MALE AND FEMALE SEXUAL HEALTH

Maintaining Sexual Health

There are many ways to start learning early about and maintaining sexual health. There are probably many things that you and your son or daughter are already doing.

Use this checklist together to see which items your son or daughter is currently practicing. For items that are not as familiar or have not been implemented into a routine yet, consider working together to create a plan to start on them.

- Go to annual doctor appointments
- Practice daily hygiene routine
- Practice noticing body (paying attention to breasts, vulva, penis, or testicles, and knowing what they normally feel like)
- Talk about sexual health topics often (reproduction, contraception, STIs, etc.)
- Ask sexual health questions
- Find sexual health answers
- Exercise
- Eat nutritious food
- Know proper terms for body parts
- Know functions of body parts
- Know typical characteristics of healthy body parts
- Prepare for doctor visits
- Girls—responsibility and awareness of menstrual cycle
- Boys—wear protective gear (jock straps, cups); take care of testicles during activities
- Understand particular sensory sensitivities and make modifications to hygiene routine as necessary
- Know who to talk to about questions or challenges (parent, trusted adult, doctor)
- Practice public versus private behaviors and conversations
- Be able to say and/or communicate “no” with words or body
- Learn about contraception
- Learn about STIs and how to prevent them
- Practice noticing body language cues from other people
- Practice recognizing your own emotions
- Know characteristics of healthy relationships
- Know appropriate behaviors at different relationship stages
- Identify shades of relationships
- Talk about sexual orientation
- Seek support from counselor or professional about particular questions or issues
- Identify cues of sexual harassment



STI

STI Resources Activity

There are many books and websites that provide in-depth information about different STIs. It is not necessary for your son or daughter to know everything about STIs to make informed decisions. Yet, knowing a little bit about them can demystify the topic and give him/her concrete information about how STIs are passed from one person to another and how STIs can be prevented.

Using the resources provided on page 309 (or other resources that you may like), work together with your son or daughter to find the answers to the following questions:

- ▶ *What is an STI?*
- ▶ *What are common types of STIs?*
- ▶ *For each type of STI, how does someone get them?*
- ▶ *What are ways to prevent getting an STI?*
- ▶ *What is the treatment for each STI?*

Another option is to ask your son or daughter to put together a top 10 list of facts (using resources on page 309 to start) he/she learns about STIs. You can then go over them together, creating an opportunity for additional discussion about the topic.



STI

Starting Conversations with Your Son or Daughter About STIs

It can be hard to know where to start a conversation about STIs. Remember, just like all of your talks with your son or daughter about sexual health, talking about STIs does not need to be one big, sit-down talk. You can find small, shorter opportunities to bring up the topic.

Here are some ideas for finding concrete opportunities to talk about STIs:

- ▶ **Get the facts.** Use the worksheet on page 275 to find out information about STIs together. This activity can lead to more conversations about STIs.
- ▶ **Find a place.** Think about places you have been that you have talked about difficult topics before. It might be while driving in your car, with just your adolescent in the back seat. This allows you to avoid eye contact but you have a captive audience who can't leave.
- ▶ **Talk about condoms.** Condoms are the only method that helps to prevent pregnancy as well as STIs. With your son or daughter, help him or her to know how to properly use a condom.
- ▶ **Think of STIs as a medical issue.** STIs are medical problems, yet can be a more sensitive topic than, for instance, getting the flu. Thinking of them as medical problems and keeping them more fact based can help with conversations with your son or daughter.
- ▶ **Make a doctor's appointment.** Your son's or daughter's doctor can help with conversations about STIs. Maybe prepare questions together to ask the doctor. Some types of questions your son or daughter might want to ask might include: *What are STIs, what are ways to prevent them, where are places to be tested for them.*
- ▶ **Use media cues.** A TV show, movie, song, or newspaper article can provide a prompt to talk about STIs. Maybe a favorite character in a show is about to go on a date, or maybe you see a newspaper article about a fundraiser for a local sexual health clinic. These can be opportunities to bring up the topic with your son or daughter.
- ▶ **Ask your son or daughter about STIs.** See what he/she already knows, and go from there. You may find that he/she knows more than you think, and/or you might notice that you need to correct some common misperceptions about STIs. See what questions he or she has and work together to find the answers.



STI

Talking About STIs with a Partner

Talking about STIs, sexual health history, and methods of preventing STIs are all important topics to talk about before engaging in any type of sexual behavior with a partner. Yet, these can be really hard topics to talk about! If your son or daughter is in a relationship and at a point of needing to start conversations about sexual health and STIs, this worksheet can help him or her to start preparing for those talks with his/her partner.

1. Get more information about STIs

Being able to talk about STIs with a partner starts with knowing some basic information about him/her. It's not important to know everything about STIs, but having some basic facts can help. In this way, if your partner has questions, you can feel better prepared to answer them.

2. Set goals

It can help to know why it is important to you to have this conversation about STIs with your partner. You may want both of you to be tested for STIs. You may want to talk about condom use. Decide, before you talk, what your goals are for the conversation. This can help you stay focused.

Example goals may be: to talk more about STIs, to get tested, to talk about sexual behaviors, or to talk about condom use.

3. Make a plan

Before you sit down to talk to your partner, write down the important points you'd like to cover. You might fill in the blanks below to get started:

Why I want to talk about STIs _____

What I want to share with my partner _____

What I want my partner to share with me _____

4. Decide on time to talk

Find a good time and place to talk. You'll want to have a private location, without a lot of other people around, where you can have a private conversation. You want to be sure to talk with your partner way before you start kissing or taking clothes off. This is a conversation that happens best outside of the bedroom.

5. Remember your important points

You might find it helpful to write down your goals for your conversation. Your goals might be to talk about getting tested for STIs and to talk about the importance of using a condom.

6. Start talk

A lot of people feel nervous having serious talks with their partner. If you are feeling nervous or are unsure of how to start this conversation, here are some ideas:

"We've talked about having sex/intercourse. Before we do, there are some important things I want to talk about, like STIs."

"I feel nervous to bring this topic up, but I want to talk about STIs."

"I really love you and want to keep moving forward in our relationship. Something important to me for our relationship is to talk about STIs."

"You've asked me to perform oral sex on you; before I do this, I would like you to be tested for STIs."

Remember, you do not need a script to talk with your partner, but having some idea of your goals and ways to start this conversation can make it easier and more focused.

7. Listen

After you start your talk, give your partner a chance to respond. Listen to what he or she has to say. Stay calm. If your partner has different opinions than you, try to talk to him/her and figure out why. Listen to what is important to your partner. If your partner walks away and won't talk to you, ask him/her when would be a better time to talk openly and honestly together. If your partner is uncomfortable talking about this topic, wait on having oral, anal, or intercourse sex until you can talk about STIs.

8. Decide how to move forward

You do not need to just have one conversation about STIs. This is a topic to talk about carefully with your partner. Keeping in mind what is important to you (from your goals above) and what is important to your partner, work together to find a way to move forward toward your goals. Maybe you decide to get tested together or maybe you decide to wait on sexual behaviors for a while.

Type of Contraception		
How to Use It	Effectiveness	Where to Get It
👍 Advantages		👎 Disadvantages

Type of Contraception		
How to Use It	Effectiveness	Where to Get It
👍 Advantages		👎 Disadvantages



CONTRACEPTION

Choosing a Contraception Method

Learning About Contraception (worksheet, page 283) is the starting point for choosing a contraception method. There are many methods to choose from, but finding the type that will work best for your son or daughter is a personal decision. This worksheet can be used as a template for your son or daughter to weigh the options against their personal needs and then see what type(s) may work best for him/her.

The template (below) can be completed for each type of contraception method your son or daughter is considering. You might like to copy this template to use for each contraception method. Working together with your son or daughter, complete the different template categories, specifically thinking about the contraception method and the specific needs of your son or daughter.

Once you (and your son or daughter) have completed the templates for all of the methods, compare them to see which are the top two options that meet the most needs for your son or daughter. Remember, there is no "best" contraception method. The important thing is to find the best method that works for your son or daughter at this time in his/her life.

Type of Contraception		
Does It Meet Your Sensory Needs?	Is It Affordable?	Is It Easy to Remember to Use?
Personal Advantages of Using This Type		
<hr/> <hr/>		
Personal Disadvantages of Using This Type		
<hr/> <hr/>		

Type of Contraception		
Does It Meet Your Sensory Needs?	Is It Affordable?	Is It Easy to Remember to Use?
Personal Advantages of Using This Type		
<hr/> <hr/>		
Personal Disadvantages of Using This Type		
<hr/> <hr/>		

Type of Contraception		
Does It Meet Your Sensory Needs?	Is It Affordable?	Is It Easy to Remember to Use?
Personal Advantages of Using This Type		
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Personal Disadvantages of Using This Type		
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Type of Contraception		
Does It Meet Your Sensory Needs?	Is It Affordable?	Is It Easy to Remember to Use?
Personal Advantages of Using This Type		
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Personal Disadvantages of Using This Type		
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Type of Contraception		
Does It Meet Your Sensory Needs?	Is It Affordable?	Is It Easy to Remember to Use?
Personal Advantages of Using This Type		
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Personal Disadvantages of Using This Type		
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CONTRACEPTION

Contraception Practice

Choosing a contraception method is a personal decision, one that can be made by looking at the characteristics of each method (as in the Choosing a Contraception Method worksheet). Another important factor, both for effectiveness of the method and ease of use, is to be familiar with actually using the method of choice. So, if a condom is one method your son or daughter chooses to use, he or she needs to know how to correctly put one on a penis. Practicing with the contraception methods can help your son or daughter learn more about his/her options, as well as how to effectively use the method, if they choose to, in his/her own life.

There are different ways to “try out” or get to know different contraception options. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ **Visit your doctor or clinic.** Scheduling a visit to your son or daughter’s doctor or visiting a local clinic (such as Planned Parenthood) can give him/her an opportunity to see and feel many of the different contraception options and learn more about them. He or she could ask questions, find out more information, as well as potentially get samples to take home and try (such as a condom).
- ▶ **Try it out.** In many cases, a contraception method can be practiced before actually needing to use it. Some ways to try out a contraception option might be:
 - ▶ Your son can practice getting a condom, putting on a condom, and disposing of it properly. (He could practice on a banana first, before practicing on his penis).
 - ▶ Your daughter could practice putting a condom on a banana to know the proper way of potentially assisting a partner.
 - ▶ Your daughter can practice taking a fake pill every day for a month, at the same time of the day.
 - ▶ Your daughter could try wearing an adhesive patch, similar to a contraceptive patch, to see how it feels on her skin.
 - ▶ Your son could get different brands of condoms and see which one he likes best.

The key idea is to get to know the contraception options that might work best for your son or daughter and to practice using them BEFORE using them with a partner. Familiarity with the method of choice will increase confidence as well as effectiveness. Any contraception method should be comfortable to use in a consistent way.

As your son or daughter practices with different options, he or she might also consider these questions:

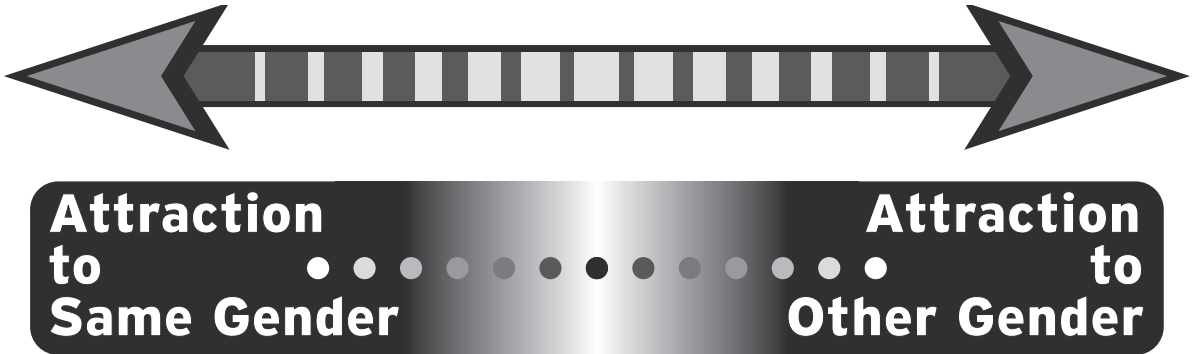
- ▶ *Was the method easy to use?*
- ▶ *Was it easy to get?*
- ▶ *Were you able to remember to use the method consistently?*
- ▶ *What did you like best about this method?*
- ▶ *What did you like least about this method?*



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Sexual Orientation Continuum

Sexual orientation refers to whom an individual is attracted, whether the other gender, same gender, or both. It can be easy to think of sexual orientation in terms of fixed “categories,” such as gay, lesbian, straight, or bisexual. While these are important sexual orientation distinctions to know, just as in relationships, sexual orientation over a person’s lifetime can also be thought of as a continuum or shades of experience.



Using this continuum, work together with your son or daughter to determine where the people in the following scenarios might fit on this continuum.



1. Jose is a teenager and thinks other guys are attractive, but he is not sure yet.



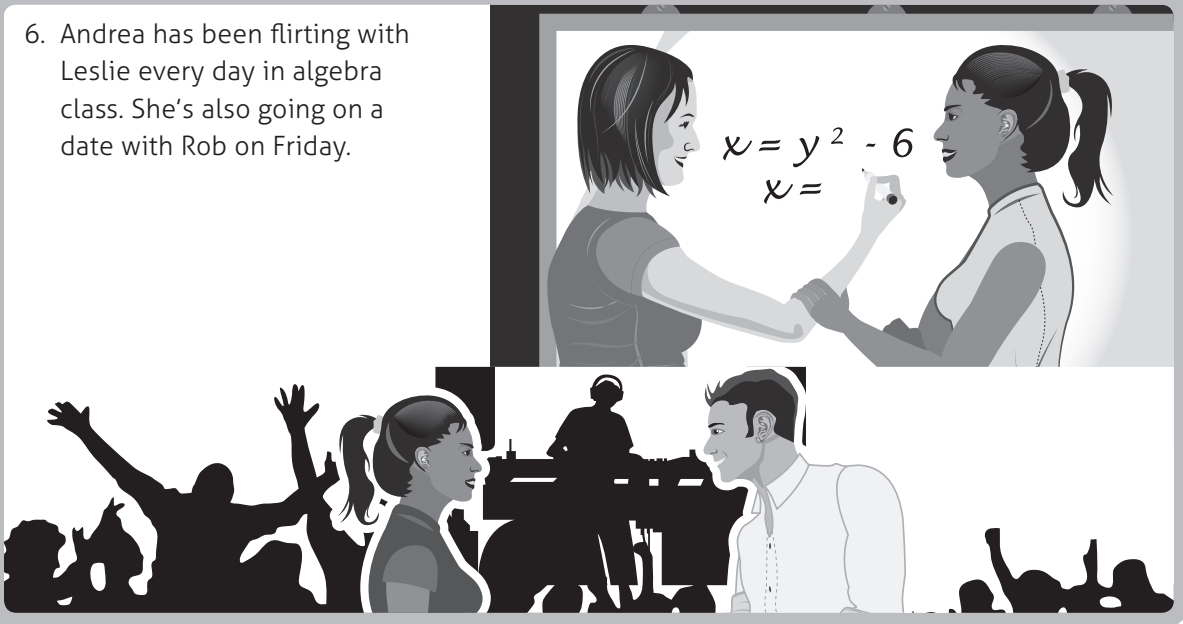
2. Tyrese has been dating Tammy for 3 years. He loves her and is hoping to marry her one day.

3. Tabitha has dated some guys but also enjoys a lot of the same kind of activities as a girl in her junior English class. She is wondering if she might like girls more than guys.

4. John and Jimmy are in a committed intimate relationship and are thinking about adopting a baby.

5. After going on many dates with men, Melanie is noticing at the gym that she is attracted to Skylar and would like to ask her on a date.

6. Andrea has been flirting with Leslie every day in algebra class. She's also going on a date with Rob on Friday.





SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Respecting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Every individual is unique and has different ways of expressing who he or she is. Sexual orientation and gender identity are a part of who someone is, but are not right or wrong—just who he or she is. Understanding and respecting how people express their sexual orientation and gender identity can increase acceptance of others, and also help your son or daughter learn about his/her own sexual orientation and gender identity.

Use the following myths and facts as a place to start talking about ways to respect individuals' sexual orientation and gender identity. The myths and facts lend themselves to conversations about what sexual orientation and gender identity are, as well as how individuals may explore and experience their orientation and identity. At the end of the worksheet, you and your son or daughter may also add to the list of ways to practice respecting others.

Myth: Because Bill is a boy, he should like girls, be good at fixing cars, and enjoy sports.

Fact: One person's experience of being a boy is different than another boy's. Every individual, whether a boy or a girl, can have different talents—like different hobbies—and be attracted to the same, different, or both genders.

Myth: It's okay to call someone "gay" when they are doing something you do not like. So, it's okay for Eric to say, "You're so gay," to Russell, when Russell won't play a computer game.

Fact: Calling someone "gay" is not respectful of individuals who are gay or homosexual. Eric may not mean to insult an individual who is homosexual, but it is still an insensitive use of the word.

Myth: You can tell when someone is homosexual by the way he/she talks and dresses.

Fact: You cannot tell by looking or listening to someone if he/she is homosexual. Homosexuality is not something you can see just by looking at someone.

Myth: TV shows and movies often show accurate representations of different sexual orientations and gender identities.

Fact: Often, TV shows and movies show exaggerated or stereotypical versions of sexual orientations and gender identities. The key is to learn about different orientations and expressions of identity, and talk to a trusted adult about TV shows or movies that you see.

Myth: Stefanie is more comfortable in and prefers to wear boys' clothes. She should not be allowed to dress like a boy at school.

Fact: Everyone expresses themselves differently. Wearing boys' clothes is not an indication that Stefanie is homosexual or identifies as a boy; she may feel more comfortable in boys' clothes. Whatever reason Stefanie dresses as she does, she should be allowed to dress in ways that are comfortable to her.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Defining Terms

Working together, match the definition to the appropriate sexual orientation or gender identity term.

Homosexual

Female who is attracted to another female.

Heterosexual

An individual whose physical body does not match his or her inner sense of gender.

Gay

The process of accepting one's homosexuality or sexual orientation, and then sharing it with others.

Lesbian

Individual who is attracted to someone of the other gender.

Straight

Individual who is attracted to individuals of the same or other gender.

Bisexual

Someone who may fear or discriminate against individuals who are homosexual.

Transgender

Someone who may have a different sexual orientation, but does not feel ready or safe to tell others about it.

Coming out of the closet

Slang term for heterosexual.

In the closet

Someone who occasionally wears clothes typically worn by people of the opposite gender.

Homophobe

Male who is attracted to another male.

Cross Dresser

Individual who is attracted to someone of the same gender.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Getting Support

Talking about sexual orientation and gender identity can be difficult and sometimes sensitive. As you and your son or daughter explore his/her own sexual orientation and gender identity, you both may find it helpful to get support.

For Parents

As you practice supporting your son or daughter in his/her sexual orientation and/or gender identity, you may have questions or be looking for extra support of your own. You may consider getting support from:

- ▶ Members of your cultural or religious community
- ▶ Professionals who specialize in sexual orientation and/or gender identity topics
- ▶ Other parents of individuals with ASD
- ▶ Books
- ▶ Online communities
- ▶ Websites

You may find support in your community or online.

For Individuals with ASD

Your son or daughter may also benefit from getting support from your cultural or religious community, professionals, or other individuals with ASD. It can be especially helpful to be specific with your son or daughter about who he/she can talk to about these issues. You might find that making a list, along with pictures, of trusted adults in his/her life can be a good visual reminder of who to talk to about sexual health, orientation, and identity questions.





SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Signs of Harassment

Using the chart below, ask your son or daughter to mark if the sign is an example of sexual harassment or not. You can further use this activity to talk about ways to say “no,” telling a trusted adult when harassment happens, and/or deciphering healthy versus unhealthy behaviors in relationships.

Sign	Harassment	Not Harassment
Calling someone a sexual name		
Making comments about a person’s body		
Telling a funny joke		
Pressuring someone to kiss		
Whistling at someone		
Asking very personal questions		
Contacting someone multiple times during a day		
Saying “Hi” to someone		
Showing sexual pictures to someone		
Repeatedly asking someone on a date who always says “No”		
Giving a compliment on someone’s shirt		
Pinching someone’s bottom		
Touching someone’s arm when you are friends		
Sending naked pictures of self or another person using your cell phone (sexting)		
Sending naked pictures of self or another person via social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace)		
Touching a woman’s pantyhose while it is on her leg because you like the feel of it		
Add your own:		
Add your own:		
Add your own:		

Using the list above, consider adding other concrete examples of signs of harassment with your son or daughter. You might think of specific examples from his/her life. The most important thing is to help your son or daughter know that if he/she is harassed, it is not his/her fault. Any type of harassment can be painful and hurtful. Your son or daughter should always tell someone.



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

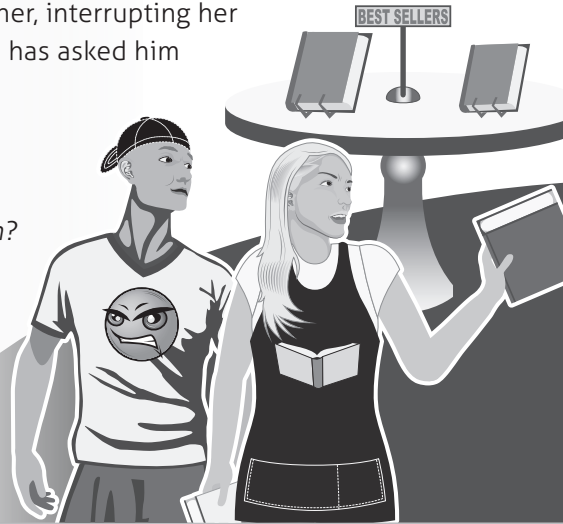
Avoiding Harassing Others

Sometimes it can be difficult for individuals with ASD to know when their actions are considered harassment by others. Your son or daughter may have trouble noticing the behavioral or verbal signs that indicate that his/her behavior is unwelcomed. Using the examples below, work together with your son or daughter to brainstorm alternative ways—using the question prompts—the individuals in each scenario could have a more positive, less harassing interaction.

1. Kenneth really likes a girl who works at his local bookstore. He visits the bookstore daily and repeatedly talks to her, interrupting her conversations with others and her work. She has asked him repeatedly to stop bothering her at her job.

- ▶ *Should Kenneth stop going to his local bookstore?*
- ▶ *Should Kenneth never talk to the girl again?*
- ▶ *How often should Kenneth talk to the girl?*

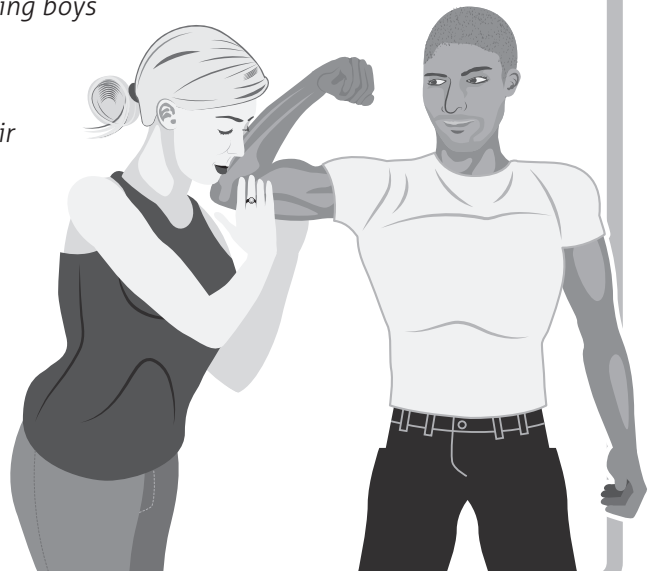
Answers: Kenneth should respect the girl's wishes for him to stop visiting the bookstore. She doesn't want to be near him.



2. Jasmine is attracted to boys who wear tight-fitting t-shirts that show off their muscles. Whenever she sees a boy or man wearing a tight-fitting t-shirt, she likes to go up to them and touch their upper arms.

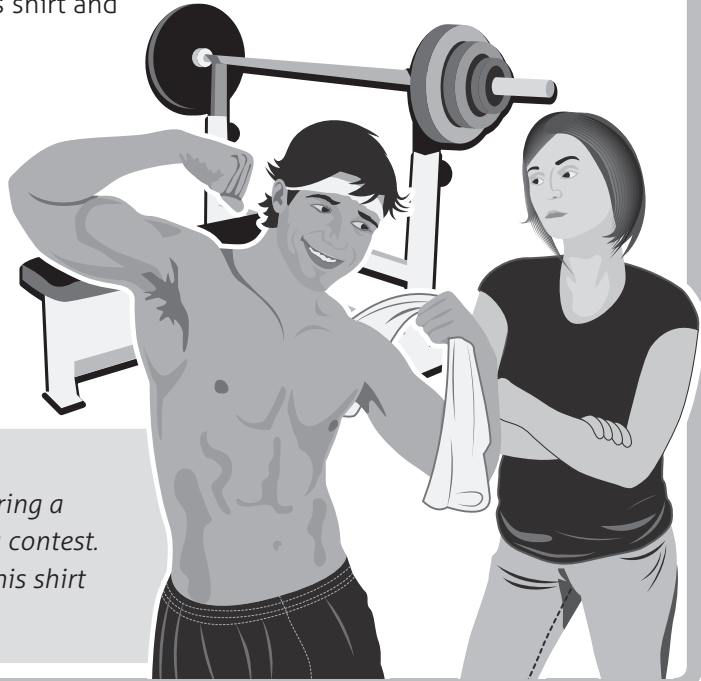
- ▶ *What could Jasmine do instead of touching boys or men wearing tight-fitting t-shirts?*
- ▶ *When Jasmine is attracted to boys who wear tight-fitting t-shirts to show off their muscles, what are some ways she could get to know the boys? (refer to Chapter 3, Shades of Relationships)*

Answer: Jasmine should never touch a person who is a stranger. Refer to Chapter 3 on the shades of relationships to guide her on how to get to know the men she is attracted to.



3. Derrick enjoys bodybuilding, or working out to build up his muscles. He is proud of how his body looks and likes to show it off. When someone at school asks about his hobby or notices his muscles, he takes off his shirt and flexes his muscles for them.

- ▶ *What could Derrick do instead of taking off his shirt to show his muscles?*
- ▶ *Should Derrick stop bodybuilding?*
- ▶ *When would be a good time for Derrick to show someone his muscles?*



Answers: Maybe an appropriate time to show off his muscles would be during a weightlifting class or a bodybuilding contest. The rest of the time, he should keep his shirt on and just say, "thank you."

Noticing the signs of someone communicating "no," whether through their behaviors or words, is an important skill to practice. Work together with your son or daughter to add to this list below, using examples from his/her life.

Ways People Might Communicate "No"

- ▶ Saying "no" or "go away"
- ▶ Walking away from you
- ▶ Turning away from you
- ▶ Frowning
- ▶ Looking angry



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Make a Plan

When or if your son or daughter experiences harassment, having a plan can help him/her have concrete steps to follow to know what to do. Using the general steps below, add in the details together with your son or daughter. Then, routinely practice through simple role plays or learning opportunities in his/her day, remembering the steps. He/she might also find it helpful to keep a printed copy of this plan in a safe, memorable place.

If you think you are being sexually harassed

Step 1: Ask the person to stop immediately.

I will ask the person to stop by using these words: _____

I will ask the person to stop by using these actions: _____

Step 2: Leave the situation or environment immediately.

I will go to this place instead: _____

Step 3: Tell a trusted adult(s) as soon as possible.

I will talk to _____

Step 4: Write down when the harassment happened (date), time it happened, where it happened, who was involved, and what happened.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Where: _____

Who: _____

What: _____

Step 5: As soon as possible, talk with a trusted adult if you have been or think you have been harassed. Remember, it is not your fault.

Step 6: It is important to tell a trusted friend or adult, but not to tell everyone you know until you are guided correctly on what to tell them about your experience.

RESOURCES

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Relationships, and Sexual Education 312

Resources about Decision Making and Values. 313

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RESOURCES

Books and Curricula about Living with ASD, Puberty, Relationships, and Sexuality

- ▶ Attwood, S. (2008). *Making sense of sex: A forthright guide to puberty, sex and relationships for people with Asperger's syndrome*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Written in clear, direct language, this book is a good resource for young people approaching puberty, and even older teens on the spectrum, to learn about developments in the male and female body, good hygiene and general health, as well as emotional changes, sexual feelings, and sexual health.
- ▶ Attwood, T. (1998). *Asperger's syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
This guide is meant to provide a detailed description of Asperger's syndrome for both parents and professionals. Assessment and diagnoses, and all other characteristics of the syndrome are covered, including a helpful FAQs section.
- ▶ Attwood, T. (2008). *The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
This is a complete guide to Asperger's syndrome for parents and children/teens, but it also contains chapters related to social interactions and relationships. It also touches on issues related to friendships, bullying, and recognizing emotions in others.
- ▶ Auer, J. (2003). *Standing up to peer pressure: A guide to being true to you*. St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press.
Accompanied with drawings, this book uses simplistic language to explain the concept of peer pressure and offers ways for children to deal with peer pressure.
- ▶ Baker, J. (2003). *The social skills picture book: Teaching play, emotion, and communication to children with autism*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.
This book uses photographs to illustrate the appropriate and inappropriate ways of handling peer pressure situations. It also offers tips on how parents can guide their children in role-playing these common, real-life interactions.
- ▶ Baker, J. (2006). *Preparing for life: The complete guide for transitioning to adulthood for those with autism and Asperger's syndrome*. Arlington: Future Horizons, Inc.
This book offers a wide range of social skills for high school graduates with ASD to help prepare them for transition into an independent adult life. Baker intends these skills to be taught by parents, teachers, or professionals.
- ▶ Bellini, S. (2006). *Building social relationships: A systematic approach to teaching social interaction skills to children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders and other social difficulties*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
This book offers an array of resources currently available for parents and teachers to help ASD children learn and develop their social skills.

- ▶ Betts, D. E., & Patrick, N. J., (2008). *Hints and tips for helping children with autism spectrum disorder*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book provides creative, practical strategies to help parents and caregivers support their child on the spectrum in five distinct life areas: home life, hygiene, community, medical, and schools and organizations.

- ▶ Boushey, A. (2007). *Talking teenagers: Information and inspiration for parents of teenagers with autism or Asperger's syndrome*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book, written by a mother with an autistic son, takes a personal approach to discussing the mastery of daily challenges for parents like herself. Broader issues for children and teenagers with autism, like dealing with anger and sex education, are also discussed.

- ▶ Buron, K. D. (2007). *A 5 is against the law! Social boundaries: Straight up! An honest guide for teens and young adults*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

This book presents the 5-point scale for challenging behaviors that can be trouble for teens with difficulty understanding and maintaining social boundaries. The book contains a lot of examples and activities that make advice clear and direct.

- ▶ Casparian, E., Goldfarb, E., Kimball, R., Sprung, B., & Wilson, P. (1999–2000). *Our whole lives: Sexuality education for grades 4–6, 7–9, 10–12*. Ohio: Unitarian Universalist Association.

This series offers general sexual education curricula based on guidelines from SIECUS. The series does not have a religious focus, although it does provide a supplementary companion on sexuality and faith.

- ▶ Darvill, W., & Powell, K. (2006). *In your jeans: A pocket guide to your changing body*. Berkley, CA: Ulysses Press.

Written in a straightforward Q&A format, this book is designed for children and teens who want to learn more about the physical changes in their body, mood swings, personal health, and relationships in an easy-to-read, straightforward manner.

- ▶ Davies, C., & Dubie, M. (2012). *Intimate relationships and sexual health: A curriculum for teaching adolescents/adults with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders and other social challenges*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

This curriculum is a comprehensive resource, both in terms of actual content and content delivery (including lessons, activities, handouts, CD, and more), on sexuality tailored to the unique characteristics of high-functioning adolescents and adults on the autism disorders spectrum.

- ▶ Gabriels, R. L., & Hill, D. E. (2010). *Growing up with autism: Working with school-age children and adolescents*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

This book provides general information for parents of children with ASD, with a focus on reinforcing positive behaviors and communication, and managing issues related to mental and physical health, as well as sexuality.

- ▶ Henault, I. (2005). *Asperger's syndrome and sexuality: From adolescence through adulthood*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book, for parents, teachers, professionals, and individuals with AS, delivers practical information about puberty, sexual feelings, dating, gender identity disorder, and the appropriateness of sexual behaviors.

- ▶ Hingsburger, D. (1995). *Just say know!: Understanding and reducing the risk of sexual victimization*. Barrie, Ontario: Diverse City Press.

This book presents safety skills for people with disabilities to protect themselves against being victims of sexual victimization and assault.

- ▶ Kraus, J. D. (2012). *The aspie teen's survival guide: Candid advice for teens, tweens, and parents, from a young man with Asperger's syndrome*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.

This book, written by a young man with AS, features practical advice on dating, social relationships, and other adolescent issues for his middle and high school-aged peers to have a fulfilling social and academic life.

- ▶ Lawson, W. (2005). *Sex, sexuality and the autism spectrum*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book, written by an adult with autism, discusses the implications of autism on relationships and sex, with a particular focus on gender identity and sexual orientation.

- ▶ Newport, M., & Newport, J. (2002). *Autism – Asperger's and sexuality: Puberty and beyond*. USA: Future Horizons, Inc.

This book is intended to be a sexual education resource for teens on the spectrum, covering topics related to initiating relationships (like personal grooming and self-confidence building), to sexual health, how to initiate sex with a partner, and building relationships.

- ▶ Nichols, S., Moravcik, G. M., & Tetenbaum, S. P. (2009). *Girls growing up on the autism spectrum: What parents and professionals should know about the pre-teen and teenage years*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This is a guide for girls with ASD, highlighting the experiences and challenges they may encounter. It helps families to understand the variety of experiences that girls may face during puberty and when growing up.

- ▶ Packer, A. J. (2004). *The how rude! handbook of friendship and dating manners for teens: Surviving the social scene*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

This book discusses all aspects of social life as it pertains to teens, including such topics as how you make new friends, how to show someone you like them, and how to ask someone out on a date. There is also a chapter on sexual behaviors and health.

- ▶ Ramey, E. M., & Ramey, J. J. (2008). *Autistics guide to dating: A book by autistics for autistics and those who love them or who are in love with them*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

This book offers practical tips on how to overcome deficits in social and communication skills to achieve relationship success. Two teens on the spectrum discuss their own dating experiences and provide advice. Though it can be used as a resource by health professionals, this book uses language that specifically addresses those with ASD and their friends, family, and loved ones.

- ▶ Sicile-Kira, C. (2006). *Adolescents on the autism spectrum: A parent's guide to the cognitive, social, physical and transition needs of teenagers with autism spectrum disorders*. New York, NY: Berkley Publishing Group.

This book provides discussions on all aspects of puberty and growth during the adolescent years. In particular, Chapter 3 offers a variety of scripts as examples that can be used to help start conversations about puberty with your child.

- ▶ Sicile-Kira, C., & Sicile-Kira, J. (2012). *A full life with autism: From learning to forming relationships to achieving independence*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book, written by a mother-son duo, offers answers to a host of difficult questions, including how young adults of different abilities and their parents can navigate adult service resources, cope with various difficulties, build relationships, etc. This is a guide that can help children, with the support of their parents, to find ways to have a full, meaningful life as they reach adulthood.

- ▶ Stork, F. X. (2011). *Marcelo in the real world*. USA: Scholastic, Inc.

This novel features the fictional but compelling story of a teen boy with ASD, featuring a love story and legal drama. The book contains some sexual content and adult themes that may not be appropriate for younger teens.

- ▶ Wrobel, M. (2003). *Taking care of myself: A hygiene, puberty, and personal curriculum for young people with autism*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.

This curriculum was specifically developed for caregivers to address the learning needs of young people with ASD in regard to hygiene, health, growth and development, menstruation, and many other topics related to puberty.

- ▶ Zaks, Z. (2006). *Life and love: Positive strategies for autistic adults*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

This book is written for adults or older teens on the spectrum, as well as their spouses, family members, and friends. The content features information on life and love, including such topics as sensory issues, career and relationship advice, and self-esteem.

RESOURCES

Websites and Online Resources about Puberty, Relationships, and Sexual Education

- ▶ Advocates for Youth:

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>

This particular page arms parents with resources on how to approach the subjects of puberty and sexuality with their pre-pubescent and pubescent children, allowing parents to be sex educators. The website as a whole is also a great general resource for helping youth (ages 14–25) make smart and responsible decisions regarding their reproductive and sexual health.

- ▶ American Psychological Association. Sexual orientation and homosexuality.

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>

This is a great resource for parents and teens to learn more about what sexual orientation and homosexuality is. A list of commonly asked questions and answers are included, as well as resources to learn more about homosexuality.

- ▶ Autism Speaks. Recognizing and preventing abuse:

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/abuse>

This page, specifically for the autism community, tells you how you can recognize and prevent sexual and other types of abuse, as well as resources for families or individuals dealing with abuse.

- ▶ Baxley, D. L., & Zendell, A. (2005). Sexuality for children and adolescents with developmental disabilities: An instructional manual for parents or caregivers of and individuals with developmental disabilities. Retrieved from

<http://www.albany.edu/aging/IDD/documents/parentworkbook.pdf>

This curriculum is designed to help parents of children with developmental disabilities develop the skills to teach their child about sex and sexuality. It is informational and includes workbook activities for parents to complete.

- ▶ Bellini, S. (2009). Making (and keeping) friends: A model for social skills instruction. *The Reporter*, 8(3). Retrieved from

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=488>.

This article offers a general overview of the social challenges of ASD children. In addition, it provides a comprehensive 5-step model on effective strategies to teach social skills to ASD children.

- ▶ Future of Sex Education Initiative:

<http://www.futureofsexeducation.org/>

This site offers a free download of the National Sexuality Education Standards for children and teens in grades kindergarten through 12. These standards may prove useful to parents who wish to communicate with their children about sex and sexuality at home to learn what may be age-appropriate and educational.

- ▶ Go Ask Alice!

<http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/>

By selecting the “Relationships” or “Sexual and Reproductive Health” categories, this website is a good place for older teens to get straightforward, honest advice about these topics.

- ▶ Harmon, A. (2011, December 26). Navigating love and autism. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com

This newspaper article features the story of two young college students with Asperger’s who are dating. The content includes their dating history, social life, relationship problems, and other dating issues experienced by the two teens. To locate this article, go to www.nytimes.com and type, “navigating love and autism” in the search bar.

- ▶ I Wanna Know!

www.iwannaknow.org

This is a resource for teens to get information about sexual health and relationships. There is also information and resources for LGBT youth.

- ▶ KidsHealth®:

<http://kidshealth.org/>

By clicking on either “For Parents” or “For Teens,” this website is a great general resource for parents to learn about reproductive changes in their children and for teens to learn about issues ranging from peer pressure to sexual health.

- ▶ NPR News. (2012, January 18). Learning to love, and be loved, with autism [Radio]. Washington, DC: NPR. Retrieved from

www.npr.org

This radio sound-recording and transcription features an interview with two college students with Asperger’s who are dating each other. The interview references the teens’ recent article in the *New York Times* (see “Harmon, A.” listed under the online resources). To locate this interview, go to www.npr.org and type, “learning to love, and be loved, with autism” in the search bar.

- ▶ Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Tools for parents:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/>

This website is a great general resource to help parents talk to their children about puberty and addresses many of the common concerns parents have about this topic. The “Talking to Kids about Sex and Sexuality” is particularly useful in learning why these conversations are important, how to make them more comfortable, and how to approach the conversation with various age groups.

- ▶ P&G School Programs. Puberty materials for parents:

<http://www.pgschoolprograms.com/parents.php>

This website offers free print material and videos to help parents help their children learn about the fundamentals of puberty. It is a great resource for children as well.

- ▶ Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention:
<http://recapp.etr.org/recapp/>
 This website helps parents, teachers, and educators learn how to reduce sexual risk-taking behaviors in adolescents by providing up-to-date tools and information.

- ▶ Scarleteen:
<http://www.scarleteen.com/>
 This website is for young people to obtain up-to-date information about sexuality, sexual health, and relationships. The site features an SMS service, a live site helpline, resources and information, and an advice column for youth on general sexual health topics.

- ▶ Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States:
<http://www.sexedlibrary.org/index.cfm>
 This website is a comprehensive resource for educators, counselors, and health professionals, and features lesson plans and research on a wide variety of topics from reproductive health to puberty to abstinence to sexual orientation and more. These resources are designed to help professionals and parents to become educated about sexuality to serve as advocates and educators to promote healthy sexual activity among children and teens.

- ▶ Sex, Etc:
www.sexetc.org/
 This website is managed by teens for teens, and provides a slew of information on topics including sexual health, reproduction, birth control, pregnancy, and more.

- ▶ Sexuality and U:
www.sexualityandu.ca
 An initiative of the Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists of Canada, this site provides reliable, up-to-date information and guidance for individuals to develop and maintain a healthy sexuality.

- ▶ Stay Teen:
<http://www.stayteen.org/frontpanel>
 Stay Teen is a site dedicated to helping teens stay informed about relationships, sex, waiting, and contraceptives so they can make informed decisions for themselves and enjoy their teen years.

- ▶ WebMD:
<http://www.webmd.com/default.htm>
 By using search terms such as “puberty,” “contraception,” or “sexually transmitted diseases,” teens can get medically accurate information to maintain a sexual health.

RESOURCES

Videos and DVDs about Puberty, Relationships, and Sexual Education

- ▶ Hingsburger, D. et al. (n.d.). *DVDs*. (Available from Diverse City Press, Inc. Retrieved from <http://diverse-city.com/dvds/>)
Through Diverse City Press, Hingsburger offers several DVDs on topics such as abuse prevention for people with disabilities (“The Whole Truth”), directions for condom use (“Undercover Dick”), female masturbation for women with developmental disabilities (“Finger Tips”), male masturbation (“Hand Made Love”), and maintaining appropriate boundaries (“The Ethics of Touch”).
- ▶ Model Me Kids®. (2011). *Videos for modeling social skills*. (Available from Model Me Kids®, LLC, <http://www.modelmekids.com/>)
This DVD set, designed as a teaching tool for children and teens with ASD, covers a variety of social topics such as self-esteem, peer pressure, choosing friends, how to greet others, and how to show interest when talking to others.
- ▶ Stanfield, J. (n.d.). *The Stanfield library*. (Available from the James Stanfield Company, Inc., <http://www.stanfield.com/>)
The Stanfield Company is a specialist in special education. They offer over 60 research-based programs for kids from childhood to adulthood. There are videos about boundaries and intimacy, hygiene and grooming, and dating and personal relationships.
- ▶ Venditti, J. (Director). (2007). *Billy the kid* [Motion picture]. USA: Eight Films.
This documentary film is a coming-of-age story of a young teenage boy with ASD who struggles in his social life, especially with dating and relationships.

RESOURCES

Resources about Decision Making and Values

Books

- ▶ Covey, S. (2006). *The 6 most important decisions you'll ever make: A guide for teens*. New York, NY: FranklinCovey, Co.

Based on experiences from real teens, this book is a good resource for assisting children with making decisions on a wide variety of topics, from relationships, to academics, and more. An audiobook version is also available.

- ▶ Deranja, M. N. (2004). *For goodness sake: Supporting children and teens in discovering life's higher values*. Nevada City, CA: Crystal Clarity Publishers.

This book is for parents and educators to encourage children and teens to develop their own life-affirming values that will help them achieve success in various areas of their life and to be happy and emotionally mature.

- ▶ Gowen, K. L. (2003). *Making sexual decisions: The ultimate teen guide (it happened to me)*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

This book was developed as a resource for teens to learn about sexuality and the associated decisions that they may encounter so they are informed enough to make good decisions independently.

- ▶ Housman, B. (2009). *Engaging your teen's world: Become a culturally savvy parent*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

This book is for parents who want to embrace culture and become a larger influence in their child's life by guiding them through their teenage years without trying to dampen their opinions or individuality.

- ▶ Rosemond, J. (2001). *Teen-proofing fostering responsible decision making in your teenager*. Kansas City, MS: Andrews McMeel Publishing.

This book is based on the premise of developing a good relationship with your teen as a means to maintain a positive, open communication pattern. With this strong foundation, you will be able to help promote making good decisions, especially as it relates to relationships and sexual development.

Websites

- ▶ Parents Magazine Online. (n.d.). Teaching responsibility and values. Retrieved from www.parents.com/kids/responsibility/values/

This website offers several articles about how to teach your teen or child about family values and responsibility.

- ▶ The Children’s Trust. (2012). Teaching your kids good values. Retrieved from www.thechildrenstrust.org/spending-quality-time-with-your-family/779

This website suggests useful, easy-to-follow parenting tips to promote healthy children and families. There are also pages about parenting teens including information about developing a responsible teen and topics related to dating and sex.

- ▶ Love to Know Family. (2012). Examples of family values. Retrieved from <http://family.lovetoknow.com/about-family-values/examples-family-values>

This website offers information and advice about core issues falling under the realm of family values and transcending culture and age.

- ▶ Welker, E. (2010). Decision making/problem solving with teens. Retrieved from <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/5301.pdf>

This resource serves as a guide for parents to help their teens learn and develop their decision-making skills. This resource is based on the premise of taking a moment to consider options and making an informed decision.

RESOURCES

ASD Specific Organizations and Websites

- ▶ Autism and Puberty WebShare:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23ocO4BVtN4>
This video webinar is presented by Melissa Dubie, an educational consultant with the Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA). The webinar series is geared toward parents and caregivers of autistic individuals, and focuses on the topic of puberty.

- ▶ AutismOnline:
<http://www.autisonline.org/Default.aspx>
This one-of-a-kind website provides research-based resources, products, and information on ASD across the lifespan and is designed for use by individuals, family members, caregivers, professionals, paraprofessionals, and advocates.

- ▶ Autism Society of America:
<http://www.autism-society.org/>
This website is comprehensive, featuring information, news, research, and resources on autism, and is designed for use by individuals, family members, professionals, and advocates.

- ▶ Autism Speaks®:
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/>
This website for parents of youth with autism and other autism spectrum disorders features the latest in ASD news and research, family services, blog posts, resources, information, and more.

- ▶ Organization for Autism Research:
<http://www.researchautism.org/>
This website focuses on applied research and features information, resources, research news, research opportunities, and more for families, professionals, and providers.

- ▶ The National Autistic Society:
<http://www.autism.org.uk/>
This website has a lot of great resources for those living with autism and working with people with autism. Such information includes helping ASD children improve their social skills and form positive relationships, as well as giving caregivers the tools to encourage children with ASD to interact with peers.

- ▶ Wrong Planet:
<http://www.wrongplanet.net/>
This website is designed for individuals and parents of individuals with autism, Asperger's, and other related disorders. The site features a discussion forum, an article section, a blog, and a chat room. Several posts on the site deal with sexuality.



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