Recommendations for Implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Students With Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexuality education is a critical component of any comprehensive education plan for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). When determining the curriculum and interventions used to teach, a collaborative team of caretakers and educators should consider use of current state and national standards when determining the scope and sequence in order to promote a healthy knowledge

of sexuality while ensuring use of effective models with use of evidence-based interventions to teach sexuality education. In some cases, inappropriate sexual behaviors must be addressed through use of behavior analytic assessments in order to effectively address problem behavior while teaching healthy and appropriate sexual behavior. Additionally, it will be important for the collaborative team to address any risks and ramifications of not fully addressing sexuality education with individuals with IDD. Part of that process will be to ensure all caretakers responsible for teaching the curriculum are fully trained and familiar with all components of the curriculum as well as addressing any cultural norms or areas of discomfort that might hinder effective implementation of the teaching.

IMPORTANCE OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

MacKenzie (2008) explored stereotypes and myths surrounding sexuality of individuals with ASD and recommended that sexuality education for this population of students can combat such misconceptions. Such stereotypes included beliefs that persons with ASD may be hypo- or hypersexual, asexual, "child-like and dependent, and/or uninterested in sex," and that sexual expression is a problem requiring remediation (MacKenzie, 2018, p. 110). These unfortunately common stereotypes function as barriers to effective sexuality education. In order to best serve students with ASD and other IDDs, teachers and families should perceive them as sexual beings like all other humans. It is important that professionals recognize sexuality as critical for attaining a positive and meaningful quality of life and that they ensure the provision of an individualized sexuality education.

Sexuality education is also important for promoting the inclusion, acceptance, understanding, and safety of individuals with ASD and other IDDs. According to Stein et al. (2017)[1], individuals with IDD are up to 83% more likely to experience sexual abuse than individuals without disabilities (Johnson & Sigler, 2000, as cited in Stein et al., 2017). Sexually active adults who can provide sexual consent should be provided an education that helps prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (Aderemi, 2013; Hanass-Hancock, Chappell, Johns, & Nene, 2018). Finally, individuals with IDDs and ASD are more likely than their neurotypical peers to be incarcerated for sexually based offenses, in part due to lack of effective sexuality education (Mogavero, 2016). Mogavero (2016) suggested criminal sexual offenses committed by individuals with ASD are most often committed without malice, which is to say they may be a manifestation of the person's disability and attributed to a lack of proper sexuality education.

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