



Healthy Boundaries and Consent

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What's ahead

- Guiding principles; What are boundaries?
- Public versus private
- Safe and unsafe touch
- Staying safe key messages
- Managing masturbation
- Talking about intimacy
- What is sex?
- Consent



**Talking About Sexuality
in Canadian Communities:
A Workshop for Parents and Service Providers of
Children and Youth with Intellectual Disabilities**



Background

We are offering this training because:

In a 2014 needs assessment of Calgary **parents** of children and youth with intellectual disabilities (ID), 100% said they need more information about sexuality and relationships. One parent said,

“It’s important to tell the children about the changes that are taking place in their body and it’s important that parents and staff are aware of how to make the children understand...”

Background

We are offering this training because:

In a 2015 needs assessment of Calgary **service providers** (n=60) working with children and youth with ID, service providers identified the need for more information on the following topics:

- Personal boundaries (90%)
- Male puberty and sexual development (85%)
- Female puberty and sexual development (78%)
- Dating relationships (70%)
- Hygiene and self-care (68%)
- Friendships (67%)
- Safer sex and condom use (42%)
- Reproduction and birth (42%)
- Sexually transmitted infections (38%)
- Contraception and birth control (37%)

Objectives

The objectives of this workshop are:

- To increase knowledge regarding:
 - Puberty
 - Hygiene and self-care
 - Personal boundaries
 - Healthy and unhealthy relationships in the context of friendships
 - Healthy and unhealthy relationships in the context of dating relationships
 - Sexually transmitted infections
 - Safer sex including contraceptive methods and condoms
 - Community sexual health services

Objectives

- To improve **attitudes** in relation to sexuality and ID.
- To increase **comfort** to address sexuality with youth.
- To increase **confidence** to address sexuality with youth.
- To increase feelings of **social support**.
- To provide **tools and resources** whereby parents and service providers can use the knowledge gained from the training program.

Guiding principles

Children and young adults on the autism spectrum should:

- know names or the names for referring to their genitalia
- have some concept of privacy (their own and of others)
- know which things not to do in public that are acceptable in private
- know that no one else is allowed to touch their private parts, except for a specific reason
- know whom you can kiss, hug, and whom you greet in some other way

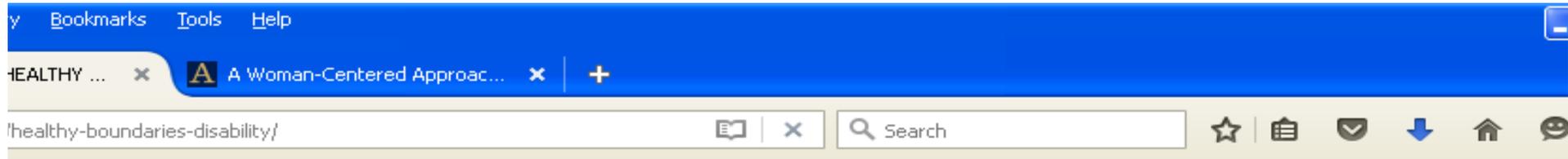
(American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Children with Disabilities, 1996)

What are boundaries?

Children and youth who understand healthy boundaries are more likely to develop skills for self-control and individual responsibility. This in turn will help them show respect for others and develop personal safety rules. Everyone deserves respect and to feel safe.

Parents are often more concerned about the risks of abuse when their children and youth have disabilities.

Research suggests that youth with disabilities, both physical and intellectual, are more likely to be abused and exploited (Davis, 2011; PHAC, 2013). **The good news is that talking and teaching about healthy touch and boundaries can reduce this risk considerably.**

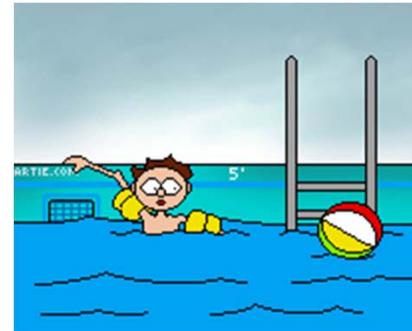


AMREET'S STORY...

Amreet is 11 years old and uses limited verbal communication. Recently he has been very affectionate towards his younger siblings and classmates wanting to hug, hold hands, and kiss. Sometimes it's welcome but more often than not, he gets the cold shoulder. His 8 year old sister gets embarrassed when they are at school and has told her parents that other students laugh at Amreet. As Amreet is turned away by the children at school he is becoming more upset and aggressive and is facing many time-outs at home and school.

Public versus private

Public means more than one person; something that can be shared with other people.



Identify public places with youth.



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Public versus private

Private means not for sharing, such as keeping personal details private or private body parts covered.



Identify places where youth can be private.



Public versus private

Click on the link below to check, **“IS IT PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?”**

Think about how you would use this information with your child or youth?

<http://www.tascc.ca/healthy-boundaries-disability/>

Good to know

There are exceptions to some of the rules about public and private when considering community helpers such as doctors, therapists, police officers and fire fighters.

Although strangers, these people may need to know personal information and may come into personal space that involves touch but only to do their job. These touches may seem scary or hurtful (e.g., giving a needle), but they are necessary to keep youth healthy.

Discussion question

Describe some of the challenges/issues/concerns about boundaries and safety that you think children and youth with intellectual disabilities may experience.

Rules of touch

- Touch and personal space are very personal.
- Learning who it is appropriate to touch is a very important lesson and will be different for family versus providers.
- Good touch helps us feel safe.
- Unsafe touch is anything that makes us feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, angry or upset.
- Rules about touch can be helpful (e.g., we don't hug our teachers, we can say no to a hug from uncle).

What is safe touch?

Good touch:

- Hugs (may need to ask)
- High five
- Kiss on the cheek
- Holding hands
- Touch with rules for sports and activities

Unsafe touch:

- Hitting, kicking, slapping, biting, poking
- Touch to “swimsuit area” without a reason such as personal care
- Giving a wedgie

Modelling safe touch

Parents and families: How are you modelling touch in your family? If you set rules for one child but not the other, it can be confusing. If one sibling is able to refuse a hug others in the family should be able too.

Providers: How are you modelling touch with other staff and colleagues? Children and youth will get mixed messages if you have a rule about only handshakes and high fives, yet they catch you hugging each other. Set boundaries and be sure to show how you follow them.

Staying safe key messages

When touch is **inappropriate** or **unsafe**, teach these rules:

- Your body is yours, your body is private.
- No-one should ask to look at your private parts, ask you to look at their private parts, or show you photos of private parts (e.g., on a computer).
- Secrets about touching should never be kept; someone may try to bribe, trick, force or embarrass you into touching. This is never OK.

Staying safe key messages

- Say NO, STOP or I DON'T LIKE THAT either in a loud voice or with body language (e.g., put hands up in front as if to send someone away). Practice this often and find a way for the child or youth to say or show no.
- Move away from the situation (e.g., if someone is pushing in the hallway, move away).
- Tell an adult you trust and keep on telling until an adult asks how they can help. Talk about who the child or youth can trust as a safe adult.

Masturbation

The topic of masturbation can be embarrassing to talk about, but setting rules and dealing with concerns is very important.

Some things to talk about when discussing masturbation include:

- Masturbation is when someone touches their private parts to make them feel good.
- Masturbation is normal. Some people choose to do it and others choose not to.

Masturbation

- Masturbation is not harmful unless it interferes with being involved with daily activities (e.g., youth misses school to stay home to masturbate).
- Masturbation is OK if it is done in private (e.g., alone in the bathroom or bedroom at home with the door closed). Be sure to identify the private places at home. Teach that even when alone in the family room, that space is not private. It may help to set some guidelines about how to clean up after.

Masturbation

Some children and youth who **masturbate** may find it difficult to stop and this could lead to the behaviour being carried out in inappropriate places. It may become a habit and can also be used as a way to soothe or relieve anxiety. Families and providers will need to work closely together to support the child or youth to masturbate when it is appropriate. Trying to stop a child or youth completely is very difficult and may lead to aggressive behaviours.

Building friendships

- Healthy friendships play an important role as children grow into teens and strive for more independence.
- Friendships can teach important life skills such as learning to share, compromise and set boundaries.
- Learning to make friends and when to end a friendship are life skills that can build as a child moves into adulthood where they may have more intimate relationships.

Peers and friends

- **Friends** usually have something in common, such as attending the same school or being similar in age.
- It is important to help children and youth learn that **their teachers, caregivers, and even family members are not friends**. These people may be special to them but they play a different role in their world. There will probably be a difference in age but most importantly **there is a difference in power and responsibility**.

Building skills – questions to ask

- How do you know if a person wants to be your friend? Can you tell if someone does not want to be your friend?
- How can you ask a friend to spend time with you? What types of things can you do together?
- How do you know if this is a good friendship? How do you want to be treated?
- What can you do and say if a friend starts to be unkind and the relationship is not healthy?

Practice makes perfect!

Some children and youth will benefit from **practicing** what they need to say and do when making friends.

Role playing a situation by acting it out can be fun. Choose a character and then have the child or youth respond as if you were that character (e.g., you play the role of a person your child would like to be friends with). They can also write it down to practice.

Connecting online – check-in

- Using social media and spending time online is a typical daily activity for many children and youth. It helps them stay connected and is a valuable life skill.
- It is important to know that the online world is very public and youth can sometimes share information that is private without realizing the dangers.
- Boundaries and limits about who they can online chat and message with can help.
- Personal information about family and home, including photos, should only be shared with permission from parents and family members.

CIRCLES

The Circles® Program is used to teach rules of social boundaries focusing on social distance and building relationships.

The goal is to “see” social boundaries and levels of intimacy in terms of **TOUCH**, **TALK** and **TRUST**.

Talking about intimacy

Talking about sexuality with children and youth can be uncomfortable.

Parents and service providers play an important role in helping them make healthy choices about sexuality.

Avoiding these discussions will not stop them from dating or being involved in an intimate relationship. Youth with disabilities report similar levels of sexual activity as those without disabilities and some studies suggest higher rates (SIECCAN, 2013).



*"I finally found out what sex is ...
my sister plays one in the school band."*

What is sex?

Sex can mean different things to different people. **Do not assume that youth know what sex is.**

- Some may think that sex is kissing or when two people roll around on the bed.
- Sexual activities can range from kissing and touching to intercourse.
- Not having a clear understanding of what sex involves can put youth at risk as they may take part in activities without knowing the consequences.

Youth need to know about:

- The **consequences of sexual** activity including **pregnancy** and **sexually transmitted infections** (STIs).
- How to give and get **consent** to take part in sexual activity.
- How **to talk about safer sex** with a partner including negotiating use of condoms.
- **Where to go for information** about birth control and STIs.

What is consent?

Consent is:

- Needed for every sexual activity, every time.
- Understanding what is being consented to.
- Asking partners if they understand what they are saying yes to.
- Checking in with the partner and accepting that either partner can change their mind at any time.

People cannot give consent if they are:

- High or drunk.
- Forced, threatened, bribed, intimidated or offered rewards to do something sexual.

Consent and the law

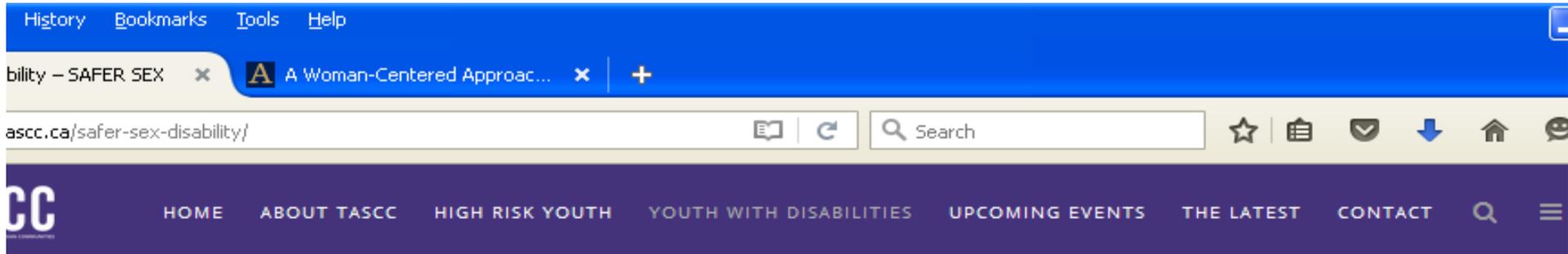
The age of consent to sexual activity in Canada is 16 except if the:

- Other person is in a position of authority (e.g., teacher, coach, employer).
- Sexual activity is exploitative (e.g., pornography, prostitution, trading sex for safety).

Children under the age of 12 cannot give consent. Consent is needed for all sexual activity ranging from kissing and touching to intercourse. **Sex without consent is sexual assault.**

For youth with disabilities.....

- Every sexual activity should be consensual.
- Consent means both people give and get permission to take part in the sexual activity.
- Consent is not just verbal; body language can show someone that sex is unwanted (e.g., pushing someone away).
- Everyone has the right to change their mind at any time.
- **SAY NO, GET AWAY, TELL SOMEONE!**



SARAH & JOSH'S STORY...

Sarah and Josh met two years ago volunteering at Stampede. What started as friends turned into a dating relationship that they both had fun with. Recently Sarah's group home coordinator Vic had a call from Josh's parents asking if he could talk to the couple about safer sex. Josh told his parents that he loves Sarah and is ready to take the relationship to the next level. His parents are really happy that he had shared this with them and although they are worried they know that at age 23 Josh wants to make his own choices. Vic feels comfortable talking about the topic with the couple, but where can he get the most up to date information and advice about birth control and STIs?

DATING RELATIONSHIP BECOMES SERIOUS, IT IS NOT THAT YOUTH HAVE THE SKILLS AND



References

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Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). (2013). Questions & Answers: Sexual health education for youth with physical disabilities. Retrieved from http://librarypdf.catie.ca/pdf/ATI-20000s/26289_B_ENG.pdf