

Inappropriate (sexual) behaviour and the child with Asperger Syndrome and similar conditions

Children and young people with Asperger Syndrome and similar conditions are not always aware that their behaviour is inappropriate. This can become a distressing issue for parents when their son or daughter begins to exhibit what parents often see as 'disturbing tendencies', or overtly sexual behaviour.

What you see as promiscuous, forward, sexual behaviour, your son or daughter may be copying because they have seen others do the same, and they think it is 'good-friend' behaviour.

Ask your child: What do you want to happen if you do that? Did you see someone else do it? These questions may give you a clue as to what your child was really trying to achieve by his behaviour.

It is wise to stop any and all inappropriate behaviour whenever it occurs. In a calm, steady voice tell your child that whatever he did was inappropriate – "now you are 12 you are too grown up to do that" or something similar. It is essential to suggest what they can do instead, for example the shoulder-to-shoulder hug instead of the bear-hug, the count-to-three kiss on the cheek.

Keep in mind what you want your child to do when he is 20 - and start training NOW.

- **Tell** your child whenever he does something inappropriate **each time** it occurs
- **Show** him what is inappropriate about it: "I did not like you doing that to ... This is what was inappropriate" or "I did not feel comfortable when you ..." and physically demonstrate what was wrong - the arm- or breast-stroking, the too tight a cuddle, etc
- **Explain** that when people grow up and become adult, there are certain rules we have to keep to make life easier and safer for everyone, including him. Here are some:
 - when dressing and undressing we should do it in the privacy of our bedroom, bathroom or changing room with the door closed, and we don't come out until we have finished changing clothes
 - when we kiss someone hello or goodbye we do so on the cheek, with mouth closed
 - when we kiss someone hello or goodbye we do it for a count of three
 - boys who are grown up should shake hands with an adult person who is not a close member of his family - not kiss or hug
 - when listening to or talking with people, we sit next to them, not on their laps
 - when talking with or listening to a younger child, they sit next to us, not on our laps
 - if we want to give a young child a hug, we give a 'shoulder-to-shoulder' hug, not full-body bear-hug

- now we are grown up, we sleep in our own bedroom, in our own bed, by ourselves
- some subjects are very private, and are only for talking about in the right place, at the right time and with the right person. For example at school in PSHE lessons when the teacher asks you.
- **Teach** your child 'stranger-danger' - if someone they do not know does or tries to do something to them which they do not like or they feel uncomfortable with, tell them
 - to say **NO**, loudly and firmly
 - to have a serious expression on their face
 - to put out their hand to keep the person away
 - to run away if the person persists
- they must tell someone they trust - their mother, father, teacher - if something they did not like has happened or they had to stop it happening.
- If an adult who is not a close family member wants to hug/cuddle/kiss, tell your child that this is not appropriate, except in some circumstances: such as a teacher offering praise or congratulations (passing exam, or other important test), or team-mates (scoring a goal, winning match, etc)
- Even a very young child should be aware of what is and is not acceptable. He too can learn to greet adults with a hand-shake, to walk holding hands or with arms linked rather than clinging to a parent/friend of the opposite sex. He must learn 'stranger-danger' signs and how to say **NO** loudly.

Remember

Whatever you say or do must be consistent - do not give mixed or confusing messages.

Remember

Always praise appropriate behaviour every time it happens as children / young adults with Asperger Syndrome will not remember from one time to the next what they should do unless reminded constantly during their learning period. If you have Aspergers you do not always know what you know.

Remember

Good teaching in appropriate social skills from a very early age will pay dividends later.

Some Community Health Nurses have expertise in supporting parents and children on sexual matters - they can be contacted via the family GP.

Remember

Information needs to be -

- Simple
- Factual
- Direct
- Use role-play, video and other appropriate resources.

Teach in -

- Small groups
- Individually focussed
- Staff should be trained
- Each session should be thoroughly planned.

Books and Videos:

The Family Planning Association has three books specifically for children with learning disabilities: Talking Together.... About Growing Up. A workbook for parents of children with learning disabilities £12.99, Talking together about sex and relationships: A practical resource for schools and parents working with young people with learning disabilities £14.99 and Talking Together about Contraception: A practical resource for staff and parents working with young people with learning difficulties £13.99.

Tel: 0845 1228 600

Web: www.fpa.org.uk or

Email: fpadirect@fpa.org.uk.

Specifically for young people with AS/special needs are the **Life Support Productions** DVD's Kylie's Private World (for females) £44.85, Jason's Private World (for males) £44.85 and You, Your Body and Sex £68.52 (a subtitled DVD featuring content from Kylie and Jason DVDs with additional material). They are used at appropriate Cambian schools. You may get a discount for bulk orders. They can be ordered at:

Tel: 020 7723 7520 or online at

Web: www.lifesupportproductions.co.uk.

Note: The OAASIS Information Sheets use 'he'/'his'/'him' rather than the cumbersome 'he / she'/'his / her'/'him / her'. No sexism is intended. The sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the correct version.

Sense - Sex and Relationships CD-ROM is an interactive CD Rom produced by Sense Educational CDs and the National Children's Bureau with advice and support from young people, parents/carers, teachers and health professionals. Has a Teachers' Support Manual and is suitable for ages 12-16 but can be used by parents too. Priced £21.99 for home use and £75.00 for school use. Used successfully in one of our Asperger schools. Available from

Web: www.sensecds.com

Tel: 01375 484546

Growing Up, Sex and Relationships booklets by Contact a Family are comprehensive booklets written in a clear, concise manner and are relevant for young people with learning difficulties. There are three different booklets for parents, teachers and young people themselves (also available in audio). The booklets are available from their helpline 0808 808 3555, or order for £1.50 each or download for free from their website www.cafamily.org.uk.

Growing and Learning is a set of three books and picture cards written by Jane Keeling a nurse, mum of an autistic child and a sexual health educator, to support parents and carers. The three packs cover subjects from puberty to periods and masturbation/wet dreams and are designed to support parents/carers of young people with learning difficulties including youngsters with profound communication difficulties. Prices range from £20-25 and they can be ordered from website: www.growingandlearning.co.uk.

The National Autistic Society website has a downloadable section entitled 'Sex education and children and young people with an ASD' which explains in matter of fact terms what topics to consider and how you should discuss them. You can find it at:

<http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1071&a=6001>

The NSPCC has produced a handy little booklet for children / teenagers entitled Worried? Need to talk? covering fear of violence, arguments, abuse, bullying, alcohol, drugs, sex and sexuality, racism and other topics. Available for a small charge from **0207 825 2775** or **Email:** info@nspcc.org.uk. There is also a linked website www.worriedneed2talk.org.uk.

Me-and-Us Ltd produce materials to help teachers/educators in sex and relationships education for people with learning disabilities. Some may be suitable for parents to use too. Available from

Web: www.me-and-us.co.uk or

Tel: 01539 621777

Making Sense of Sex: A Forthright Guide to Puberty, Sex and Relationships for People with Asperger's Syndrome, a book by Sarah Attwood, addresses just about all the issues relating to sexuality for people with AS, including helpful diagrams, explanations and practical advice. It is available from www.jkp.com priced £12.99.



www.cambianeducation.com

Cambian is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people with Autism, Asperger Syndrome and other associated complex needs in the United Kingdom. Cambian is trusted by hundreds of parents and over 70 Local Education Authorities

OAASIS publications

- SEN Information Sheets
- First Guide to ...
- Cards explaining 9 learning disabilities
- Legal advice Information Sheets
- SEN 'How to' guides

All OAASIS publications can be downloaded from www.oaasis.co.uk