

# Autism Spectrum Disorder NETWORKNEWS



Issue: 50

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## ASD & Sexuality



Congratulations to Ilana Loggia, Consultant for Autism, who gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Lila on February 8th, 2021. Mom and dad are overjoyed and doing well!

The ASD team is pleased to announce a **new addition** to the team:

Eithne Sheeran is helping support our school teams as a consultant for Autism. She comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Welcome  
aboard!

### Five Dimensions of Sexuality By Cynthia Labrecque Chauny, Sexologist

When we talk about youth with special needs, such as ASD, we rarely think about their sexuality. In fact, a common myth surrounding people with ASD is that they have no sex life. This is completely untrue and such a belief often denies them the information they need about sexuality! Like neurotypicals, people with ASD have sexual needs.

It is with the help of an adapted sex education approach that they are given the tools they need to develop their sexuality positively in all its dimensions.

#### What are the 5 dimensions of sexuality?

Note: these dimensions are interrelated.

1 The **biological** dimension includes everything related to the body along with sexual and reproductive health (e.g., physiological and physical changes, reproduction, body appreciation, Sexually Transmitted and Blood Born Infections (STBBI) and pregnancy, etc.). This dimension is particularly important for youth because of the impact of puberty, a period that can be anxiety provoking, especially when there's a lack of information available to address all their questions and concerns.

2 The **psychoaffective** dimension refers to the expression of emotions and desires, assertiveness, and the development of imagination and intimacy. The social aspect of this dimension is especially significant for students in primary and secondary schools who feel the need to expand their friendship circles and explore different relationships, which, in turn, contributes to the consolidation of their identity.

3 The **moral** dimension refers to the values, beliefs, and principles that shape an individual's attitudes and behaviour with regard to their sexuality.



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The **interpersonal** dimension addresses an individual's relationships with others. Through their school years, students' interpersonal circles broaden and become more complex. Consequently, youth have to learn the skills and competencies necessary to build, maintain and repair relationships (e.g. communication, problem-solving skills, empathy, perspective-taking, respect, etc.).

5

The **socio-cultural** dimension refers to the social environment (e.g., family values, cultural practices and norms, legal framework, stereotypes, models and messages presented in the media, etc.) that influences the perception of sexuality and of oneself, which, in turn, shape the way sexuality is expressed and experienced.

Given the multiple dimensions of sexuality it is easy to see that education in this area is essential for all. Sexuality education promotes a comprehensive and positive vision of sexuality by empowering students with the right knowledge and providing them with the tools needed to experience healthy psycho-sexual development. However, individuals with ASD can have unique needs regarding sexuality education. For example, they need special attention to certain aspects of socialization, such as appropriate sexual behaviour in public vs. private spaces, understanding what consent is, online safety guidelines, and the *Social Circle*® (<https://stanfield.com/>). By adapting sexuality education, we can help students with ASD acquire the knowledge and the skills needed to avoid possible problematic situations, but more importantly, to better understand and express their sexual interests and desires.



Behavior  
**TIP**

### My Feelings Timeline

Some students with ASD may have difficulty controlling impulses, delaying gratification, and the expression of sexual desires. This may lead towards students engaging in behaviours that may be inappropriate or that may inadvertently cause them to get into trouble. Direct teaching of the unwritten rules of social interaction and relationships can be helpful in preventing potentially problematic situations, particularly in regards to more intimate acts.

#### To teach age appropriate expression of feelings and actions, try this:

Use a number line to indicate the student's current age all the way to adulthood. For a more concrete visual representation, create the number line to scale making the current age smaller and the number line increasing in size as the age increases. The number line can also be represented in terms of age categories (9 - 11 years old, 12-15 years old, 16-21 years old, etc).

Teach the student that it is ok to have feelings about other people but that it is not always okay to act on those feelings. Create social scenarios that you want to teach the student about. Write each of these scenarios on a separate clothespin. This can include items such as , "Asking someone to go on a date, saying 'I love you' to a peer, asking a student to be your boy/girlfriend, or kissing someone on the lips, etc. Have the student place the clothespin on the number line corresponding to the age at which that behaviour is appropriate (see image below).

This activity helps the student to see that they cannot always act on their desires because this can cause the other person to feel scared or uncomfortable. The number line concretely helps a student to recognize that certain behaviours are reserved for certain age categories. The importance of asking for consent should also be explicitly addressed for each social scenario.

### My feelings Timeline



# TRY THIS

## Kids in the Know

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has designed an interactive safety education program called *Kids in the Know*. This program is targeted for students from Kindergarten to Grade 9. It focuses on many very relevant issues such as:

- personal safety strategies in the community,
- reducing victimization in online platforms such as the internet and social media,
- building resiliency skills including self-awareness, problem-solving, and assertiveness,
- encouraging children to report concerning experiences and behaviours,
- enhancing communication between children and their parents teachers about worrisome behaviours.

There is a spiral-bound manual for each grade level that includes step-by-step lesson plans with a variety of engaging and interactive activities. This evidenced-based program is being used by thousands of schools across Canada. Several of the lessons are relevant for the Ethics and Religious Culture curriculum in our elementary schools. This program might also be a pertinent resource for the social skills programming and social emotional learning activities animated by special education technicians in elementary and high schools. The following link provides a detailed overview of the program:

[https://www.kidsintheknow.ca/pdfs/KIK\\_ProgramOverview\\_en.pdf](https://www.kidsintheknow.ca/pdfs/KIK_ProgramOverview_en.pdf)

The Centre for Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder has a copy of the K-8 program in French and in English that can be signed out through the resource library. If you are interested in borrowing a copy of the program, please contact Natalie Mongeau at [nmongeau@lbpsb.qc.ca](mailto:nmongeau@lbpsb.qc.ca)





Click here for a social script on Public vs. Private



## PRIVATE OR PUBLIC?

A social narrative adapted from  
<https://janitron.org/resources/self-public-and-private-places/>

Central Carolina



# WEBSITE REVIEW:

## Sex Ed for Self-Advocates, hosted by the Organization for Autism Research

*Sex Ed for Self-Advocates* is an easy-to-navigate website that covers sex education topics such as public vs. private behaviour, consent, puberty, and online safety. Each topic includes video, audio, written and visual content to explain the subject and provide examples. Following each content module is a short quiz to test users on their understanding of the material. Although the website is intended for older children on the autism spectrum, the lessons can easily be adapted for use by parents of children who may not be able to navigate the website on their own. A user guide for parents is available, as well as a list of additional resources.

<https://researchautism.org/sex-ed-guide/>

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Read  
ALL  
about it!

## What's Happening to Tom? & What's Happening to Ellie? by Kate E. Reynolds

These two simple resources help parents and caregivers teach youth girls and boys about puberty. It covers all the changes that they will experience, both emotional such as new feelings as well as physical. These fully illustrated positive and entertaining books provide the perfect opportunity to talk about puberty with individuals with autism or special needs in a concrete way. When using these books, it is important to take into account the developmental age of the individuals you are supporting to make sure these books are appropriate to use.