The Illusion of Sexual Safety: Perceptions vs. Reality

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Presenter
Beverly Frantz, PhD
Institute on Disabilities, Temple University

VISION
A society where all people are valued and respected, and where all people have the knowledge, opportunity and power to improve their lives and the lives of others.

MISSION
The Institute on Disabilities leads by example, creating connections and promoting networks within and among communities so that people with disabilities are recognized as integral to the fabric of community life.
The Fluidity of Sexuality
Begin with the End in Mind

This presentation is about US

Our experiences, whether personal or professional
Our anxieties, discomfort, fears
Our perceptions that we don’t know how, or when to raise the subject
Our fear of not being heard or understood
Our fear of opening “a box” that can’t be closed
Our concerns about what other people will think – our immediate and/or extended family members, friends, teachers, staff, medical personnel, clergy/faith leaders, etc.
Sexuality

Sexuality is an integral part of the personality of everyone: man, woman, and child; it is a basic need and aspect of being human that cannot be separated from other aspects of life. World Health Organization

While not all individuals choose to be sexually active, all individuals are sexual being.

Expressions of sexuality include, but are limited to, socialization, activities of friendships, boundaries in relationships, body awareness, self-image, human connectedness, decision making, and personal code of conduct. American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
• What sells better than sex? FEAR
• If we come from a fear perspective when talking about sexuality, social etiquette, etc., we can’t become empowered.
• Empowerment is the giving or delegation of power/authority, it is giving permission. It is taking a balanced approach to risky situations.
• Coming from a pro-active strategy perspective builds confidence, promotes empowerment and conversations with safe people, and may be less likely to connect with “friends” through social media.
• Less likely to be come involved in “sextortion,” revenge porn, or child pornography.

Key Issues:
• Inappropriate touching
• Masturbation/self-pleasuring
• Disrobing
• Inappropriate sexual language
• Social/sexual nuances
Social/Sexual Perceptions and Consequences: Who Decides?

- Smirk and a smile
- Hug and hold
- Pat and slap
- Crush and stalking
- Appropriate and Inappropriate behavior
- Inappropriate behavior and criminal behavior

The Unexpected Consequences of SOCIAL/SEXUAL NUANCES
Awareness…Decisions…Consequences

Public or Private?
Abstract or Concrete?
Following the Rules

Concrete vs. Abstract Thinking
Common Misunderstanding/Misconceptions

- When a social/professional courtesy is misinterpreted as a romantic overture.
- The “accidentally” bumping into someone could be misconstrued as stalking.
- Misread social cues on the internet – Facebook, chat rooms, Instagram, etc. People may become stuck and/or passively exploited.
- People who are sensory challenged don’t want sex.
- Social boundaries are not always the same as physical or sexual boundaries.

Building Bridges and Supports for Life Long Success: IEP and ISP
Individualized Education and Support Plans

• Need to be individualized
• Is not stagnant, new objectives can be added at any time
• Require a great deal of communication and collaboration – especially around social/sexual goals
• Typically, March through June is the “season” for updating IEPs – although, meeting can be held any time

IEP/ISP: Healthy Social Relationships

Generally, IEP/ISP goals place the responsibility on the student/person to successfully complete a goal. However, it is the teacher/staff responsibility to provide an opportunity and positive attitude for the student to succeed.

Socialization is highly relevant to every student’s/person’s success, whether - they have disability or do not have a disability.
Addressing “Friendships” in IEPs and ISPs

- How is a “friendship” defined?
- Who gets to define/label a “friendship?”
- Double edge behaviors
  - Hugs
  - High fives
  - Fist bumps
  - Holding hands
- Is “friend” an euphemism for:
  - A buddy, classmate, co-worker, bus driver, teacher, support aide, mail carrier, etc.?
  - Gentle persuasion, not so gentle persuasion
  - Coercion, manipulation
  - An acquaintance

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Safety Plans
Balancing Safety, Risk, and Convenience

• You can always find something that will protect your assumptions and biases;
• With awareness you have choices;
• Bullying thrives in silence – Be an active bystander;
• Develop safety plans and code words both for in-person and on-line;
  • Person # 1: I’m going to the doctor (message – I need help)
  • Person # 2: Glad you were able to get an appointment (message – help is on the way)
• Plan around potential risks – ask the person what he/she thinks the risks are;
• Check Facebook privacy setting – often;
• It’s about creating an ongoing conversation.

The Confusing Evolution of Friendship

Diagram showing the evolution from friendly to friendship.
Friendly Does Not Always Make a Friendship
Adapted from Michelle Garcia’s Social Thinking Worksheets for Tweens and Teens

- Close Friendship
- Bonded Friendship
- Evolving Friendship
- Possible Friendship
- Acquaintance
- Friendly Greeting

Addressing Socialization Goals in IEPs

________ should be encouraged to participate in all activities with the right to decline at his/her discretion. Appropriate supports should be provided to the student for their successful participation.

What about risky behaviors, like playing on the Monkey Bars?

Other suggestions:

_______ should ambulate independently whenever possible to increase self-esteem and avoid dependence on peers;

Teacher/support staff will help _______ socialize by asking him/her to use his/her academic/social/personal skills to help students who are struggling with any issues.
Good Decisions: A Collaborative Approach

Making good decisions involve:

1. Gathering accurate information
2. Thinking about the possible consequences
3. Weighing the Pro’s & Con’s
   (with family members, friends, teachers, school nurse, others)
4. Choosing a path that they are comfortable with
   (understanding the power of peer and family values/pressures)
5. Taking responsibility for their actions

THANK YOU
Contact Information

Beverly L. Frantz, PhD
Institute on Disabilities
Temple University
1755 N. 13th Street, Suite 411S
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Direct: 215-204-5078
Email: bfrantz@temple.edu
http://disabilities.temple.edu