Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality: The Importance of Modeling and Teaching

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Objectives:

Provide accurate information and modeling to:

- Prevent sexual exploitation
- Build social acceptance
- Allow a person to develop and maintain healthy relationships
- Model and teach healthy sexuality for our students

Barriers to knowledge about bodies, boundaries, and sexuality:

- Lack of peers to ask questions (and lack of communication skills to ask peers that are known.)
- Insulated rather than educated
- Isolated by caregivers
- Intellectual disability makes retention of information more difficult
- Learn in “crisis”
Melberg Schwier describes how our fears may become exaggerated to such an extent that we deny young people with disabilities their right to grow into adults who are able and allowed to have relationships that provide companionship, conversation, trust, love and an appreciation of who they are.

In some cases, over-protection and a lack of opportunity to build self-esteem, personal and social skills may deny a person the right to share their life with someone else; a person who is “for themselves, not someone paid to be there, not someone who will disappear in the next wave of staff turnover”.

From Karin Melberg Schwier, Couples with Intellectual disabilities talk about living and loving.

From the beginning we teach:

• You are loved and how you show love
• You are important
• We have high expectations
• How to look after your body
• How to stay safe physically and emotionally
• My body is mine
• A child a way to build self-esteem

If you rely on caregivers, you:

• have skewed boundaries because you rely on others
• are taught to be compliant
• multiple caregivers may have different attitudes
• privacy is limited
The Body

1. Always call body parts by their correct names
2. Teach and reinforce societal rules concerning the body (public vs. private)
3. Reinforce good and proper care for the body

Dr. Michelle Ballan’s video presentation is full of great information and perspective.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkm_9U7iZc

Exploitation Prevention

1. Correct name for body parts
2. Evaluating relationships
3. Boundaries in relationships
4. Body rights
How do you teach students to evaluate relationships?

What is healthy vs. unhealthy?

What kind of relationships are there?

What is the expectation with different relationships...family, friends, caregivers, coworkers, sweethearts, and acquaintances?

Teach societal values, not personal values

Teach facts.

Acknowledge when behavior and feelings are normal.

Teach safety.

Teach socially acceptable skills so a child can engage in and maintain meaningful relationships

Resources:

This is an excellent book with very practical approaches to sexuality and teaching boundaries. It is available at the Austin Public Library.

http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/healthybodies/ has a lot of great materials that could be used in the classroom. In the appendix there are visuals already developed for private vs. public.
This is written in simple language with concrete examples for students who are cognitively challenged. There are a lot of visuals and social stories related to health and safety.

**Videos:**

David Hingsburger on the importance of relationships to people with disabilities
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXWeXKqPqig

Michelle Ballan, University of Columbia, the importance of sexuality
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkm_9U7IiZc

Teaching ideas for a variety of subjects dealing with sexuality can be found at:

An article with additional teaching ideas and information is:
https://www.down-syndrome.org/practice/330/