Chapter 5
Enhancing Sexual Awareness in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Case Study Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) involves difficulties in communication, relationships, and social interactions. Social deficits, in conjunction with sensory issues, can provoke several difficulties regarding the capacity of a child to be engaged in a relationship. The present study is a case report that outlines the implementation of a sex educational program, aiming at increasing participant awareness and the ability to improve/establish relationships. Findings also revealed the need for early intervention on issues regarding sex education and the involvement of the family of children with ASD.

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INTRODUCTION

Although sexuality education is crucial and important for all children, it should be a priority for children that are diagnosed with a disability (Alevriadou & Sereti, 2014; Grove et al., 2018). The absence of a clear understanding of appropriate sexuality among this population exposes them to various risks (Stokes & Kaur, 2005 as cited in Travers & Tincani, 2010). Children with disabilities and especially children with an ASD are usually uninformed or misinformed as far as sexuality is concerned (Gougeon, 2009). This makes them vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation (Brown-Lavoie, Viecili, and Weiss, 2014; Gougeon, 2009), which are often unable to report due to communication deficits and/or because they are unaware it is wrong (Ballan & Freyer, 2017; Travers & Tincani, 2010), increasing the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD) (Gougeon, 2009). In addition, they are more likely to adopt inappropriate socio-sexual behaviors that will ultimately lead to even more social exclusion and isolation (Gougeon, 2009) and feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness (Koller, 2000).

Moreover, the aptitude and comfort of ASD individuals with computers, and the prevalence of pornography as a vehicle for them to try to learn about sexuality and romance, what neurotypical youth learn from their social interactions, has exposed more than a few ASD male individuals to child pornography (Mahoney, 2009). Their curiosity, unrestrained by social or legal rules, of which they are unaware, leads them to criminal convictions, lengthy mandatory prison sentences, and a lifetime of reporting, ostracization, and residency restrictions as “sex offenders.” (Mahoney, 2009).

It’s also imperative for sexuality education to be proactive rather than reactive (Gerhardt 2006 as cited in Gougeon, 2009) and to include social skills training (Mehzabin & Stokes 2011) because lack of such skills causes negative effects that are long-lasting and affect cognitive, social, and emotional development (Attwood, 2003).

Many researchers (Attwood, 1998, 2006; Rutter, 2005) highlighted the difficulty of interaction with other people as one of the primary areas of difficulty for people who are on the Autism Spectrum. While people on the autism spectrum do establish friendships the majority struggle to form and maintain intimate relationships (Moxon 2000).

Quality of life in adolescents and adults on the Autism Spectrum is negatively influenced by poor social skills (Gustein & Whitney, 2002). Difficulty in developing social skills derive from the lack of appropriate social understanding which can lead to social withdrawal while children on the autism spectrum are often seen as ‘inappropriate’ or ‘cold’ which doesn’t describe their desperate struggle to fit in a relationship (Church, Alisanski,& Amanulla, 2000). High functioning adolescents
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