

Session 10

• Adolescent Issues for Teenagers with Asperger's Syndrome

Topics

- Puberty
- Cognitive abilities
- Friendship
- Sexuality
- Emotion management

Physical Changes of Puberty

- Coping with new experiences and change.
- Body size and proportions.
- Menstrual cycle.
- Voice.
- Body hair.
- Education some time before the changes.
- Personal hygiene.

Puberty

- Hygiene
- Positive & appropriate image
- Peer pressure & reactions
- Desire to create relationships
- Transition period, adjustments

Changes in Cognitive Development

Executive Function

- Organizational and planning skills.
- Getting started, being distracted.
- Flexibility, 'one track mind.'
- Complex reasoning, different perspectives and opinions.

Impaired Executive Function

- Impulsive, in strategies and recognizing consequences.
- Problems with working memory.
- Ability to explain reasoning in words.
- Need an 'executive secretary' and 'executive toys.'
- Typing.
- Examinations.
- Show working.

Learning Style

- *Verbalisers* (Higher verbal IQ) use Social Stories, metaphor and discussion; career - lawyer.
- *Visualisers* (Higher performance IQ) use Comic Strip Conversations and role play; career - engineer.

Friendship: Adolescence to Adult

- Peer group acceptance more important than the opinion of parents.
- Greater depth and breadth of self disclosure.
- Desire to be understood by friends.
- Friend's character compatible with their own.

Friendship: Adolescence to Adult

- Complex needs met by different types of friendship.
- "He/she accepts me for who I am."
- "We think the same way about things."
- Conflict resolved with self analysis and mutual insight.
- Compliments and emotional support

- Animals as friends
- Internet friends

- Clubs.
- Buddy system.
- Team work program.
- Drama classes

Home Is a Castle

Sexuality

- *"I have a 4th grader that was recently diagnosed with Asperger's. In class he had his hands in his pockets and was playing with himself. The para-professional asked if he needed to go to the restroom. He said, No! I just like it when it stands up.*
- *How should I handle this situation?*

- Don't "invade people's space"-that means get too close to them.
- Don't stare at someone whatever reason (however fit they are!).
- Don't make comments about people's bodies, good or bad.

- Don't tell dirty, sexist or racist jokes or make sexual innuendos.
- Don't hug or touch people unless they are part of your family or they have agreed to be your boyfriend or girlfriend and you have both agreed to it.

- Here comes the but... you just watch and listen to a group of teenage boys or girls. They tell dirty jokes and make sexual innuendos at every opportunity and they will often touch someone when they are not a member of their family. It seems that when boys and girls are in their teenage packs, performing their adolescent rituals, then these rules go out of the window. What a strange world we live in.

Sexuality

- The dating game.
- The art of flirting and romance
- Signals of mutual attraction
- Expression of affection
- Misinterpretation of intentions

Sexuality

- Crush
- Vulnerability
- The relationship continuum
- Sources of information

The Perception, Expression and Regulation of Emotions

- An inherent characteristic of Asperger's syndrome?

Amygdala

Anxiety

- Very good at worrying.
- Generalised anxiety (pessimist)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (25% of adults with Asperger's syndrome)

Anxiety

- Cleanliness, performance anxiety (fear of making a mistake)
- PTSD from being teased or bullied
- Sensory experiences
- Social anxiety
- Controlling and oppositional

Depression

- Occurs in one in three adolescents and adults
- Low self-esteem due to being rejected and ridiculed by peers
- Painful awareness of being different

Depression

- Loneliness
- Mental exhaustion
- Depression 'attack'
- Suicide attempts in adults

Anger

- Two out of three people with Asperger's syndrome have a problem with anger management.
- Sadness and anxiety expressed as anger

Sadness Expressed As Anger

Anger

- Achieve solitude
- Dominance and control
- Anger due to not being valued and accepted (arrogance)
- Agitated externalized depression

Affective Education

Affective Education

- A project on a specific emotion.
- Start with happiness or pleasure.
- Create a scrap book that illustrates the emotion.
- Diary with new experiences.
- Compare and contrast other children's scrap books.

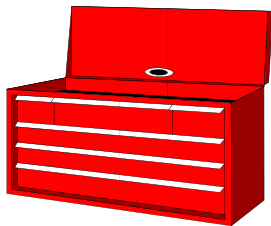
Affective Education

- A thermometer to measure the degree of intensity.
- Place photographs and words at the appropriate point on the 'thermometer.'
- Increase precision and accuracy in verbal expression. *Alexithymia*.

The Understanding and Expression of Emotions.

- Happy- Sad.
- Relaxed-Anxious.
- Affection-Anger.
- Problems with emotional arousal for both negative and positive emotions.
- Rapid expression of extremes of emotion

Emotional Toolbox: To Fix The Feeling



Evaluation Studies

- Sofronoff, K *et al* (2005) 'A randomised controlled trial of a CBT intervention for anxiety in children with Asperger syndrome.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46, 1143-1151.
- Sofronoff, K *et al* (2007) 'A randomized controlled trial of a CBT intervention for anger management in children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.' *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 37, (1203-1214).