Running ASD Support Groups at College
Menu

- Goal of ASD Groups
- Who attends
- How I’ve been planning it
- Some things I’ve tried already
- Some things I might try
- My concerns
- Your experiences?
What’s the goal?

- Help develop social skills that students are not confident in
- Reduce isolation and facilitate friendships
- Safe, supportive, relaxed, visual, structured and interactive manner
Who attends?

Students with:
- Asperger’s
- ASD
- PDD-NOS
- LD affecting expressive language
- Some degree of social anxiety

5-10 students each session
How I’ve been planning it

- 1 period each week (plus time for planning and debrief)

- Keep an email contact list of ASD students

- Interrogate all students’ schedules to find common available time

- Book room
How I’ve been planning it

- Advertise via emails, posters, website, during intakes, at TP
- Email reminders each week once group starts
How I’ve been planning it

- First session – survey
- Last session- reflection and food
- Each session – start with icebreaker and recap
Some things I’ve tried...
delighted emotion

definition: very happy about something good that has happened

simple definition: when you feel very good about something.

similar emotions: gleeful

www.human-emotions.com
Some things I’ve tried...
Slipping into a conversation

- **Appropriate**
- **Inappropriate**
Some things I’ve tried...

THE SOCIAL SKILLS PICTURE BOOK
for High School and Beyond

Dr. Jed Baker
Start the conversation about something you have in common.

The young man notices that the young woman has no food for lunch, just like him. That is something they have in common.
If someone looks bored, ask if they want to hear more.

**Right Way**
The young man sees that she looks bored, so he asks her if she wants to hear more.

**Wrong Way**
The young man does not see that she looks bored, so he continues to talk.
Some things I’ve tried...

Asperger’s Syndrome and Sexuality
FROM ADOLESCENCE THROUGH ADULTHOOD
Isabelle Hénault
Foreword by Tony Attwood
Sexual relations and other sexual behaviours
(90 minutes)

General goals

To lead each participant to describe what a sexual relation is to him/her, name different kinds of sexual behaviour, and identify reasons for having sexual relations.

1. Fears: the goal is to allow the participants to express the fears that they may have about sexual relations (see 5.1, “Information for the group leader”). Participants should fill in Worksheet 5.2 and have a group discussion (25 minutes).

2. A sexual encounter: the goal of the next exercise is to think about what could make a sexual encounter agreeable and pleasant. Participants should fill in Worksheet 5.3 and have a group discussion (25 minutes).

3. The five senses: hyposensitivity, hypersensitivity, acceptable or normal sensitivity – what impact can these have on sexuality? What are the possible means by which this impact can be decreased? Test the participants’ different senses using the methods explained under “The five senses related to sexuality” (p.137) and listed on Worksheet 5.4. Discuss tips to help deal with participants’ sensitivities (40 minutes).
5.1 Information for the group leader

This worksheet provides the group leader with the necessary information to help lead this topic. However, it should be noted that the group leader is by far the most important factor in enabling the goals of this topic to be met. Inevitably, as group leader, you will be asked personal questions. It is important to be prepared for these and to refuse all questions that you judge to be too personal.

You, like the participants, may at times feel uncomfortable talking about sexual relations, since this is indeed an intimidating topic. We suggest that you share your discomfort with the young people, which will help to decrease any tension. A touch of humour will often help too... we also ask that the group leader respect the choice of certain adolescents who might prefer to remain silent.

Nonetheless, you should establish a candid dialogue on sexuality and avoid making value judgements. It is likely that questions will be asked to which you will not know the answer. You can take advantage of such a situation by inviting participants to find out extra information and remind them that learning about sexuality is a lifelong process.

Important factors must be considered throughout these activities, such as the age of the adolescents, their maturity and sexual history. In addition, cultural and ethnic factors should be addressed. It should be noted that cultural differences exist with respect to premarital sex, and these should be considered when discussing such topics as virginity or rupture of the hymen (an intact hymen can be viewed as a symbol of virginity). Circumcision is also frequently performed a few days after birth within certain religious contexts.

The information provided and the vocabulary and means used to convey it must be adjusted according to the characteristics of the group. You should note that some adolescents in the group may not be sexually active whilst others may be. The interests, concerns, and questions raised may therefore be quite different within the same group. Regardless of whether they are sexually active or not, discussing this topic will allow the participants to become better prepared to experience their first or next sexual relation.

Throughout the activities, the group leader must be sensitive to the fact that adolescents commonly have several fears about romantic and sexual relationships. The topic may induce feelings of guilt in some adolescents. To prepare yourself to discuss this topic, consider these common questions and fears that preoccupy young people:

- Will I be disappointed?
- Can you tell if it's someone's first time?
- Will everyone notice?
- Will I ejaculate too quickly?
- Will I be able to get a "hard-on"?
- Will I have an orgasm?
- Do I have enough/too much hair?
- How am I going to suggest using a condom? Will he accept?
- I'm afraid of getting pregnant...
- I'm afraid that I won't live up to it...
- I'm afraid of catching some disease...
- I'm afraid that he/she will leave me afterwards...
- I'm afraid to disappoint...
- Will my parents notice?
- How will I go about it?
- Will he/she tell his/her friends all about it?

All of these concerns are frequently encountered. Adolescents need to be reassured and to have some of their fears reduced to realistic proportions. It is helpful for them to know that the level of satisfaction in first sexual relations is rarely high. Sexuality is learned by trial and error and is tied into a process of discovering one's self and partner.

The five senses related to sexuality

The information outlined in this section is background to Worksheet 5.4.

To the author's knowledge no studies to date have examined the link between sensory states and sexuality in AS. Given the intimate link between sexuality and the senses, this omission is certainly puzzling, especially in light of the fact that individuals with AS can experience hyper- or hyposensitivity.

Hypersensitivity can be defined as extreme sensitivity experienced in one or more of the five senses. Auditory and tactile hypersensitivity are common in AS and may be associated with neurological disorders. For example, light background music played at a low volume can be perceived as loud and shrill. Similarly, a slight brushing up against the skin can provoke the same intensity of pain as would be caused by a sharp object. Various forms of sexual stimulation can therefore cause discomfort or even pain for individuals with AS, reinforcing avoidance behaviours and hindering the development of intimate relationships.
5.2 Fears

Here is a list of common fears about romantic relationships and sexual relations. Circle the letter corresponding to any fears that you have had.

A  Fear of not being liked  M  Fear of regretting it
B  Fear of being compared  N  Fear that it will hurt
C  Fear of being disappointed  O  Fear of getting naked in front of someone
D  Fear of not knowing what to say or do  P  Fear of catching a disease
E  Fear of being turned down  Q  Fear of pregnancy
F  Fear of showing my lack of experience  R  Fear of not getting a "hard-on"
G  Fear of disappointing  S  Fear of ejaculating too quickly
H  Fear of looking "easy"  T  Fear that my body is not nice enough (legs, stomach, penis, breasts, hair, muscles)
I  Fear of it being too intimate  U  Fear of not having an orgasm
J  Fear of what others will think  V  Fear of being left afterwards
K  Fear of being provocative  W  Fear that the other person will tell everything
L  Fear that the other person only wants sex

X Y Z  Other fears (give examples)

You circled ten or more fears. You’re in the norm. Don’t stay alone with your fears. Talk about them; they’ll be less scary.
### 5.4 The five senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hyposensitive</th>
<th>Sensitive</th>
<th>Hypersensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under-sensitive</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Over-sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Hearing</td>
<td>(soft music/loud noise)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Smell</td>
<td>(perfume/alcohol)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Touch</td>
<td>(soft fabric/sandpaper)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sight</td>
<td>(bright colours/blurry images)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taste</td>
<td>(lemon/honey or chocolate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What impact does your level of sensitivity have on your sexuality?

Can you think of possible ways and means of tackling under-/over- sensitivity?


Some things I’ve tried...

Preparing for Life
The Complete Guide for Transitioning to Adulthood for those with Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome

Dr. Jed Baker
Interview skills (and whether to disclose a disability)

Rationale

Employers often consider a face-to-face or phone interview as critical to hiring some- interaction provides some information about what it will be like to interact with that person on an ongoing basis. Thus it is crucial to develop a plan for having a successful interview.

Should you disclose information about a disability?

Many adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) indicate great difficulty with interaction because of their difficulties with social interaction.

- If social difficulties are readily apparent during an interview (e.g., difficulty in maintaining direct eye contact, flow of conversation, or idiosyncratic movements) it is often helpful to the employer that you have a disability while explaining that although it may not interfere with performing the duties of the job. In fact, studies have shown that many aspects of autism spectrum disorders make someone an employee (e.g., the desire for rules and consistency often make ASD individuals honest, hardworking and reliable than those without autistic disorders). See “If I have a disability worksheet.”

- If your disability will interfere with the job duties (e.g., social skills are key positions), then the job position may not be right for you.

- If your disability is not at all noticeable and will not interfere with your job, you may be no need to disclose information about a disability.

Preparing for the interview

- Research the position to find out exactly what the job duties are, what skills are looking for and what the company does. This way you can prepare answers to what the employer is looking for. Study the job posting to find out more about to be filled. To find out more about the company try one of the following websites: www.interbiznet.com/hunt/, www.joboptions.com, www.foot.com, www.corptech.com (then insert company name). Companiesonline.com prnewswire.com, hoover vault.com (this contains an employee message board of what employees say about their company).

- Create a portfolio of your work to show the employer. This might include: Samples of writing, drawings, music, pictures of projects you completed, machines you have maintained, crafts, computer programs, or lists of satisfied clients.

- Rehearse a 1-minute commercial about yourself (see “Tell me about yourself worksheet”).

- Rehearse what you might say, if anything, about a disability (See “Disclosure of Disability worksheet”).

- Rehearse answers to common interview questions, questions for you to ask them, and how to close the interview (see “Answers to Common Interview Questions”).

- Rehearse how to get to the interview (take a trial run of your travel plans).

Dressing for the interview

For men and women: Dress one step above what might be expected dress code for the job.

- Men: Shaved, hair groomed neatly, pressed suit or dress pants and dress shirt, shoes with dark socks (no white socks), matching belt and shoes, clean looking briefcase.

- Women: Business dress suit or outfit, nothing too revealing, shoes not sandals, hair is neat (no “big” hair or elaborate styles), not too much make-up, neat portfolio or briefcase.

Nonverbal skills during the interview

Nonverbal skills are crucial, although any information you provide about a disability (see above) may help offset any difficulties here. But it still makes sense to try to present yourself as well as possible. Use the Nonverbal Behavior Checklist as a guide for how to conduct yourself in the interview.

After the Interview is over

- Write a thank you note (see sample thank you note).

- Call to check on the progress of their search for an employee. Say, “This is _______ calling for _________. He or she interviewed me for the position of _______ (job position) last _______ (day of interview). I was calling to thank him or her and to check on the progress of their search for an appropriate candidate. I would like to express continued interest in the job and any opportunity to work with him/her. If he/she has any questions, I can be reached at _________ (phone number and email). Thanks again.”
Social Skill Menu

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Circle those items that may be a challenge for the student.

• Nonverbal cues/Body language
  1. Expressing and reading welcoming versus unwelcoming social cues
  2. Interest versus boredom social cues
  3. Sarcasm versus genuine expressions
  4. Attending to others
  5. Respecting personal space and belongings
  6. Personal hygiene
  7. Dealing with odd motor mannerisms

• Dealing with anger/frustration
  8. Understanding your anger
  9. Identifying triggers to your anger
  10. Altering or avoiding the triggers to your anger
  11. Better ways to think about and deal with the triggers to your anger
  12. Calming yourself when angry
  13. Talking versus acting out your feelings
  14. Using the Daily Anger Record

• Dealing with anxiety
  15. Dealing with anxiety and fear—understanding the alarm reaction
  16. Dealing with unpleasant, intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviors
  17. Dealing with social fears

• Conversation
  18. Dealing with new feared situations
  19. Saying hello’s and goodbye’s
  20. Introductions
  21. Polite interrupting
  22. Maintaining and joining a conversation
  23. Starting conversations with people you know
  24. Getting to know someone new
  25. POSTER: Summary of Starting and Maintaining Conversations
  26. Conversation repair strategies
  27. Politely changing topics
  28. Being sensitive to the listener’s interests
  29. Politely ending conversations
  30. Answering the telephone and taking messages
  31. Calling friends on the telephone

• Building and maintaining friendships (and dealing with roommates)
  32. Where to find friends
  33. Don’t try too hard too soon
  34. Sharing friends
  35. Avoiding touchy subjects and insults
  36. Complimenting
  37. Respecting others’ views
  38. Don’t impose rules on others (minding your own business)
  39. Avoid bragging
  40. Dealing with peer pressure and avoiding setups
41. Empathic listening
42. Showing caring for others’ feelings through supportive statements
43. Deepening relationships—sharing personal information
44. Conflict resolution/Assertiveness
45. Dealing with teasing
46. Showing good sportsmanship
47. Getting attention in positive ways

• Dating
48. Where to find a date and how and when to ask someone on a date
49. Asking someone out on a date
50. Reading the signals—when to pursue a romantic relationship
51. Sexual harassment
52. Do’s and Don’ts on a date
53. Communicating clearly to meet each other’s needs

• Dealing with school and family demands
54. Asking for reasonable modifications
55. Dealing with frustrating work
56. Accepting no or waiting for what you want
57. Asking nicely for what you want
58. Working cooperatively in groups
59. Dealing with mistakes and correction
60. How to respectfully disagree with teachers, parents, or supervisors
61. Dealing with stressful living situations

• Employment skills
62. Choosing job/career directions
63. Conducting a job search
64. Writing a resume and cover letters
65. Scripts for networking with friends, relatives, and potential employers
66. Interview skills (and whether to disclose a disability)
67. Handling rejection
68. Do’s and Don’ts to maintain a job
69. Responding to criticism, accusations or complaints on the job
70. Exiting a job

• Money Matters
71. Managing money

• Preparing for Emergencies
72. Dealing with emergencies and emergency workers (such as police or hospital workers)

• Transportation
73. Negotiating transportation
Other things I might try...

Learning To Be Social – Hawkins Institute

When you use CONTEXT, what you say will make sense to other people.
Some Concerns

- Scheduling and availability
- Should it be skilled based?
  Should it be informal social time?
- How to transfer learning to other contexts
What Are Your Experiences?