



**Sex Ed and Self Esteem:  
Residents with Intellectual  
Disabilities  
Including a Vision Impairment**

ASSID 8th Annual Disability Support Worker Conference  
27-28 November 2008  
University of Melbourne  
Mike Steer  
RIDBC Renwick Centre  
November 2008

## Overview

- Sex education & Self esteem
- Social skills and competence

## Sex Education - Labels

- **Social/sexual education**, illustrates ties between social skills training & sexuality
- **Social skill instruction** includes basics: handshaking, establishing appropriate distance, development of appropriate touch
- **Family life education** takes the word **sex** out of the title

## Why is the Name Important?

- Most of us uncomfortable talking about sexuality
- Ignoring social/sexual issues doesn't make them disappear
- Residents left with misconceptions & sketchy knowledge
- Families left trying to teach skills at home without benefit of quality instructional materials

## Research into Sexual Abuse

- 1999 study indicated approx 10% of children in UK sexually abused at some time in their lives
- 80% were female
- Higher % of boys in younger age group (5-9 yrs)
- Girls most highly represented in 5-14 yrs band

## Children with Vision Impairments

- Birmingham University Study 1993-5
  - Questionnaire to 60 schools
    - > 20 special VI schools
    - > 40 resource centres
  - Discussions with teachers
- 46 responses - in half the cases, teachers encountered suspected or confirmed sexual abuse
  - Confirmed sexual abuse of children with VI is a reality
  - Today's children are tomorrow's residents

## Barriers

Perception that people with disabilities also have sexuality that is disabled

We don't feel competent to teach the subject

We don't have clear image of what future holds for these individuals

Over-protectiveness by families and/or staff

**Social skills must be systematically taught**



## Defining Social and Sexual Behaviours

APPROPRIATE / INAPPROPRIATE

PUBLIC / PRIVATE



## What should be in a Sex-Ed program for residents with vision impairments?



## General Development

- Names and functions of body parts;
- Body changes during puberty; and
- Differentiating between babies, children, adolescents, and adults.



## Personal Safety & Community Safety:

- Differentiating between familiar people and strangers;
- Inappropriate touching of others & by others;
- Public rest room behaviour;
- Assertiveness training; and
- Abuse prevention.



## Concepts of Public and Private Spaces:

- Identifying personal private places;
- Differentiating between private places in residence & community, & private places at home; and
- Behaviours appropriate to public and private places.



## Body Care, Health & Hygiene

- Washing and bathing;
- Menstrual care;
- Toileting skills & hand washing;
- Disease prevention; and
- Preparation for medical examinations.



## Affectionate Expression

- Appropriate greetings with acquaintances, friends, staff members, etc.;
- Expressions of friendships; and
- Choosing & differentiating between friends & acquaintances.



## Sexual Expression

- Masturbation;
- Sexual intercourse and birth control;
- Safe alternatives to sexual intercourse;
- Safe vs. unsafe behaviors & sexually transmitted diseases; and
- Identification of consensual partners.



## Additional Sex-Ed Program Content

- Personal values exploration and clarification.
- Building concepts of self-esteem.
- Self-concept, self-responsibility skills.
- Problem solving skills, dating skills.
- Developing long-term, committed relationships.
- Pregnancy, family planning & alternatives to pregnancy.
- Slang terminology.



## Staff/Resident Relationship

- Subject matter at times very personal
- Imperative that residents feel comfortable with staff member
- Imperative that staff members feel comfortable with residents
- If facilitator or interpreter used by resident, important that resident feels comfortable discussing issues through a facilitator



## Using real objects is possible & preferable

- A real condom that can be explored by the group will make a lot more sense than a picture & verbal description of a condom
- Trip to pharmacy, grocery store, or rest room vending machine to locate condoms
- Help sort the laundry



Administrative support for purchase & adaptation of instructional materials

## Instruction

- Use all appropriate communication modes and appropriate language levels
- Speech, photographs, symbols, raised line drawings, signed communication, voice output systems, pantomime, models
- Ensure each resident is fully included
- Instructional objectives must focus on generalisation of skills



## Instructional Activities

- Must be conducted with various materials, in various locations, with various people, and at different times of the day to increase likelihood that skills will be generalised.
- Example: If teaching appropriate rest room behaviour & safety, ensure resident understands the skills apply in all settings, not just in rest rooms familiar to the individual.



## Instructional Activities (cont.)

- Instruction should be integrated into all areas of program, not just during a time set aside for this purpose.
- Teach a skill at a topical moment rather than wait for a contrived setting during a scheduled instructional time

**SEIZE THE MOMENT---AND  
SOMETIMES CREATE THE MOMENT**



## During Instruction

- Men and women should not be separated. Separation suggests the "other side" has secrets or mysteries that can't be divulged.
- Concern over issues of liability
- Makes good sense to teach in pairs
- Sense of Humour



## Who Can Help?

Sexual Health & Family Planning Australia  
[www.fpa.net.au](http://www.fpa.net.au); [www.fpahealth.org.au](http://www.fpahealth.org.au)

Sexual Health & Family Planning Queensland  
<http://www.healthservices.qut.edu.au/information/sexual.jsp>

Family Planning Queensland [www.fpq.com.au/](http://www.fpq.com.au/)

Family Planning NSW [www.fpnsw.org.au/](http://www.fpnsw.org.au/)

Family Planning Victoria [www.fpv.org.au/](http://www.fpv.org.au/)

Shine SA [www.shinesa.org.au/](http://www.shinesa.org.au/)

Family Planning Tasmania [www.fpt.asn.au/](http://www.fpt.asn.au/)

FPWA [www.fpwa.org.au/](http://www.fpwa.org.au/)



## Social Skills & Competence

- Focus on adults with vision impairments



## Self-Esteem

- Adjusting to a vision impairment
- Building self-esteem
- Involvement with caring adults
- Reaching out - interacting with peers



## Communication Skills

- Initiating contact
- Sustaining interactions
- Conversational techniques
- Group work
- Using the phone
- Written communication skills



## Nonverbal Communication Skills

- Interpreting nonverbal cues
- Expressing nonverbal cues
  - What are the most critical nonverbal skills for people with vision impairments to learn?



## Social Demands of Daily Living

- Fashion
- Eating out
- Managing money
- Getting around the community
- Appropriate expressions of sexuality
- Work - getting and keeping a job



## Self Advocacy Skills

- Problem-solving skills
- Negotiating skills
- Setting goals (short- and long-term)
- Assertiveness





## Questions





1. What are the greatest social challenges faced by residents with intellectual disabilities and vision impairments?

1. What are the greatest challenges faced by staff in addressing these resident challenges?



### References

- Sacks, S.Z. Thomas, K.L., & Wolfe, K.E. (2000). Focused on: Social skills for teens and young adults with visual impairments. New York: AFB Press. Video and Study Guide.
- Steer, M. (2005). Sex education and self-esteem: Youth with intellectual disabilities including a vision impairment.