Pennsylvania’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service
Building safe and healthy relationships looks different for everyone.

Our Education System

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

- Albert Einstein
Why Is this Important?

• People with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism are “highly likely to be victims of all manner of criminal activity – from bullying to robbery to sexual assault.” Center for Disease Control, 2014

• Research suggests that an estimated 30-40% of inmates in state prisons have an intellectual or developmental disability. A Guide for Attorneys, New Jersey State Bar Foundation & the Criminal Justice Advocacy Program, Arc of New Jersey, 2014
Incidence and Prevalence

- Children with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be sexually abused as children without disabilities.
  

- The trauma suffered by victims with disabilities is just as severe emotionally, psychologically and socially as trauma experienced by people without disabilities who survive crimes. In fact it may even be more severe.

  Westcott, 1993
Incidence and Prevalence

• In 2010, persons with disabilities (40%) were more likely than persons without disabilities (31%) to be attacked by persons well known to them or who were casual acquaintances to them. DOJ, 2011.

• 67% of perpetrators who abused individuals with severe cognitive disabilities accessed them through their work in disability services. Journal of Sexuality and Disability, 1991
Suspects/Defendants

- People with intellectual disabilities comprise 2%-3% of the general population (Petersilia, 2000).

- However, they represent 4%-10% of the prison population, with greater numbers in juvenile facilities and jails (Petersilia, 2000).

- Another study looking at a large forensic database of sex offenders and paraphilia suggested no over representation of people with intellectual disabilities (Erik Sondenaa, 2008).
Counterfeit Deviance

Occurs when an individual offends for the following reasons:

– Lack of personal privacy and little understanding of basic human sexuality and boundaries;

– Lack of social skills;

– Lack of opportunities to develop friendships or dating relationships;

– Little understanding of legal issues combined with a developmental age similar to that of a young child or young adult.
The Unexpected Consequences of Good Intentions....
THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL/SEXUAL NUANCES AND SOCIAL ETIQUETTE
Awareness...Decisions...Consequences
Social Skills/Sexual Etiquette

Social skills/etiquette are behaviors and convention that let others know what we want without being rude, disruptive, etc.

They are the passport to acceptance.
Social/Sexual Perceptions

What’s the difference between a…

Smirk and a smile

Hug and a hold

Pat and a slap
Social closeness?
Social etiquette?
Is it ....

Diminished Capacity
or
Diminished Appreciation?
Perception vs. Reality
The Fluidity of:

Friendships
Social Etiquette
Relationships
Sex Education
Friendships and Relationships Come in all Forms and Many will Change Over Time.

The meaning of friend & touch also changes over time.

- **Social**
  - Touch
  - Handshake
  - High 5
  - Hug

- **Romantic**
  - Touch
    - Caress
    - Kiss

- **Intimate**
  - Touch
    - Hug
    - Caress
    - Kiss
Friendly ≠ Friend
Friends Are:

- People you can trust
- People you feel comfortable being with
- People you have experience with across time
- People you share something in common with
- Friends require that both people have to agree to be friends with each other.
Translating Abstract Concepts into Concrete Realities

What is the difference between a

Girlfriend or Boyfriend

and

Girl friend or Boy friend?
A girl who is also a friend or a boy who is also a friend?
Friendly Does Not Always Make a Friendship.

Adapted from Michelle Garcia’s Social Thinking Worksheets for Tweens and Teens.
Teaching the difference between:

- **Friends** – People you choose to be your friend
- **Friendly /acquaintances** – People who may cross your path and who are friendly when you see them
- **Others** - People who may cross your path, but you just go about your day when around them, You don’t greet or have a conversation with them.
- **Mean** – People who treat you badly and make you feel bad when you’re around them (abstract concept, could be any of the above).
Level One: Friendly Greeting

Someone you are friendly to - but really do not know, don’t talk to, and don’t hang out with at all.
Level Two: Acquaintance

You’ve talked a little bit to this person because you worked with them in a classroom group, of they are a friend of a friend and you happen to hang out with them for a short time. You may look them up on Facebook even you aren’t their “friend” yet and ask if they want to be friends.
Level Three: Possible Friendship

This is when you start to seek people out to talk to them, but you meet up with them in the same general location that you met them. When you happen to see the person, ask to meet for lunch, break between classes, or after class.
Level Four: Evolving Friendship

• This is when you are demonstrating to people that you would like to spend more time with them by trying to consistently hang out with them in class, on campus, and most importantly contact them to see if they want to hang out outside of classes.

• At this level, you start to work at being friends by making plans with the other person to do things later in the day or week.
Level Five: Bonded Friendship

This is when people are there for each other. They look out for each other and go out of their way to make sure things are okay for that person. This level represents that you are spending a lot more time with this person in the place you met them, but also at home or in the community. This level is similar to Level Four: Evolving Friendship, but just more intense.
Level Six: Close Friendship

It is expected that you do all the things in Level Three with this person but with a bit more intensity. It is expected you have some deeper conversations...these are the people you can really open up with.

Not everyone has a really close friend.
On Again, Off Again Friendships

A special category into which many friendships fall.

What are some examples?
Individual Educational Plans and Person Centered Planning

When a goal is written in the students’ IEP… it assumes the team is responsible for the student to achieve that goal.

The student should not perceive the goal as punitive.
Touch/Sexual Health and IEPs?

- Lack of age appropriate sexual health information
- Lack of appropriate sexuality language
- Accepted in-school behaviors versus generally accepted societal behaviors
Person Centered Planning uses a series of charts/maps/symbols to engage the focus person and their family/community in planning.
TOUCH
TOUCH is the “mother of all senses”

Our tactile system is the earliest sensory system to become functional (in the embryo) and be the last to fade (Fosshage, 2000)

It is our only reciprocal sense – we can not touch another without being touched ourselves
Good Touch/Bad Touch

Touch is tangible and reciprocal (concrete).

Describing touch is based on speech, vocabulary, experience, culture, and more (abstract).

When describing touch both the sender and receiver must be on the same page, understand the intensity and emotion of the touch.
When is an Embrace a Hug or a Hold?

How do you tell the difference?
• Personal experience
• Professional experience

Are the consequences the same?
Is a “label” created?
Touch/Sexual Health and IEPs?

- Lack of age appropriate sexual health information
- Lack of appropriate sexuality language
- Accepted in-school behaviors versus generally accepted societal behaviors
Good Decisions Begin with Good Discussions

Making good decisions involve:

1. Gathering accurate information
2. Thinking about the possible consequences
3. Weighing the Pro’s & Con’s
   (with family members, friends, teachers, school nurse, others)
4. Choosing a path that they are comfortable with
   (understanding the power of peer and family values/pressures)
5. Taking responsibility for their actions
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