

12-Part Sexuality Series for Parents with Children with an Intellectual Disability

Part 11 of 12: When the Plan Goes Wrong

We do our best to teach our children what we feel they need to know about sexuality and relationships and then something happens and it feels like our efforts were for naught. Something termed “inappropriate” or “deviant” has been reported to have occurred and there is an urge to push the panic button. Before pushing that button it is important to take a second look at the situation to determine exactly what the issue is and what adjustments are required.

The first question that must be answered is exactly what happened and in what context. Ask your child and the person reporting the concern the details of what, when, where, who was involved. Ask your child how they interpreted the situation. It is possible that what looked like a worrisome situation can have a totally different meaning when looked at through the eyes of someone less skilled at maneuvering social situations. For example, the persistent following of another peer at school may be perceived by the adults as stalking and dangerous when it involves nothing more than a clumsy attempt to make a friend and misread social cues.

When discussing the matter at hand be wary about descriptions of behavior that impose a value or hint at a diagnosis. Is it really an obsession or is it a natural curiosity? Is it really a deviant sexual behaviour or is it the result of a lack of social skills? Is it really excessive behaviour or is it within the realm of acceptable behaviour for this age. For example, is the teenager who is approaching younger children displaying a sexual interest in this age group or merely wanting to spend time with people who share may share a similar interest.

It is also important to put situations in perspective. It is okay and normal to make mistakes. Keep in mind that disability may result in those oops being caught due to more supervision than others of the same age. After assessing what has truly happened take the necessary steps to remedy the situation and move forward. Do specific social skills need to be taught or fine-tuned, is additional information needed or does the environment need to be altered? For example, kissing with a boyfriend or girlfriend in a public place is more apt to happen if there are no opportunities for privacy.

Just as we didn't give up on learning to walk when stumbles occurred, there is no need to give up on helping your child develop the knowledge and social skills necessary to have meaningful relationships when difficulties occur.

Written by: Eleanor Gibson, Behaviour Consultant, Lake Ridge Community Support Services

Part 12: Next Steps (December 2015)