

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

Part 6 of 12: And We Have Teenagers

Whether we believe it or try to deny it, as puberty ends our wee babies have gradually developed into teenagers. We have gone from being totally responsible for all aspects of their care, to caring for young adults who want to make decisions on their own and be as independent as possible. It is at this age that teenagers may experience increased sexual feelings and desires. This can be the result of physical changes, increased levels of sex hormones, cultural emphasis on sexuality and rehearsal for adult sex roles. There may be peer pressure to have a boy or girlfriend and to be sexually active. Romantic relationships may be more valued than long-standing friendships.

At this age there is an increase in the frequency of masturbation for both males and females, with the purpose of masturbation being sexual pleasure. Sexual activity between 2 people tends to evolve from kissing to French kissing, to breast and genital fondling, to oral-genital contact or intercourse typically over a period of years.

As parents of a child with disability it is difficult to see these developments as normal and healthy. Our children still require help with so many aspects of their lives. It is important to remember that as a parent your job is never done. There is opportunity for providing information and sharing your values at this stage. Now more than ever is the time to talk about relationships. Discuss what makes a healthy relationship, how relationships take time to develop, that is okay to have or not have a boy or girlfriend, what a date might look like, how to arrange a date and that it is important to maintain friendships while exploring new relationships. Discuss consent and the need to respect if others are not interested in being friends or dating. Social skills are key at this stage and it is important to develop the skills to talk to the opposite sex, to read the cues if someone is interested or

not and to respond appropriately. It is also the time to discuss birth control and sexual transmitted diseases, even if this information is not needed at the present time. These discussions are ongoing and may feel unending, but they are an important part of providing teenagers with the tools they need as they enter adulthood.

Think back to your own teenage years and remember the importance of these relationships as well as the complexity of emotions and the trial and tribulations you experienced. Keep perspective, keep talking and teaching and remember that healthy relationships are important at all ages.

References

Sexual Health through Education (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.serc.mb.ca/sexual-health>

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Teaching Sexual Health (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/>

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

Part 7: Family, Friend, Acquaintance, Stranger? (July 2015)