

The Bad News and the Good News: Sexual Abuse, Sexual Education, and Positive Sexuality

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Just Say Know!

By Dave Hingsburger

- Diverse City Press, Inc.
<http://www.diverse-city.com/display.htm>
- Amazon.com

THE FACTS . . .

- Estimated 10% of population has a disability
- 83% of females and 32% of males with developmental disabilities have experienced sexual assault

(Hard, 1986)

- Of those who were assaulted, 50% had been assaulted 10 or more times

(Sobsey and Doe, 1991)

MORE FACTS . . .

- Disabled adults are 4 to 10 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than rest of population (California Committee on Sexuality of Persons with Developmental Disabilities)
- 99% of sexual abuse is committed by family, acquaintances, or caregivers (Seattle Rape Relief Project, 1981)
- Majority of assaults happen in person's residence, including institutions (Froemming, 1991)

Why are People with DD Abused?

- **Targeted by Abusers!**
- What abusers see which may be part of disability
 - Communication Differences
 - Physical Limitations
 - Difficulty with Judgment

Things that can be changed

- Intimate Cares and Privacy
 - Dependence on Others
 - Sexual and Protective Information
 - Boundary Confusion
 - Learned Compliance
 - Loneliness
-
- ✓ People with developmental disabilities can learn new skills
 - ✓ We can change how we view and care for them.

All people are sexual whether
we like it or not.

Protection is Dangerous

- Protection from sex education

“Protection from sex education leaves a person effectively mute when it comes to speaking of their body.”

Just Say Know!, by Dave Hingsburger, page 18

“...we are advocating for a thoughtful approach that teaches the right skills at the right time.”

Just Say Know!, page 19

Sex Education is Prevention

- Social skills
- Affection skills
- Gender
- Privacy
- Consent
- We all have the same sexuality rules

Examine your own Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

- You don't have to be an "expert" to teach sex education
- You know how the people you support learn and communicate
- Name your fears about teaching people you support about sex
- If you will not teach the person, someone else must

“When people with disabilities are denied access to sex education, they become perfect victims, because they can’t report what they can’t say.”

Just Say Know!, page 20

Language = Power

- Keep it simple
- Teach correct names for all body parts, including genitals
 - Use line drawings and label
 - If person uses a communication device, be sure penis, vagina (vulva), breasts, anus, and butt are included and the person knows what they are
- Give slang words for body parts as well

Teach Basics of Sex and protection

- Masturbation – give rules, but never punish
- Sexual intercourse – how babies are made
- Birth control – for the safety of both partners
- Gender preference

- “If someone tells you it’s a secret or if you tell, you will get in trouble, they are lying – TELL!”
- Let person know you will listen

“...it is important to see that while sex education gives the vocabulary with which to report sexual abuse, privacy awareness teaches the concept that allows people to understand violation. If you don't understand that your body is yours and no one can touch it without your permission, then you simply accept what happens to it as being part of what it is to be powerless.”

Just Say Know!, page 74

Teach Basic Privacy and Consent

- Your whole body is private which means no one can touch any part if you don't want them to
- Vagina (vulva), penis, butt, and breasts are special private body parts
- No one can touch any part of your body unless they ask first and you say “yes” every time
- People often report abuse while learning about privacy

What you can do

- Give person real privacy, including a place where she/he can be sexual
- If this is not possible, ask each time you need to help, wait for an answer, and honor the answer
- If there is no real choice, explain what you are going to do ahead of time

Teach Boundaries

- Front hugs vs. side hugs and other ways to tell the person you care
 - Problem if someone hugs them
 - Problem if they hug someone
- Thinking everyone is a friend vs. clarifying your relationship.

Teach Appropriate Non-Compliance

- People need to learn to “stick up” for themselves
- Set up situations where person can say “no” and honor it
- Differentiate between a demand and a choice
- Be careful not to give dangerous instructions which may confuse person about other safety rules

Sex is Good!

- Teach that sex is good within the context of consent, privacy, responsibility and values
- If person thinks sex is dirty or wrong, will interpret all touch as bad and thinks will get in trouble if tells about abuse
- All people have genitals that give them pleasure whether we like it or not.

If a proper private place is not available to people to explore and practice their sexuality, sex will happen anyway.

Loneliness

- Desperation to connect with another person forces people to accept dangerous situations
- Men and women differ in their loneliness
 - Rings and hugs
 - Porn and chat rooms
 - Targeted by criminals for sex, housing and money

Protection is Dangerous

- Protection from Society
 - People learn from their environments and social interactions
 - People with developmental disabilities have more to fear from people they know than from those they don't

“Develop a system that respects relationships.
There is no point in doing sex education, or any
of the suggestions...if people with disabilities are
prohibited from engaging in appropriate sexual
behavior at home.”

Just Say Know!, page 67

What you can do

- Honor a person's choices and decisions even if you don't agree with them
- The ability to make up one's own mind is the first step to autonomy and the ability to say **"NO!"**

“The denial of appropriate relationships robs people of the ability to discriminate between that which is acceptable and that which is not.”

Just Say Know!, page 30

Personal Safety Checks

- By talking to people about personal safety regularly, you may
 - Catch abuse as it happens
 - Prevent abuse because a potential abuser sees you are vigilant and aware
- Should be a priority in any plans for a person at home, at work, and in the community
- When asking the person:
 - The word “safety” may need to be modified to something “that scares you” or “you do not like”
 - Ask if anyone has told her/him to keep a secret or would get in trouble

Sexual Abuse Happens

- Safety first
- Don't blame the victim – “I told you not to...”
 - People are abused because there are abusers
- Now is not the time for sex ed
- You did nothing wrong and you are not in trouble
- Prepare the person for what happens next
- Victims don't need prison, they need aftercare

Most Damaging responses when Sexual Abuse is Self-Reported

- We don't want to believe it can happen or the person accused would do it and abusers count on this.
- Looking for attention
- Lying
 - Issues of time

Behaviors are not just random

- They mean something and we need to find out what
- Be alert for signs of sexual abuse
- Be careful not to program people out of behaviors they have developed to protect themselves

“The punishment of appropriate sexual behavior is as abusive as any other form of assault. When an individual is taught that they, their feelings, their bodies, their hearts, their genitals are dirty, wrong, immoral, evil, profane, or wicked, and when this message is taught through pain and punishment, then they have been sexually assaulted.”

Just Say Know! page 8

Questions