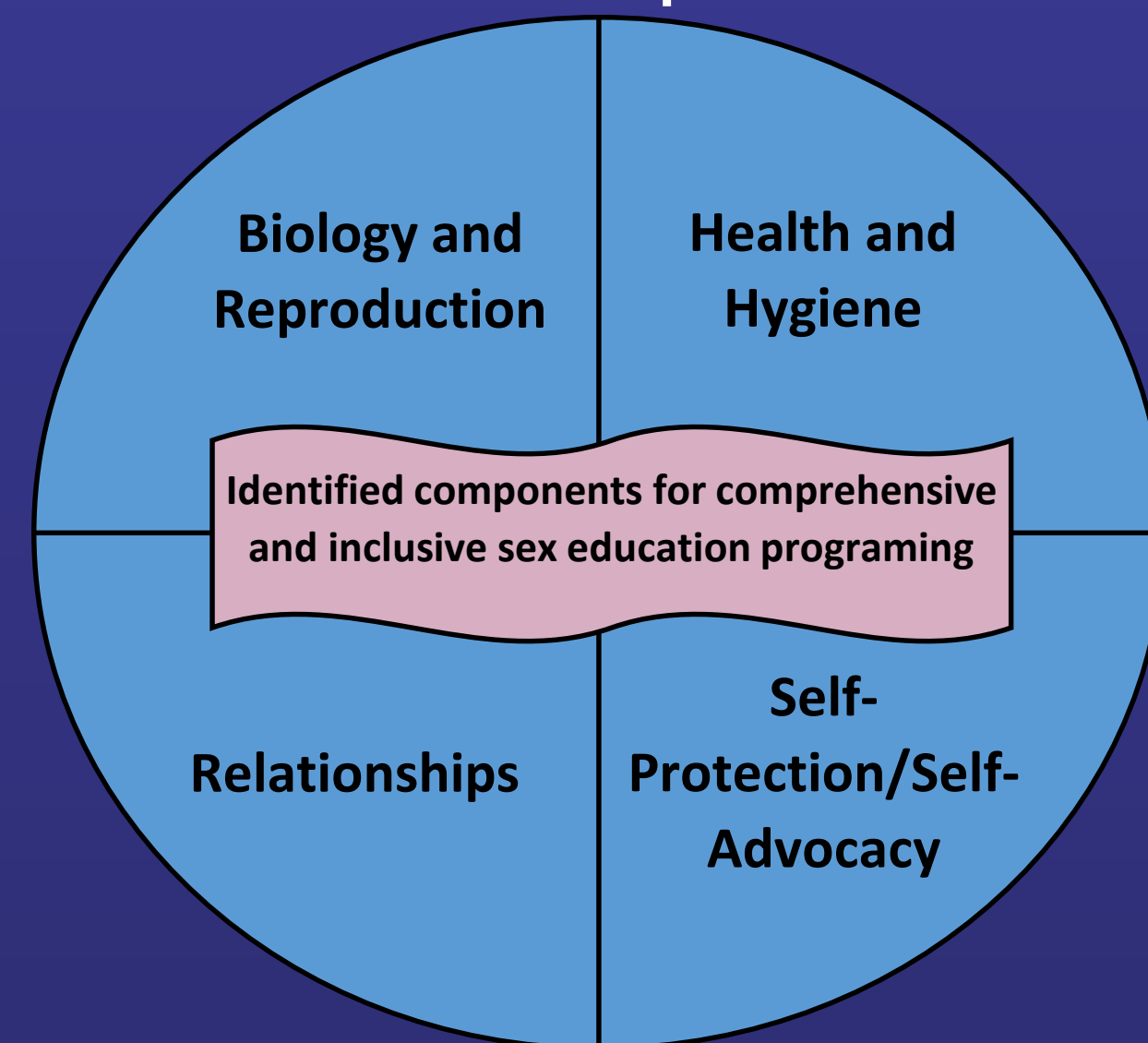


Background and Significance

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability in which individuals face difficulty in the areas of social interaction and communication.¹
- Individuals with ASD often desire and pursue romantic and sexual relationships just like neurotypical peers.⁶
- Social communication deficits inherent to ASD often impede appropriate learning of sex education from peers, teachers, parents, or media sources.³
 - This can lead to individuals with ASD engaging in unsafe, dangerous sexual practices or being victims of sexual abuse or assault.⁷
- Research demonstrates sex education curricula may not adequately address the sexual health and behavioral learning needs of individuals with ASD.²
- Individuals with ASD report greater variation in sexual orientation and gender identity. This may lead to additional challenges and risks faced in sexual development and well-being.⁵

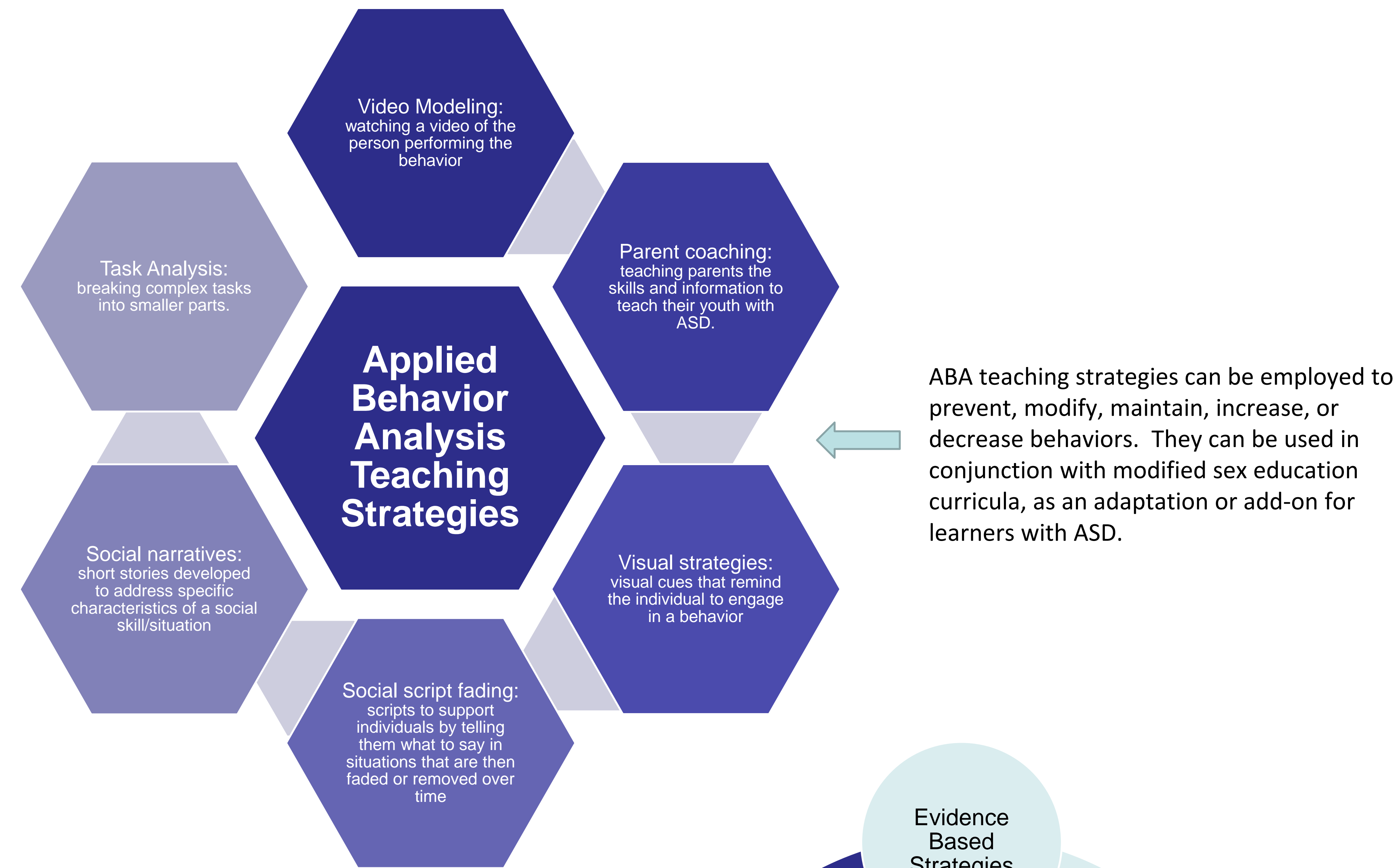


Research Process and Methods



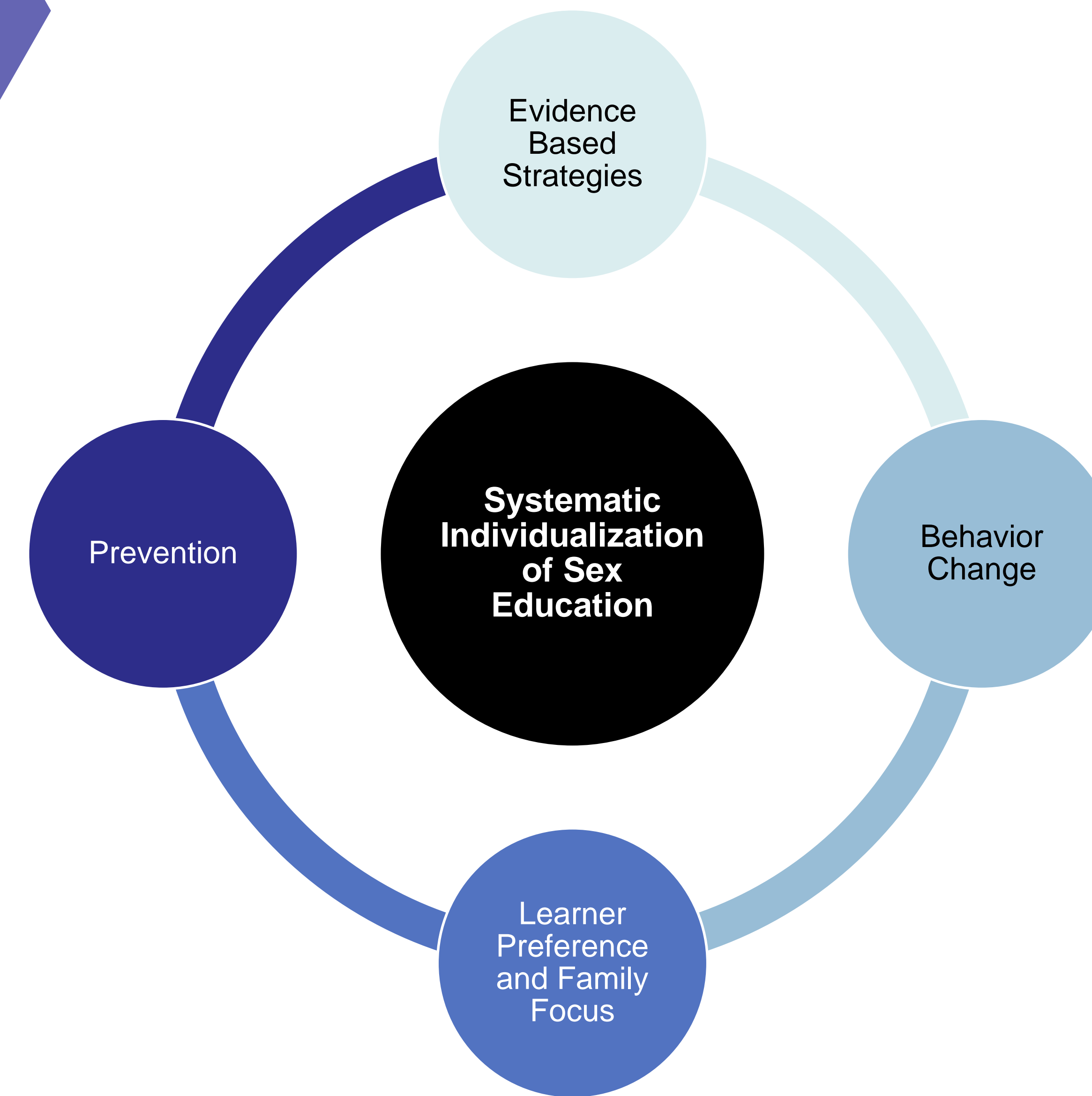
Making the Case for Comprehensive Sex Education for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Lindsay M. McCary, Ph.D, Madeline Barger, MS, LMFT, BCBA, CST and Sara Warner, PsyD



ABA teaching strategies can be employed to prevent, modify, maintain, increase, or decrease behaviors. They can be used in conjunction with modified sex education curricula, as an adaptation or add-on for learners with ASD.

Systematic Individualization of sex education involves identifying both learning and behavior objectives, that are guided by the learners' assessed needs and preferences. The learner includes not only the youth with ASD, but the key stakeholders in their environments, such as family and friends who will practice the ABA strategies together.



REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5)*. American Psychiatric Pub.
- Barger, M. (2019). *Sex on a Spectrum: ASD, sex education, sex education, and behavior*.
- Brown-Lavoie, S.M., Viecili, M.A. & Weiss, J.A. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2014; 44(9), 2185-2196.
- DaWalt LS, Greenberg JS, Mailick MR. (2018) Transitioning Together: A Multi-family Group Psychoeducation Program for Adolescents with ASD and Their Parents. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders; 48(1), 251-263.
- Dewinter, J., De Graaf, H. & Begeer, S. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2017; 47(9), 2927-2934.
- Hellemans, H., Colson, K., Verbraeken, C. et al. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2007; 37(2), 260-269.
- Stokes, M. A., & Kaur, A. (2005). High-functioning autism and sexuality: A parental perspective. *Autism*, 9(3), 266-289.
- Wolfe, P. S., Condo, B., & Hardaway, E. (2009). Sociosexuality education for persons with autism spectrum disorders using principles of applied behavior analysis. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(1), 50-61.

Summary of Information:

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA):
 - There are four **ABA-based instructional strategies** that have been proven effective for individuals with ASD. They can be applied to sex education curricula to promote greater **skill and knowledge acquisition**⁹.
- Parent Education/Coaching:
 - Parents are critical in teaching sex education topics to their youth, and **parent coaching** is an effective method.⁶
 - Parents and teens with ASD have reported **reduced stress** and **improved functional outcomes** during this transitional period with the implementation of this programming.⁴
- Use of inclusive practices:
 - Need to consider family culture
 - Need to develop programs that are inclusive of all **gender identities** and **sexual orientations**

Future Directions/Research to Practice Implications:

- There is a need for **individualized** and **effective** education related to sex and sexuality for individuals with ASD across the spectrum. *Recommendations for future directions:*
 - There is a need for **funding and resource support for research** and development of sex education programs for ASD
 - There is a need for **individualized and effective** programs utilizing **multiple teaching approaches**.
 - There is a need for curricula that are **evidence-based** and focused on **parent education** and multifamily group instruction.
 - Curricula and materials should be considerate and **inclusive** of the range of family backgrounds and cultures and the spectrum of gender identity and sexual orientation.