

Healthy and Safe Sexuality for Teens and Adults with FASD

Sexual feelings are normal and healthy. Youth and adults with FASD share the same physical changes and desires as everyone else but because of the brain injury, they are less mature socially and emotionally. For this reason people with FASD need extra support to learn about healthy and safe sexuality. Youth and adults naturally have a desire to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, to love, marry, or have a child. We can help them try to understand that not all of us marry, not all of us have children, and that relationships take a lot of work. We know that relationships can be hard for people with FASD. They become even more complicated when there are sexual feelings involved. Teaching and talks about sexuality needs to happen early and often. Sexuality is a sensitive topic and all talks about sexuality need to maintain the self esteem and dignity of the person. Issues of health and safety must be stressed. The young person must feel that it is safe to share such personal details with you. Problems around sexuality may arise. Here are some real life examples...

Example #1:

Your son is attracted to an older girl at school. She smiles at him and is nice to him so he thinks they are boyfriend and girlfriend. He follows her home from school and phones her in the evening. He has tried to hug her at a school event. His actions at first bother her and then begin to frighten her.

What is happening

Because of brain differences some people with FASD may have trouble reading social cues, facial expressions, or knowing who is a good choice as a partner or date. They may think of a friendly smile as a sexual advance and then respond with behaviour that is inappropriate to the other person or situation. Persons with FASD may be at high risk for committing sexual offences or being sexually exploited due to lack of understanding of social boundaries and socially accepted ways of showing affection. Be aware of relationships between older teens and younger children. It is important to stop all risky behaviour, like following or sexual advances before the behaviour becomes criminal.

Example #2:

Your son comes home from school upset one day. The next day you are called to the school for a meeting to discuss concerns about your son masturbating in the locker room at school.

How you can help

Masturbation is a sensitive topic. Occasional masturbation is not cause for concern at any age. People with FASD need clear direction about safe and healthy masturbation. Your son or daughter may have trouble distinguishing when and where it is OK to masturbate. A clear rule like "Masturbation is only done in private, in your bedroom, at home." This will help remove confusion between private and public spaces.

FASD Tip #17

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Please feel free to photocopy
and use these sheets.

Example #3:

Your daughter has a boyfriend. You have just found out that she has been sexually active with her boyfriend. You are concerned about her decision to be sexually active, her sexual health and about possible pregnancy.

How you can help

Persons with FASD may have trouble knowing when physical affection is right for them. They will need extra help from family and caregivers to stay safe and be responsible. Consistent and rigid social rules about physical affection work best, but this can be difficult as the rules will change as people grow up. Due to memory problems, a daily birth control pill may not be the best option. A family doctor can give information about kinds of birth control that do not need to be taken each day. This might be a better choice. A support person, sister, or trusted friend could attend appointments with a young woman and then pair the appointment with a positive outing like going for lunch. Teach that birth control is the responsibility of both partners. Condoms are effective birth control and also prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Whatever kinds of birth control are used, young women and men with FASD will need continued support and external reminders about how and why to use birth control.

Some Tips and Teaching Strategies:

1. Practice things like how to shake hands, hug and touch others respectfully.
2. Teach to always ask permission to touch. Never touch without asking.
3. Know where your kids are and who they are with when they go out.
4. Ensure that the school reinforces what is being taught at home about sexuality and that as parents you know what is being taught at school.
5. Use role play to teach about how to ask someone out on a date or how to say no to sexual advances.
6. Supervision is important. A trusted friend, cousin or sibling might be willing to double date or even go on practice dates.
7. Encourage young couples to attend family events, meet up with friends or get involved in community activities. Let others know to provide extra supervision at events like school dances or camping trips.
8. Be aware of the danger of the internet. Monitor internet activity, set time limits and set rules that limit or avoid chat rooms. Look into parental controls to block dangerous internet sites.
9. Talk about sexuality even if it is uncomfortable. If your son or daughter doesn't get information from you he or she will get it from someone else. If this is hard for you, find a friend or another parent to help you in this task, you do not need to do this alone.
10. When talking about sex, use language that is clear and simple. Use the appropriate name for sexual acts and body parts to avoid confusion and misunderstandings.
11. Rules about sexuality need to be simple, consistent, absolute, and concrete. For example, teach that unprotected sex is never safe. Always use a condom.
12. Demonstrate use of birth control methods and show what birth control looks like.