

## Handout 4—The impact of HFA/AS on learning about sexual issues

This tip sheet provides information on various areas that potentially affect how an individual with high-functioning autism (HFA) or Asperger syndrome (AS) understands and learns about sexual issues. These tips and techniques provide you with potential solutions and ideas on educating your child in the most effective manner.

### 1. Difficulty with how information is presented and understood

Individuals with HFA/AS learn best with concrete examples and/or rules that are presented in a step-by-step process.

#### Tips

- Present information about sexual development in small amounts. Have regular, short conversations about sexuality.
- Use simple, concrete, and basic terms when discussing sexuality with your child. Give specific examples and avoid abstract or overly detailed examples.
- Use visual aids, such as pictures, diagrams, or videos to help your child understand certain points.
- Role-play certain scenarios with your child to help him/her understand the information.
- Find examples from everyday life that can be used to reinforce a point.

### 2. Generalization

Individuals with HFA/AS often are unable to apply a skill they have learned in one specific situation to another similar situation by integrating the learned material and experiences.

#### Tips

- Ask questions in order to clarify what your child has understood. Discuss the topic in relation to different situations.
- Encourage your child to ask you questions during the initial conversation and in daily life as situations arise.
- Share as much information as possible to fully inform your child.
- Develop a list of key points on a specific topic. This list can serve as a reference for your child in different situations. Be sure that your child understands that not all situations or environments are the same and that different rules may apply.

### 3. Learning to communicate

Individuals with HFA/AS have difficulty knowing how to effectively express their needs, wants, and desires.

#### Tips

- Use the learning method that is most appropriate for your child in school (such as pictures, drawings, etc.) to communicate about sexuality issues.
- Role-play scenarios, such as facial expressions used when flirting, or potential conversations to have with a person they want to have a friendship with to increase your child's comfort in different situations.
- Have your child continually practice watching for nonverbal cues during daily life, such as at the grocery store or at the movies. Have a continual discussion with him or her about these nonverbal behaviors and what they mean.
- Role-play ways that your child can approach a group of peers and start a conversation.
- Help your child develop pictures or visual aids that can help them appropriately express how they are feeling in a given situation.

### 4. Sensory issues

Many individuals with HFA/AS are hypersensitive or hyposensitive to one or more of their senses. This interferes with how they interact within the environment and how their bodies function within an area.

#### Tips

- Teach your child techniques, such as muscle relaxation or visualization, that will help him or her relax in certain sensitive situations.
- Discuss with your child why a particular situation or environment is uncomfortable for them. Brainstorm possible ways to combat this discomfort.
- Develop creative solutions to manage the sensitivity, such as politely excusing themselves from a room or taking a deep breath to calm themselves and explaining the situation to a peer.
- If your child has a specific interest, relate this interest to methods of coping with sensory issues.