



SEX ON A SPECTRUM: ASD, SEX EDUCATION, AND BEHAVIOR

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MANAGING NEW INFORMATION

- Discussing sex can be a unique experience!
- Breathe!
- Write down your questions.

THIS CONTENT MAY BE PERSONAL...

- This presentation contains discussion of sexual material for the single purpose of uncovering sex education gaps and discoveries in clinical work.
- Use parental discretion about whether the material is appropriate for younger people.
- All individuals and details discussed in case studies from across the country have been de-identified to protect privacy and confidentiality.

TODAY'S AGENDA

- The Mission
- Research and Clinical Experience
- What to do with the information as parents and clinicians
 - Awareness of sexual practices (no assumptions)
 - Understanding sexual behavior as human behavior (science is science)
 - Learning differences in sex education (Individualize)

THE MISSION 1 OF 3

- As parents, teachers, and clinicians, we are all potential sex educators, behavior models, and resources for our children, whether we are aware of this or not.
- All children learn about sex from somewhere.
 - Accuracy and usefulness will vary.
- We learn from the classroom to the bus stop!

THE MISSION 2 OF 3

Research is showing that sex education curriculums may not be completely addressing the sexual health and behavior learning needs of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.



THE MISSION 3 OF 3

Today I want to lift the curtain and take you behind the scenes in sex therapy with individuals with neurological differences like autism.

One conversation inspires another....

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THE RESEARCH

- Challenge of Sex Ed. (Travers & Tincani 2010)
- Parents' Reports – Comfort Vs. Reality (Chan & John 2012)
- Sexual Practices of Adults with ASD (Clinical Practice)
- Misunderstandings and Knowledge Gap (Holmes & Himle 2015)
- Necessary Modifications

BEHIND THE CURTAIN



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WE ALL HAVE.....

- Sexual:
 - Experiences (large spectrum)
 - Desires
 - Thoughts
 - Ideas
- Regardless of our sexual behaviors and practices
- "Sexual" does not always mean erotic, can mean "Intimacy"
- Often we have needs for connection, friendship, and intimacy
- EVERYONE has some level of need for human connection

AWARENESS OF SEXUAL PRACTICES FROM CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Sex/Intimacy Topic or Practice	Behind the Treatment Curtain
What is it?	Something that comes up a lot in sex therapy OR An area of sexual behavior in which someone engages or has high interest
Social Constructions of "sex"	From hand-holding to sexual intercourse: anything can be "sex" (How do you know I'm not having sex right now?)
Touch and Sensory Experiences	Another spectrum: communication and safety
Objects of Affection	More common than you think – subject to misdiagnosis or labeling
"Roleplay"	Appealing because: consent is clear, scripts are available, scenes are structured and practiced
Self-pleasure/Masturbation	May comprise a person's sex-life
Special Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Orientation • Gender Identity • Online World



But.....

When a behavior becomes unsafe or needs to change for some reason...

LOOKING BEYOND THE CURTAIN



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WHAT'S BEHIND THE CURTAIN?

- No scary monster.....
- When we use evidence-based strategies, the sky is the limit, we can teach almost anything! We can support safe sexual practices while still meeting a person's needs.

THE LONG JOURNEY: ASD, SEX EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOR


- What we want to avoid:

- 1) Misdiagnosis or Misunderstanding

- ASD Considerations and Context (special considerations for self-report)
- DSM -Paraphilic Disorders example

- 2) Ineffective Treatment per Client Report Leads to:

- Decrease in Communication
- Increase in Secrecy
- Increase in Unsafe Behaviors
- Increase in Punitive Interventions (not evidence-based)



Make no assumptions about
someone's sexual needs, practices,
definitions, or desires.

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WHAT TO PACK FOR THE JOURNEY

- Clinical Experience:
 - Family Therapy (LMFT)
 - Behavior Analysis (BCBA)
 - Sex Therapy (AASECT Certification)
- The Parents Packing List:
 - Listening Ears
 - Reflection
 - Practice – strong evidence base
 - Call for Help as Needed

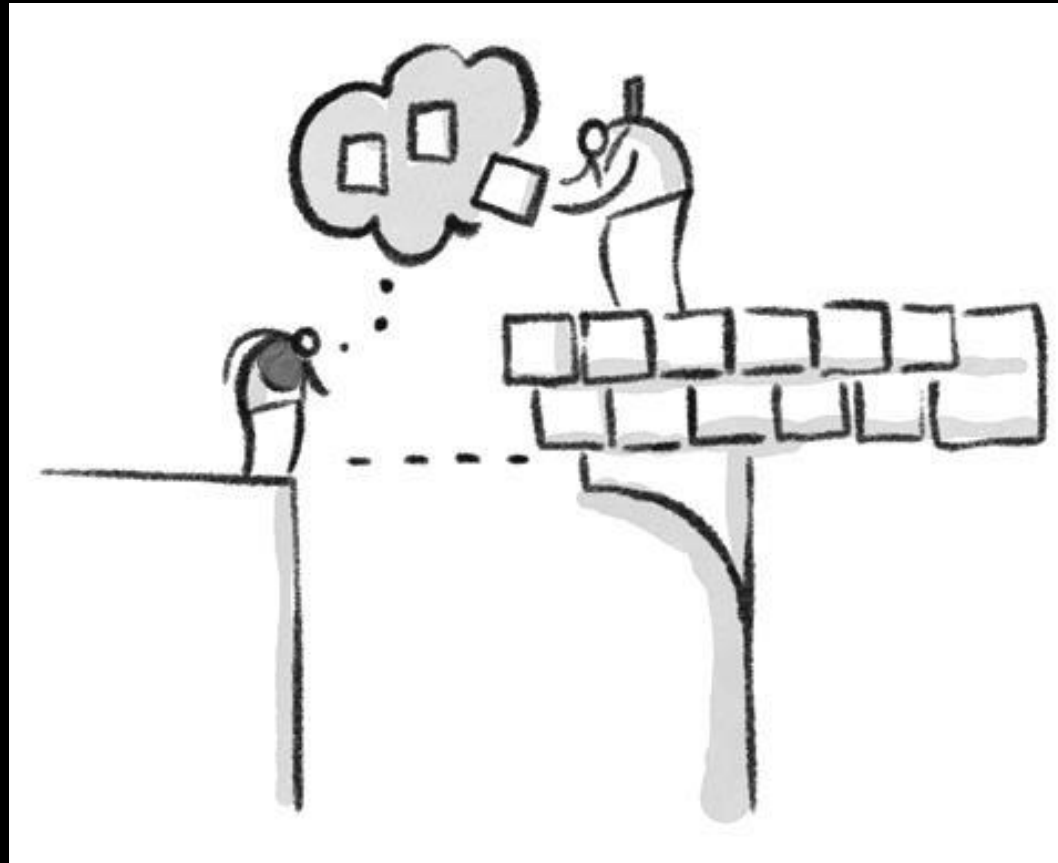
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IS BEHAVIOR

- Behavior Analysis and Family Treatment – A Model for Sex Education and Behavior Assessment and Change
- De-pathologize, Stop Judging, Observe, and Listen (Use your S.O.L.)
 - Is the Behavior..
 - Causing the person distress per their report ?
 - Causing family members or partner distress ?
 - Impacting their daily life:
 - Home life
 - Work life
 - Community Involvement
 - Safety
- Functions of Behavior – Must know function to replace behavior – *George and the Dreaded Dates*
 - Automatic
 - Tangible
 - Attention
 - Escape

LEARNING STYLES AND SEX EDUCATION

- Consistent with features of Applied Behavior Analysis
 - Discussion
 - Visuals
 - Videos
 - Modeling
 - Roleplays
 - Practice in Target Environment
 - Practice in Real life with Debriefs and In-moment Teaching when possible
- Case Example – First Dates

DISCUSSION – STEPS AND TASK ANALYSIS





VISUALS

VIDEOS – USE PEERS WHEN POSSIBLE



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MODELING



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ROLEPLAYS AND TARGET ENVIRONMENT



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DEBRIEF – AN IMPORTANT FAVORITE!



**KEEP
CALM
AND
DEBRIEF**

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TALKING ABOUT SEX INCLUDES...

- Knowing
- Feeling
- Doing
- Living

TALKING ABOUT SEX...

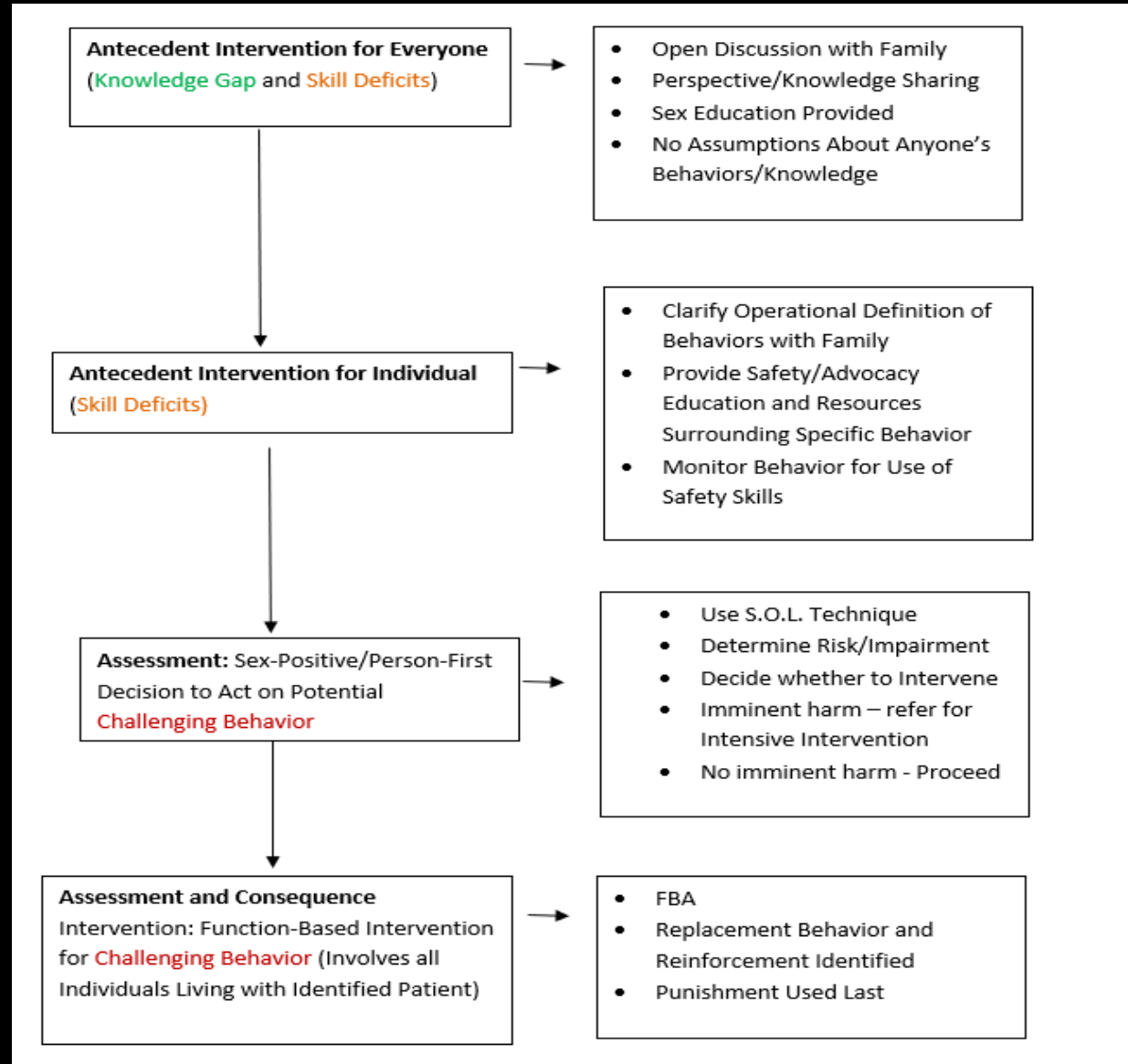
- Increases knowledge (KNOWING)
- Shines line light in the darkness that may include someone's shame and fear (FEELING)
- Improves behavioral outcomes (DOING)
- Saves lives (LIVING)

BOTTOM LINE

- “We need to consider alternative sexual lifestyles, behaviors, and case conceptualizations that are non-pathologizing, non-judgmental, person first, behavior focused, and with an emphasis on consent, social validity, and safety in intervention rather than recommending abstaining or removing the behavior entirely (without appropriate assessment and replacement).”

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BEHAVIOR ANALYTIC MODEL FOR SEX EDUCATION, ASSESSMENT, BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, AND FAMILY-CENTERED CARE





REFERENCES

- DSM – 5 (2013)
- Travers & Tincani (2010)
- Holmes & Himle (2014)
- Chan & John (2012)
- Wolfe et al. (2009)

GREAT BOOKS

- Our Whole Lives (Goldfarb & Casparian)
- S.T.A.R.S (Heighway & Webster)
- Sexuality and Relationship Education for children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Hartman)
- Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health (Davies & Dubie)

THANK YOU!



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