



ASPERGER  
CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## **Asperger Syndrome and Sexuality: What Parents Need to Know**

Dr. Jaime Fleckner Black

Originally Appeared in the White Plains Examiner and Putnum Examiner July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Adolescents and teens with Asperger Syndrome can be more naïve than their peers about sexuality and dating. Aspergers syndrome is associated with a number of social challenges, including difficulty developing peer relationships and a limited ability to understand what others are thinking and feeling. By the time most non-Asperger individuals begin navigating the road to a romantic relationship, they have had many experiences interacting with different people in a variety of ways. Though young adults with Aspergers are often immature, they reach puberty and tend to become interested in sex and dating at the same time as their peers. This immaturity places these particular teens at risk for a variety of dangerous outcomes. Parents need to be aware of these risks to prevent their children from engaging in behaviors that could have unfortunate and occasionally devastating consequences.

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome tend to have special interests that are unusual in intensity or focus. It is not uncommon for a child to know as much as a paleontologist about fossils, for example. For teens, sometimes the special interest is a love interest, and the teen may be accused of stalking or harassing. These teens are left feeling hurt and rejected, and they don't understand why their desire to know everything about another person is seen as creepy. Often they don't have close friends with whom they can discuss their confused feelings, so they rely on the media to teach them about relationships. Some males turn to pornography for sex education which poses numerous risks. Teens who watch pornography develop unrealistic expectations about relationship progression. When they are with women, they expect them to behave like the women in films. In addition, due to their emotional immaturity, many males with Asperger Syndrome relate more to a younger age group and therefore can be more likely to view websites featuring underage girls. This is particularly troublesome for older teens because viewing such images constitutes child pornography and is a felony. In the past few years, an increasing number of individuals with autism spectrum disorders have been incarcerated for downloading images of underage girls or for chatting with them online.

Girls with Asperger Syndrome have their own challenges as they enter their teen years. Having received little attention from other girls during childhood, they are often flattered to receive male attention as a teen. They may fail to recognize the sexual nature of a boy's interest. A common characteristic of Asperger Syndrome is difficulty understanding nonverbal communication. Because flirting is so heavily reliant on body language, it is often not recognized by the teen with Asperger Syndrome. Lacking experience and sex education, these females can be susceptible to sexual abuse.

Parents, teachers, and clinicians have critical roles to play in helping boys and girls with Asperger Syndrome learn appropriate sex and dating behaviors. Effective tactics include communicating the factual benefits of appropriate behaviors along with the risks of inappropriate behaviors, monitoring and giving feedback on computer use, and offering realistic relationship models. It is imperative for the safety of children with Asperger Syndrome that they receive sound instruction and structured support rather than learning informally (and inaccurately) from friends and media.

*Dr. Jaime Black is a licensed psychologist practicing in Westchester and New York City. In addition to providing general mental health services, Jaime works with individuals of all ages on the autism spectrum, doing psychotherapy, conducting evaluations, and facilitating social skills groups. Visit [www.spectrumservicesnyc.com](http://www.spectrumservicesnyc.com), e-mail [JaimeBlackPsyD@gmail.com](mailto:JaimeBlackPsyD@gmail.com) or call [\(914\)712-8208](tel:(914)712-8208).*