

Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Promotion with Autistic Youth

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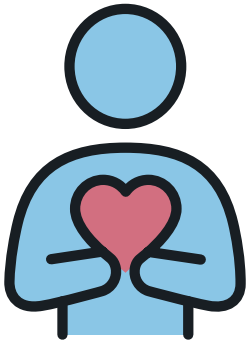
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Introduction

What is the project about?

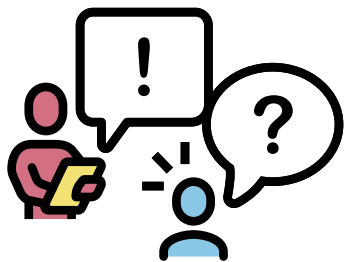


The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) did a project to make sexual health promotion better for Autistic youth.

To do this, SIECCAN asked:



- Service providers what information they need to know to support Autistic youth



- Autistic youth what information they need about sexual health



SIECCAN used this information to write the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Promotion with Autistic Youth*.

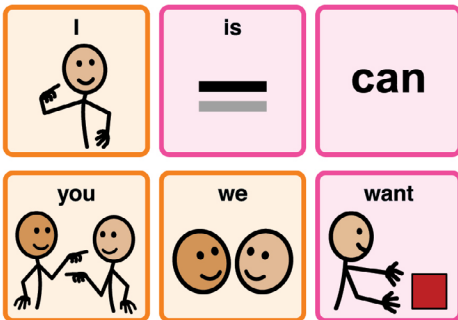
What is autism?



Autism is a lifelong condition that some people have. Autistic people have different ways of thinking and interacting with other people compared to non-autistic people.



Some Autistic people do not like certain sensations or too much noise or light.

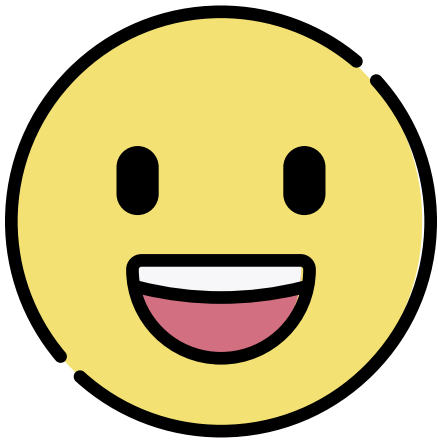


Some Autistic people use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to communicate because they do not speak at all or they only speak part of the time.

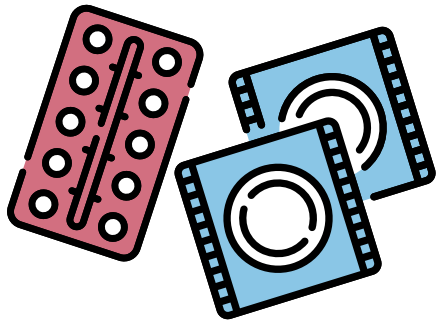


It is important for non-autistic people to learn from the diverse community of Autistic people.

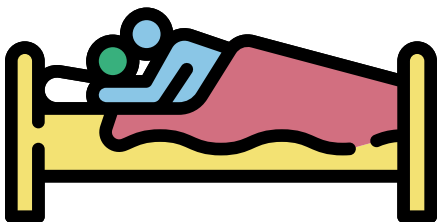
What is sexual health promotion?



Sexual health is when a person feels good about their sexuality. This means feeling good physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially.



Sexual health also means preventing negative things from happening like sexually transmitted infections or becoming pregnant when you do not want to.



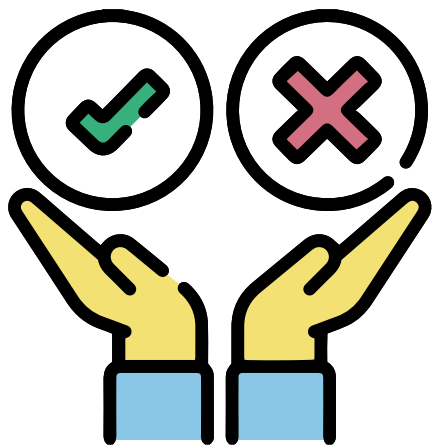
Sexual health promotion is about giving people what they need so that they can have a happy and satisfying sexual life.

Why is this project important?



Autistic youth need and deserve sexual health information and services, but right now, they do not have access to the supports they need.

By respecting Autistic youth's sexual rights and giving them the information and services they need, Autistic youth can:



- Make their own decisions

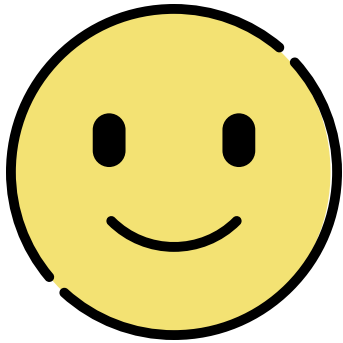


- Have safe and satisfying dating, relationship, and sexual experiences

Section I:

Importance of sexual health promotion with Autistic youth

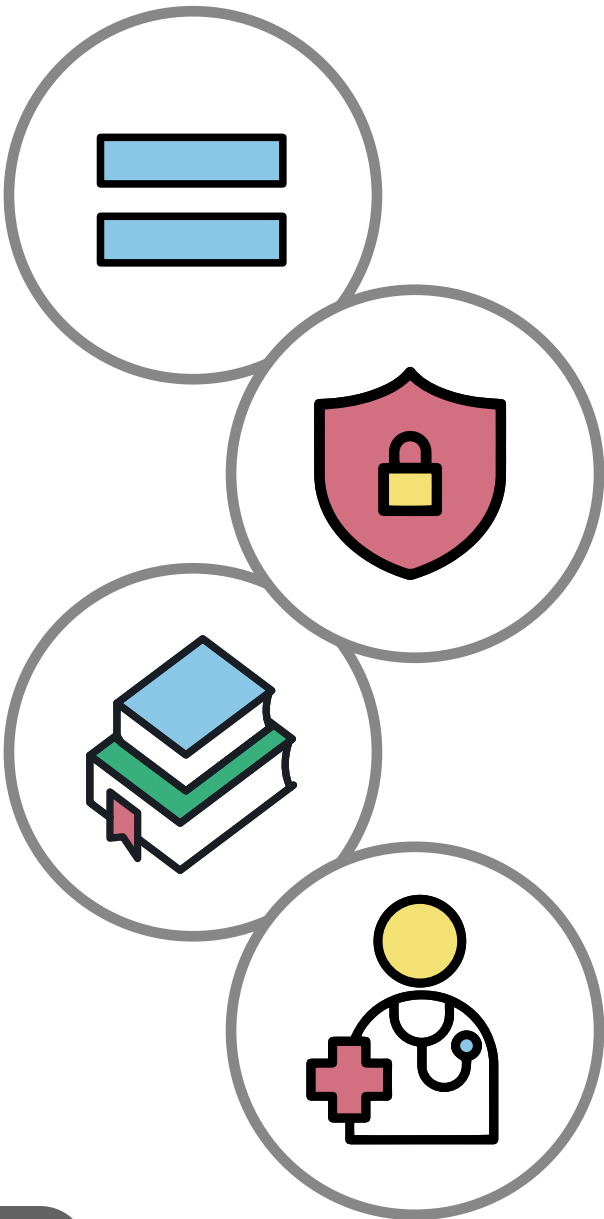
Sexual rights of Autistic youth



Sexual rights are about making sure people can express their sexuality and feel good about their sexuality. It is also about respecting other people's right to do the same.

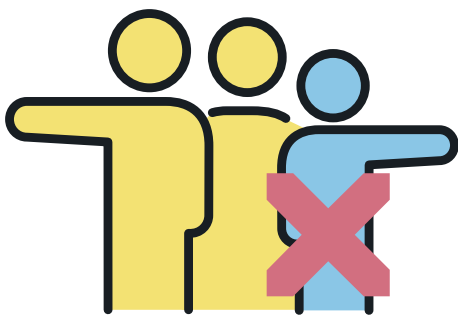
For this to happen, people's human rights need to be respected. Human rights include the right to:

- Equality
- Privacy
- Information and education
- Quality health care





The United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) says that Autistic people should have sexual rights. However, the sexual rights of Autistic people have not always been respected.



Many times, other people make choices for Autistic people and do not let Autistic people make choices for themselves.



Autistic people can make choices for themselves, including choices about their sexuality, if they are given the support and opportunities that they need.

For Autistic youth to have their sexual rights respected, they need to:



- Have access to sexual health information and services

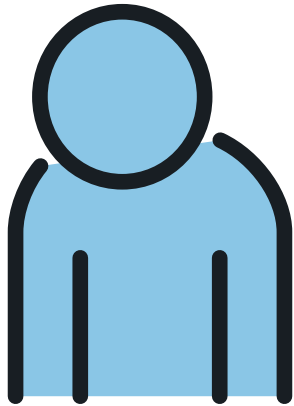


- Be able to make choices for themselves



It is also important for people in society to have a better understanding of Autistic people.

Improving quality of life



Autistic people's sexual health is sometimes not as good as non-autistic people's sexual health.

Some reasons for this include:

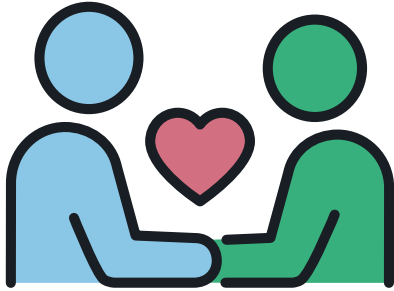


- More Autistic people than non-autistic people have been sexually abused



- Some Autistic people who want to be in a relationship find it hard to find a partner and to stay in a relationship

Some ways to make relationships better for Autistic people include:



- Helping Autistic youth and non-autistic youth better understand each other



- Supporting Autistic youth to communicate their needs and boundaries and have their needs and boundaries be respected by their partners



There are also some Autistic people who are asexual. This means they are not attracted to anyone sexually. This needs to be respected and understood by the people around them.

Preventing abuse



Autistic people can be physically, emotionally, or sexually abused.

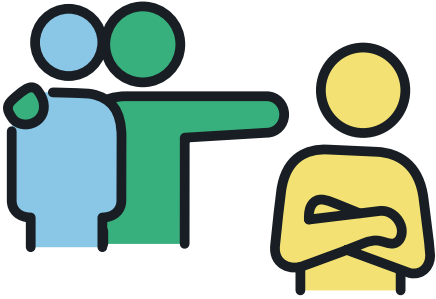


Sometimes, a person who is supposed to support an Autistic person takes advantage of them. Another thing that happens is some Autistic people get tricked or lied to by other people.



When someone is abused, it is important that they know it is not their fault.

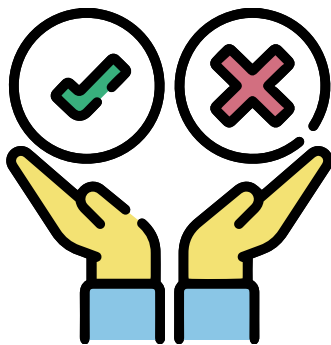
Some things that can help prevent
Autistic youth from being abused include:



- Doing more in communities to protect Autistic youth and making sure that the people who are supposed to help Autistic youth in their daily life cannot abuse them



- Giving families more support



- Teaching Autistic youth about boundaries, consent, and safety so they can make better choices about their sexual health and protect themselves

Section 2:

Barriers to sexual health promotion for Autistic youth

Ableism



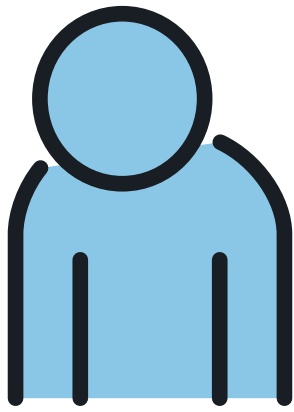
Ableism means negative beliefs or beliefs that are not true about Autistic people and disabled people.



For example, some people including some parents and professionals think that Autistic people do not like sex or cannot have sex.



Because of this thinking, opportunities to date, have relationships, and learn about sexual health are taken away from Autistic people.



In the past, most people thought of autism as a problem that needed to be prevented or changed.



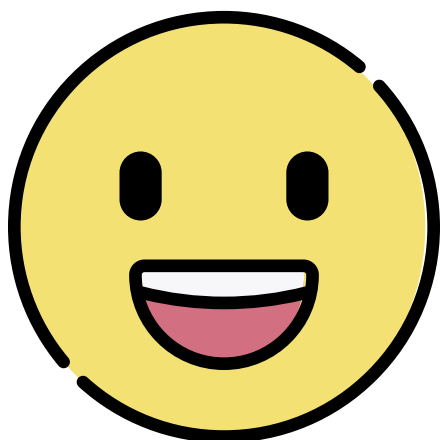
Because of this thinking, many supports and services for Autistic people try to change Autistic people so that they can act more like non-autistic people.



This is harmful to Autistic youth's self-esteem and can make it harder for Autistic youth to have healthy friendships and romantic/sexual relationships.



The new way of thinking about autism is that it is a difference that should be accepted. Sometimes this is called Autistic acceptance or neurodiversity.



When non-autistic people accept Autistic youth for who they are, it is better for Autistic youth's physical and mental health.



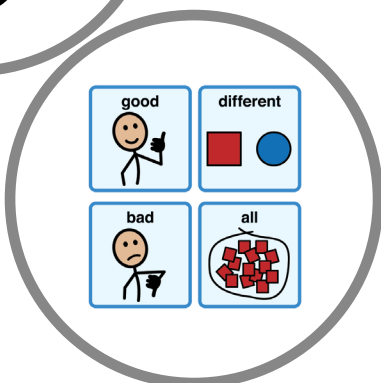
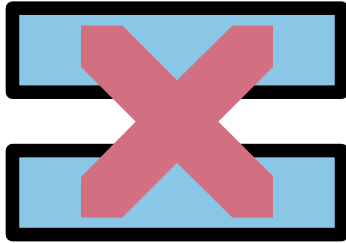
Non-autistic people can support the sexual health of Autistic youth by learning about neurodiversity and making sure Autistic youth have access to sexual health information and services that are accepting of autism.

Autism and intersectionality

Some Autistic youth experience more disadvantages than others in society and this can affect their sexual health. Autistic youth can experience ableism that intersects with other kinds of disadvantages.

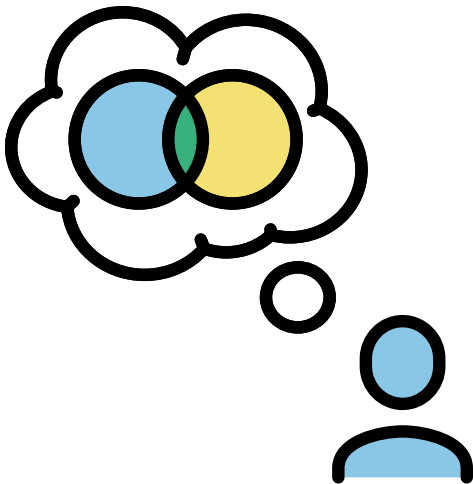
Some of these disadvantages include:

- Autistic youth who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour can experience racism
- Autistic youth from immigrant families can face language barriers and deal with cultural differences
- Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, nonbinary, and asexual (2SLGBTQINA+) Autistic youth can experience discrimination
- Autistic youth with an intellectual disability and non-speaking Autistic youth have less opportunities to make their own decisions and are more likely to not have their accessibility needs met



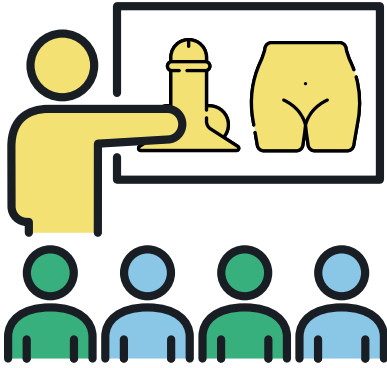


Autistic youth in these groups are more likely to be victims of violence.

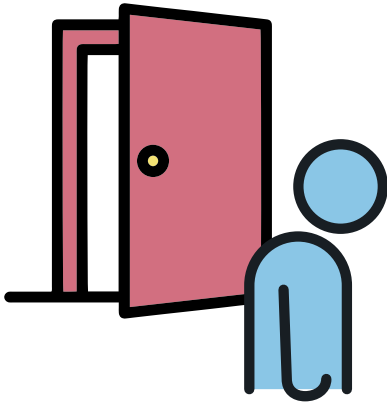


It is important to think about these intersections when developing sexual health education and services.

Sexual health education for Autistic youth

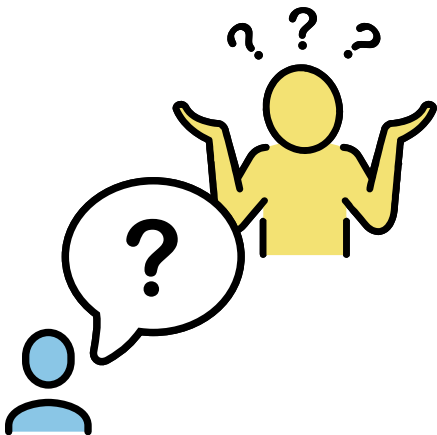


Sexual health education gives people the information they need to make better choices about their sexual health, but most Autistic youth do not get enough sexual health education.

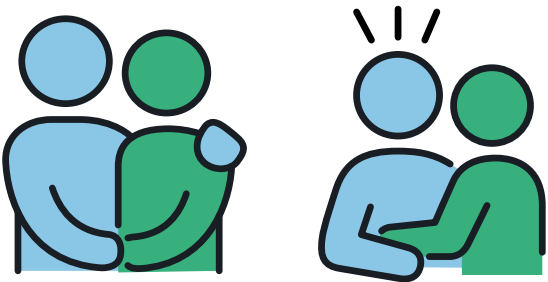
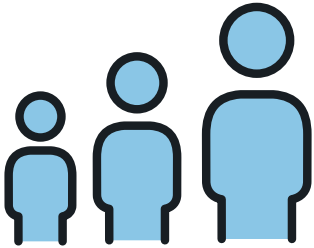
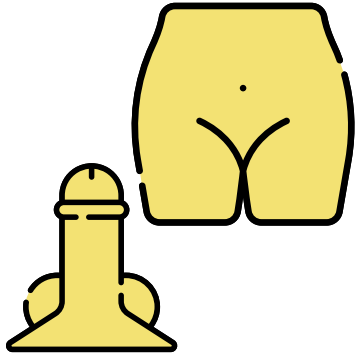


For example:

- At school, many Autistic youth do not get to go to classes where sexual health education is taught



- At home, parents can be uncomfortable talking to youth about sexual health or may not know how to talk about sexual health topics



When Autistic youth do get sexual health education, it is usually about:

- Body parts
- Puberty
- Good and bad touch
- How to keep their bodies clean

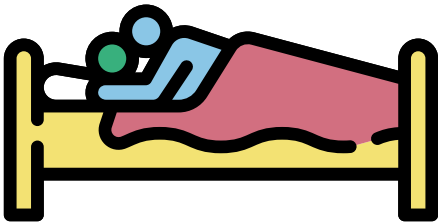


Autistic youth usually do not learn about other important topics like:

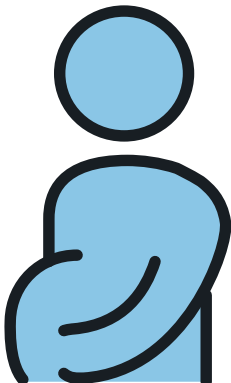
- Dating



- Relationships



- Having sexual experiences



- Pregnancy



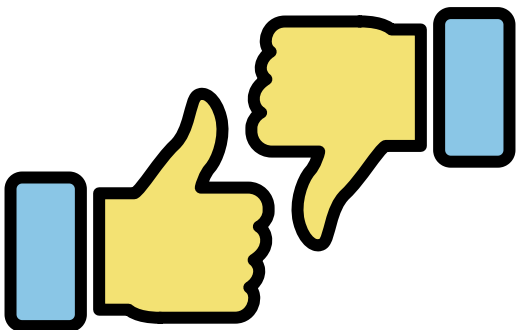
Because Autistic youth do not get the sexual health education they need, many go on the Internet to find sexual health information.



Going on the Internet for sexual health information can sometimes be dangerous because youth might talk to the wrong people or take in the wrong information.



It is important for parents, teachers, and other service providers to teach Autistic youth about the things that Autistic youth **want** and **need** to learn about.



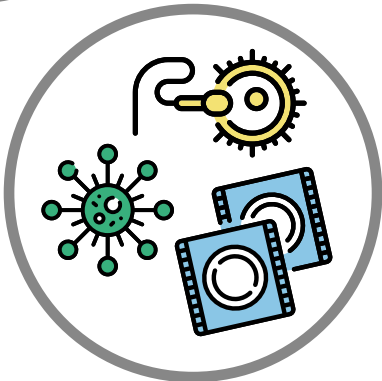
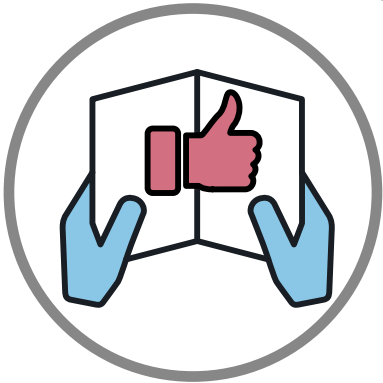
Sexual health education needs to include information about how to have positive experiences and also how to prevent negative experiences.

Section 3:

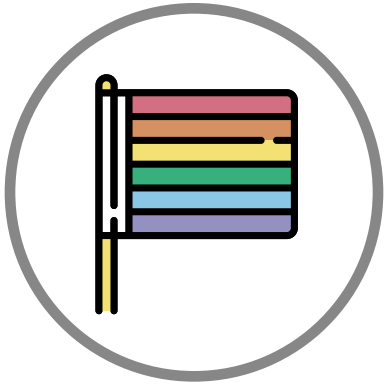
Important principles for sexual health promotion with Autistic youth

There are 14 important principles for sexual health promotion with Autistic youth that are listed below.

Sexual health promotion with Autistic youth:



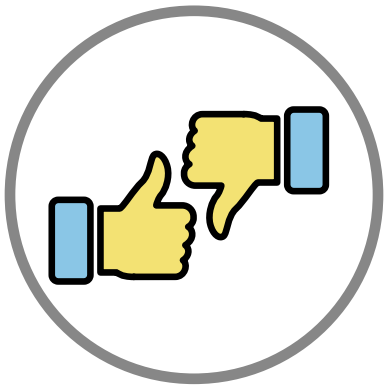
1. Is accessible to all people
2. Promotes human rights
3. Gives information that is true
4. Teaches about many different sexual health topics



5. Includes the experiences of people who are 2SLGBTQINA+



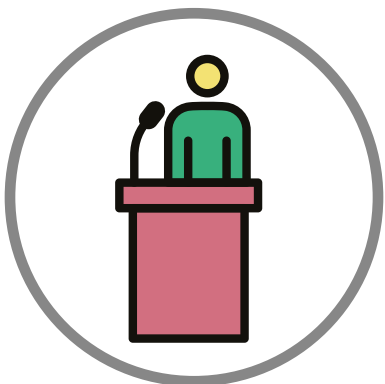
6. Promotes gender equality



7. Teaches about how to have positive experiences and how to prevent negative experiences



8. Teaches about topics that are important in the moment



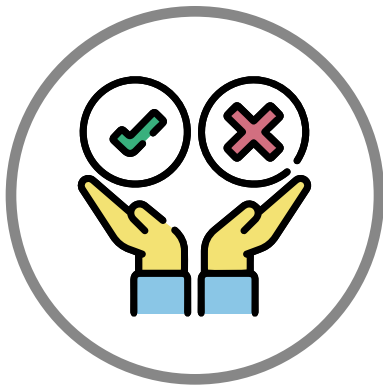
9. Is taught by people who know a lot about sexual health



10. Is accepting of Autistic differences



11. Considers how Autistic youth's different identities can impact their experiences



12. Encourages Autistic youth to make their own choices about what their goals are and what supports they want



13. Focuses on what Autistic youth are good at, to support Autistic youth in areas of need



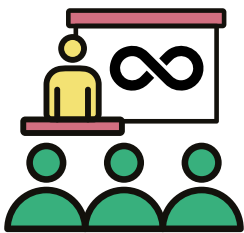
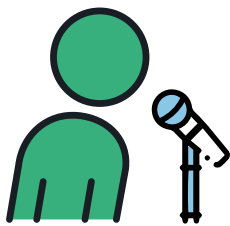
14. Takes extra care to not cause trauma to Autistic youth

Section 4:

Guidelines for sexual health promotion with Autistic youth

Guideline 1:

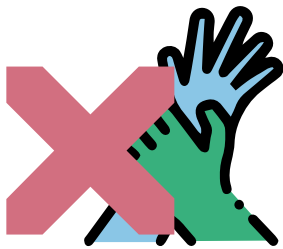
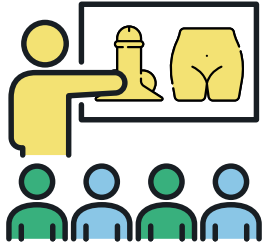
Promote Autistic awareness and acceptance



- Consider and talk about autism as a difference that should be accepted
- Use public campaigns to challenge ableism
- Give service providers education and training about neurodiversity
- Teach non-autistic youth to be accepting of Autistic differences
- Teach about autism in sexual health education for non-autistic youth
- Give Autistic and non-autistic youth opportunities to meet and get to know each other

Guideline 2:

Give sexual health education to Autistic youth



- Teach sexual health education in a way that all Autistic youth can understand
- Teach Autistic youth about their sexual rights
- Give Autistic youth more information about preventing abuse
- Support Autistic youth and non-autistic youth to better communicate with one another
- Give Autistic youth information about non-autistic differences, but do not make it seem like non-autistic ways are better

Guideline 3:

Give Autistic youth opportunities to help develop sexual health education and services



- Teach Autistic youth leadership skills



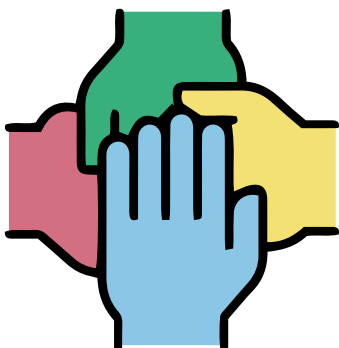
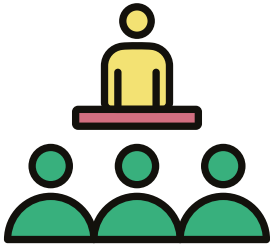
- Consult with many different Autistic youth when developing sexual health education and services



- Find or create opportunities for Autistic youth to be leaders in developing sexual health information and projects

Guideline 4:

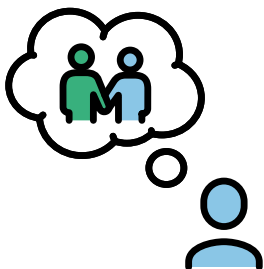
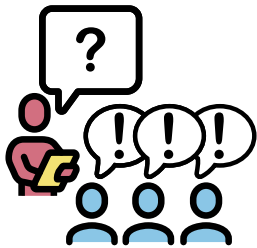
Help service providers and family members to feel more confident to promote sexual health with Autistic youth



- Give service providers training
- Improve abuse prevention and response in places that provide services to Autistic youth
- Service providers should support parents and families to promote sexual health with Autistic youth
- Services providers should work with parents, families, and Autistic youth to improve sexual health for Autistic youth

Guideline 5:

Do more research about the sexual health needs of Autistic youth



- Research about what sexual health means to Autistic youth
- Research about the kinds of things that will help make sexual health better for Autistic youth
- Research about the experiences and needs of many diverse Autistic youth
- Research about how sensory sensitivities can affect sexual health for Autistic youth
- Research about the challenges some Autistic youth experience in finding a partner or staying in a relationship
- Research about how to prevent abuse for Autistic people



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