

**PORNOGRAPHY AS A LEARNING TOOL? RESEARCH FINDINGS AND
PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
WITH AN AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION**

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**Mary Morgan and Jodie Harrison
NOTA, CARDIFF 2017**

Aims and objectives

- Overview of research and literature review
- Findings from an initial data analysis
- Findings from YP questionnaire re what is helpful and not helpful
- Working with YP directly around sex and relationships education
- Working with families to support YP in sexual health education

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Woodlands

Opened 1999

18 places for boys 11-18

Family work integral to programmes



Therapeutic
holistic
environment

4 houses,
independent
school, therapy suite

Good Lives Model

Young People and ASC

- In general population within UK it is estimated 1.1% will have an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) according to National Autistic Society
- Within Woodlands this figure is currently 25% but has been as high as 50% - including boys with 'significant traits'
- This may occur alongside other additional needs – such as learning difficulties and ADHD
- The Good Lives Model used within Woodlands is a 'strengths based' approach which encourages young people to prioritise 'Primary Goods' important to them and will include developing healthy interests and preoccupations

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What is ASC?

- ASC is an Autism Spectrum Condition
- Autism defined as ... a developmental disorder which identifies impairments in social interaction and social communication as two distinct areas. The other area of impairment in the 'triad' (Wing 1996) is associated with restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviours or interests. Whilst there have been subsequent theories focussing on providing neuro-cognitive explanations, primarily theory of mind, weak coherence effect and executive functioning, the triad of impairments remains key to the criteria for assessment and diagnosis.
- ASC crosses the spectrum of ability – from severe learning disability to high ability

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Why choose this research area?

- *Young people with an ASC appear to have a lower level of sexual knowledge than others within their peer group - Brown-Lavoie, Viecili and Weiss (2014).*
- *Difficulties in interacting and gaining experience of peer relationships – leading to their use of sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) to both gain sexual gratification and to gain sexual knowledge. DeWinter et al (2016).*
- *Gaining a better insight into the reasons why this group access sexually explicit internet material will help to inform the formal and informal sex and personal relationship teaching in education provisions and home settings (Beddows and Brooks 2015, Corona et al 2016, Visser et al 2015, Tullis and Zangrillo 2013).*
- *Improving our understanding would inform therapy programmes and the way in which they are implemented to provide most effective outcomes.*
- *Difficulties experienced by families and teachers in providing appropriate sex and personal relationships education. Ballan (2012), Baker (2016) and Kalyva (2010).*

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Research Aims

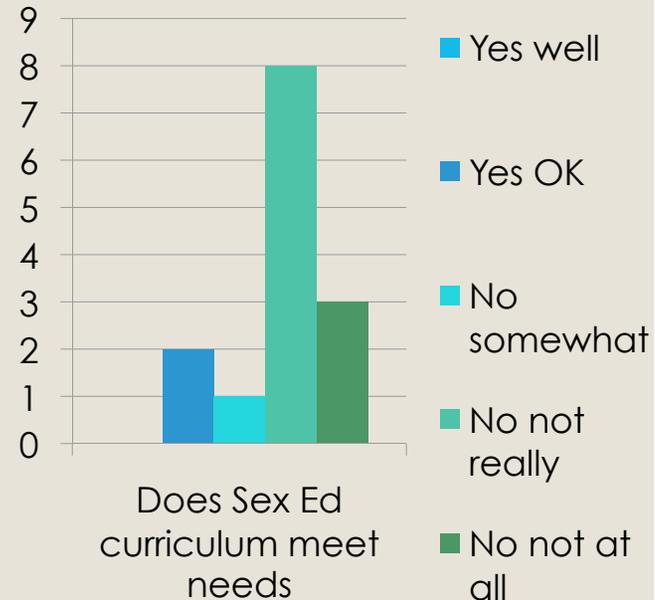
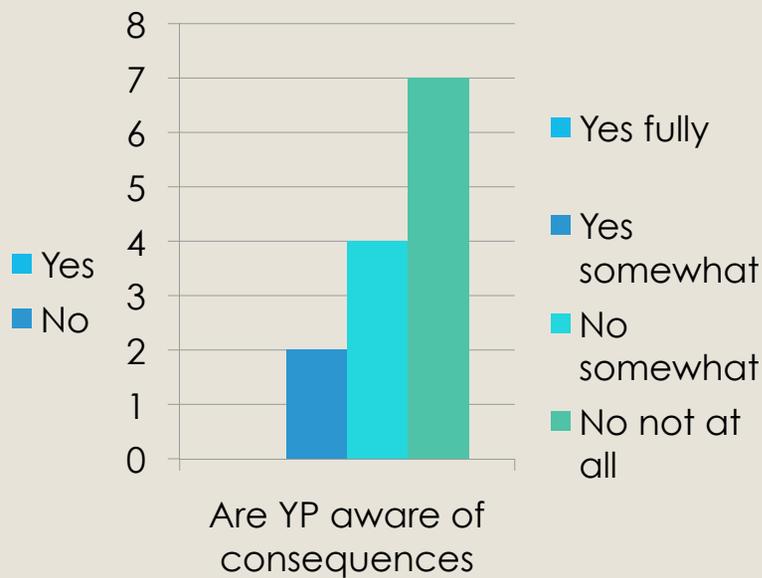
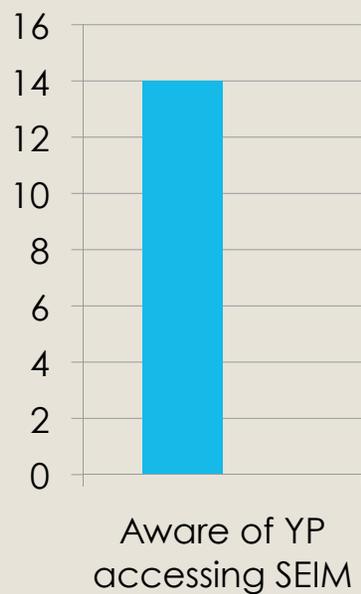
- *The research questions identified were:*
- *Do professionals supporting young people with an ASC perceive their use of sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) as a source of knowledge?*
- *Do professionals have concerns in relation to the young people's use of SEIM as a knowledge source?*
- *Could sex and relationships information be provided more effectively to young people within this group?*

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Overview of Research and Literature Review

- *There is a gap in the literature addressing the use of sexually explicit internet material by young people with an ASC and whether it is accessed for multiple reasons, including educative. This is identified by researchers such as De Winter (2015) Mattebo et al (2013) Mitchell et al (2003), Flood (2007) and Peter and Valkenburg (2006)*
- *There has been an increasing number of young people referred with either significant autistic traits or diagnoses of an ASC over time and some have self-reported using sexually explicit internet material as a learning tool, whilst others have appeared to become fixated on accessing sexually explicit internet material to view sexual images, still or moving. This is also evidenced in research undertaken by Braun-Courville (2009), Doornward et al (2015), Doornward et al (2016), Flood (2007), Gonzalez-Ortega et al (2015), Mattebo et al (2013), Mesch (2009), O'Regan (2011), O'Sullivan (2014) and van Oosten (2016).*
- *However most of the available studies have not focussed specifically on young people with an ASC - and if so have not generally been in community settings.*

Initial Data Analysis



Initial Data Analysis

- The professionals involved included Social Workers, CAMHS workers, Teachers, Therapists, Care Workers, Registered Managers and YJS workers
- Their responses were varied when looking at the possible reasons for young people accessing SEIM:

Curious 5

Influence of friends/peers 4

To use for sexual gratification 4

One link led to another 3

Watched it with parents/siblings 2

Easy access

To learn about sex and relationships

Enjoy watching it

Feel isolated – lack of peers 4

No supervision 4

Believe it to be normal for a person of their age 3

Not able to ask others 2

Accessed from a young age 2

Not aware of the consequences

Accessing SEIM as an obsession/special interest

Unable to control urges to access SEIM

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Initial Data Analysis

◦ Describing level of age and developmentally sex and relationships knowledge:

Knowledge and understanding appears to be below actual age 12

Often confuse difference between 'having sex' and 'being in a relationship' 5

Knowledge below actual age in many areas 3

Use of SEIM becomes their template for sexual relationships 3

Many struggle with basic relationships 2

Struggle to develop social and emotional skills needed for peer/intimate relationships

Find it difficult to generalise knowledge 2

Appear primarily concerned with own needs

May have had no previous sex education

Lack of positive relationship role modelling

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Initial Data Analysis

- Does current sex and relationships curriculum meet the needs of young people with an ASC?

They may have attended sex education lessons but not understood or processed the material delivered 4

Fails to meet the needs of this group 3

Subject not spoken about enough 2

The number of YP involved in the Criminal Justice System Not covered at home

Should start in primary school

Need more input before leaving care

Because of ASC not seen to need sex ed

Teachers not confident to deliver

Even if curriculum adequate, may be outweighed by previous life experiences

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Initial Data Analysis

◦ In what ways might access to SEIM affect sexual knowledge and attitudes of young people in this group?

Exposure gives distorted view of reality of sexual relationships 1 1

Struggle to distinguish real life from fantasy 5 More likely to copy behaviours seen 3

Distorted view of male/female roles 3 Women seek as weak and sexual objects 2

Normalises sexually abusive relationships 2 Can become fixated/preoccupied 2

Can have huge impact on behaviours and into adulthood 2

May rely on SEIM for sexual arousal Creates confusion and anxiety

May highlight/compound behaviours from home

Could become dominant, aggressive and disrespectful from SEIM influence

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Initial Data Analysis

- What approaches are used in your setting to support young people to develop sexual knowledge and behaviour?

Attend weekly therapy sessions 4

Discuss personal issues in therapy 4

Teach sexual knowledge and relationships, sexual development and sexual health 3

No access to SEIM 3

Monitoring of internet use in school 2

Concrete/black and white approach to providing info 2

Clear and consistent messages 2

Tailor intervention to individuals 2

Set ground rules 2

Work with other agencies and family 2

Challenge stereotypes and discuss attitudes 2

Work as holistic team 2

Strategies discussed in team/TAC meetings 2

Seek support from therapists

Clear school and classroom conduct rules

Discuss previous harmful sexual behaviour

Use TV/films as discussion points

Sharing of information helps staff to support YP

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Initial Data Analysis

◦ What improvements could be made?

Appropriate resources and support to be readily available 5

Schools to tailor sex education lessons for pupils with an ASC 4

Provide knowledge to parents and carers 4

Close network of support 3

A clearer understanding of needs and requirements of YP with an ASC 2

Training for teachers at primary and secondary levels 2 Attendance at youth group 2

Early identification of an ASC

Should start sex education in primary school

Relationship games in home environment

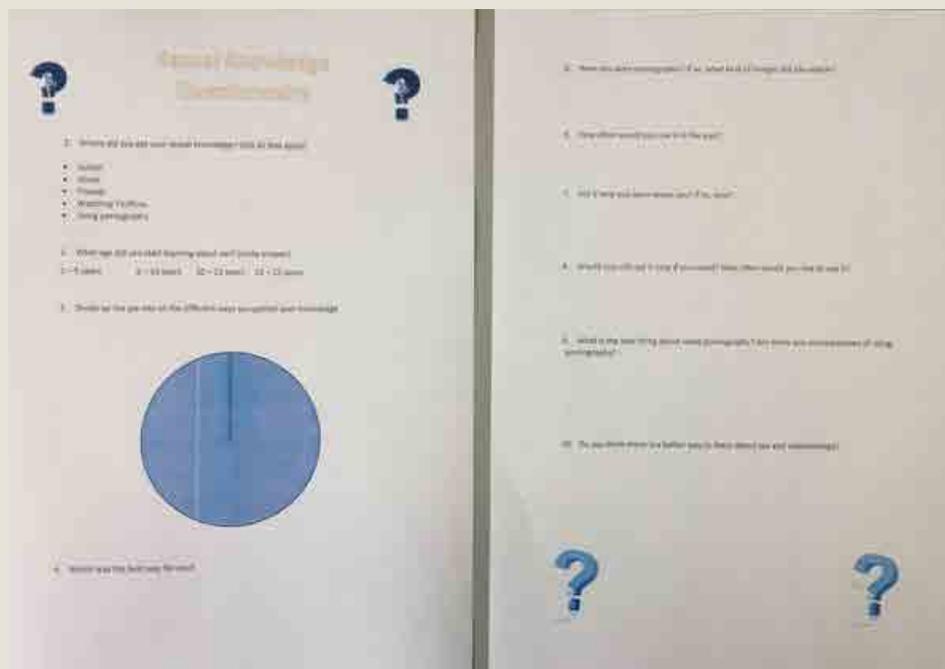
Social skills education

Clear consistent messages and rules

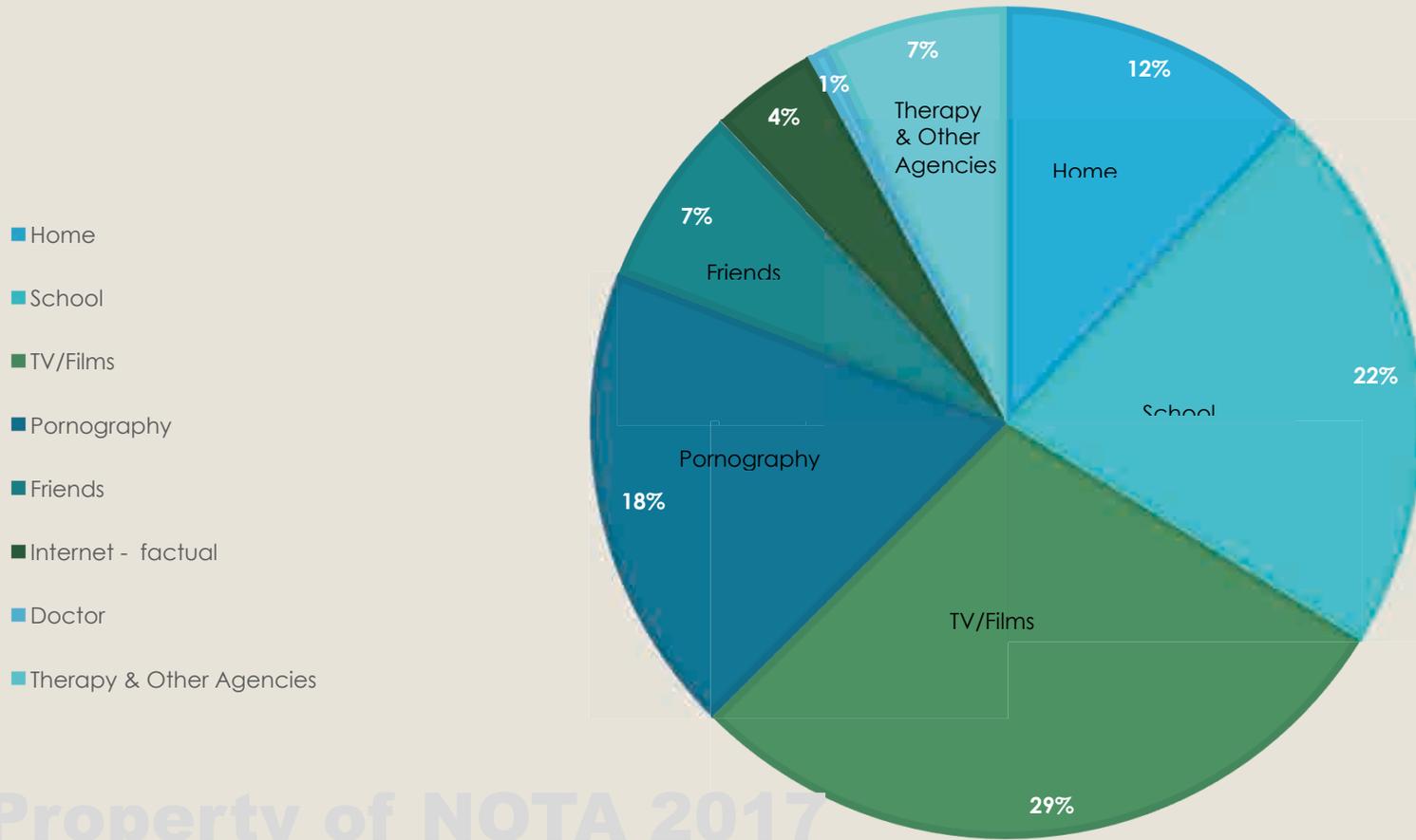
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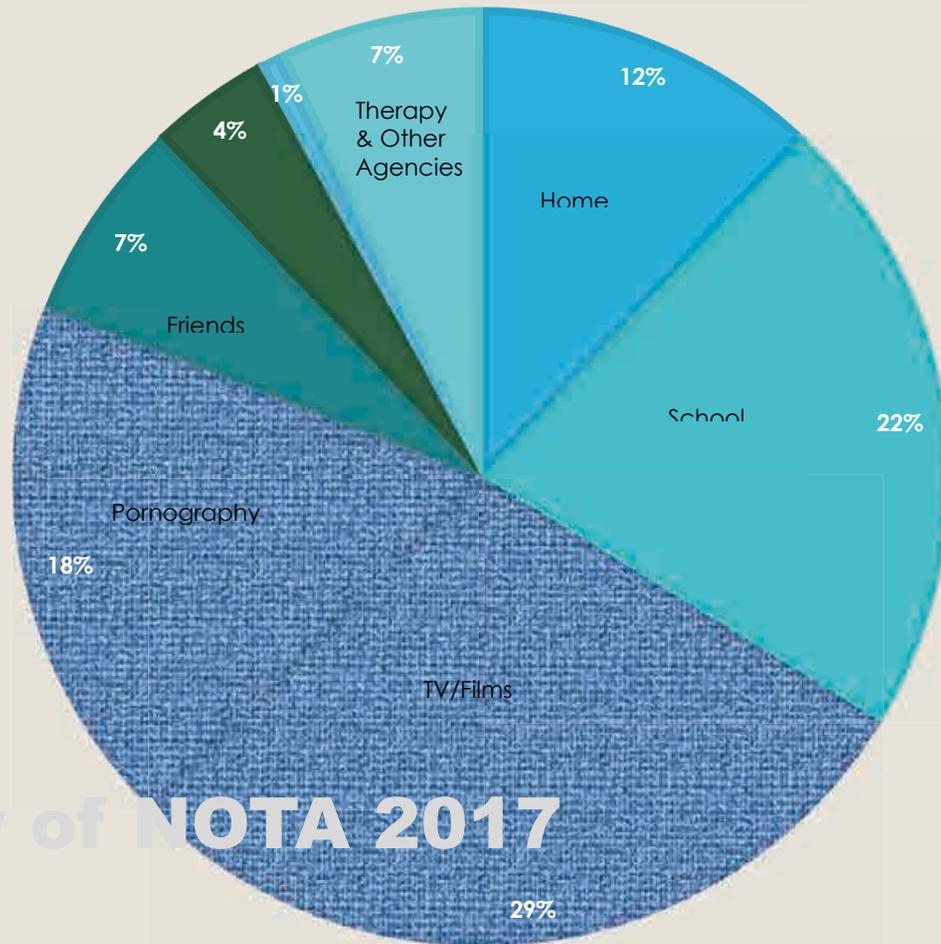
Information from YP Questionnaire



SOURCES OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE



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Data gathered

- 12 boys completed questionnaire. 3 boys declined, 1 boy was leaving and 1 was new to placement
- Watching TV and films, accessing pornography and sex education at school were the predominant sources of knowledge identified by the boys
- The age that they started learning about sex was for most between 10 – 12 years old, although 33% responded they had been between 5 -10 years old
- The majority identified school and therapy as being the best way to learn about sex and relationships
- Around 90% admitted accessing pornography and this included mainstream male and female, gay, lesbian, male and female multiple, animal, violent and forced sex
- Frequency of use varied from not very often to every day and would depend upon when they were able to gain access

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Data gathered cont'd.....

- Did it help them learn about sex? - Around 67% said that accessing pornography had not helped but others said 'it taught me about gay sex' 'it showed me what to do' 'it taught me things but also confused me' 'I learnt about older males' body parts' 'some of it is true – but some of it isn't' 'You don't learn anything – it's fake'
- Most said that they wouldn't use pornography now but their responses may have been influenced by the environment they are in currently
- Best things about using pornography? – 'I liked watching men have sex because it would give me nice feelings' 'It made me happy , I had orgasms' ' to get pleasure'
- Consequences? – 'It messes up your mind, teaches you bad things' 'It gets you into trouble' 'Makes you more addicted' 'You can get arrested' 'It would be embarrassing if your parents found out' 'It's illegal to watch underage' 'The police confiscate your laptop'
- Better ways to learn about sex and relationship? – Talk in therapy, at school and with family , read factual books

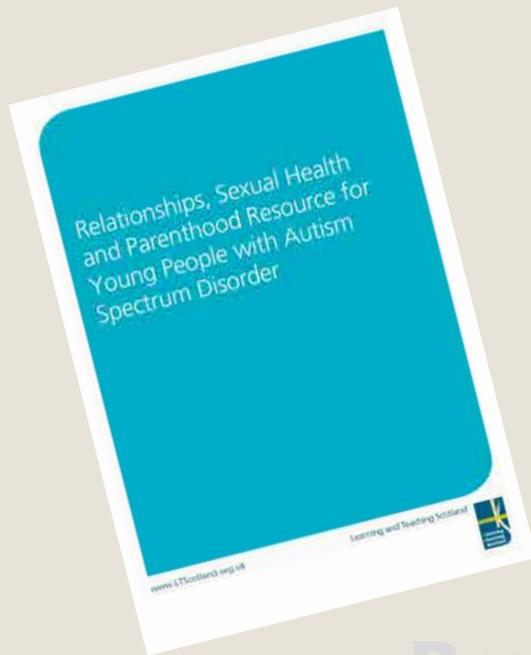
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What have we learnt from professionals' and boys' responses

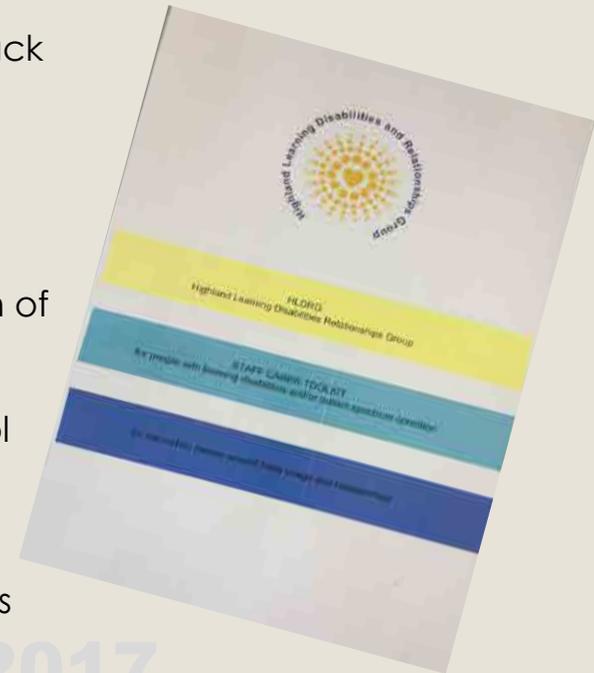
- Need to have age and developmental stage appropriate information provided at an earlier age
- Ensure that professionals, carers and parents are skilled up to have the conversations the young people are wanting to have
- Recognise the influence of TV and films to ensure appropriate access
- Limit/restrict internet access and provide supervision alongside equipping young people with the skills to keep themselves safe
- Provide education in concrete 'black and white' format to minimise misinterpretation or misunderstanding – check out regularly
- Need individually tailored programmes
- Require more direct social skills training opportunities
- Create resources to support young people and provide reminder for relationship rules
- Accessing SEIM gives distorted information

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Direct work with YP around Sex and Relationships



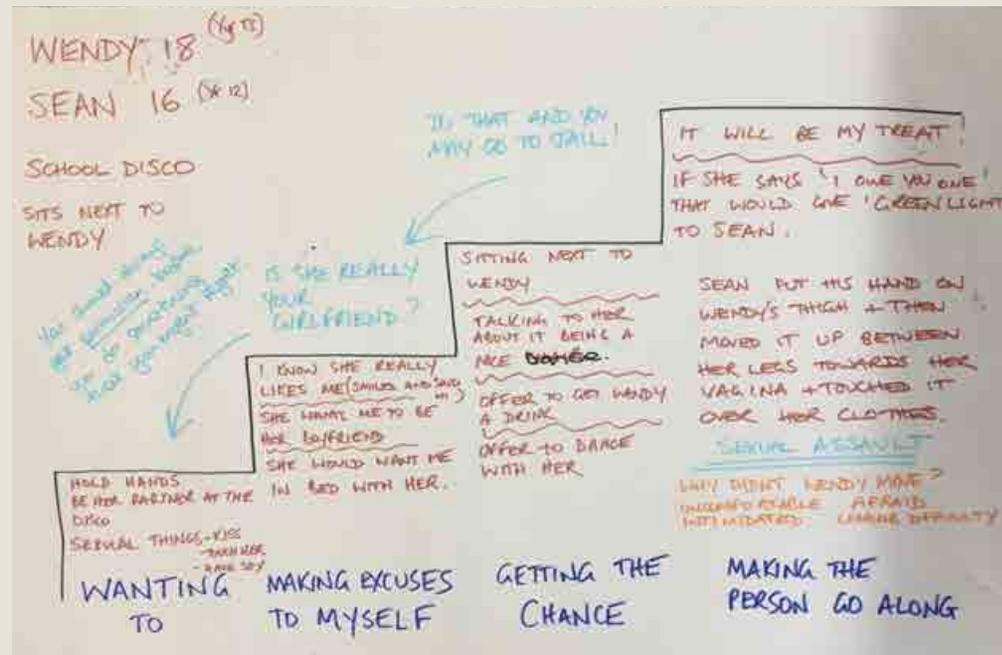
- Input needs to be concrete – black and white
- Individually tailored to the young person
- Repeated to check out retention of information and understanding
- To be provided in therapy, school and home to give a consistent message
- Use visual planners and reminders



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Examples of Direct Work

- Discussing previous harmful behaviour:



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Developing a therapy 'tool kit' with the young person to take with them – rules for life

Internet Safety

- Use your real name and real information about yourself.
- Everything you write and delete can be checked by the Police.
- Only message people you know. Only reply to people you know.
- Don't collect information on other people.
- Don't get other people's information or Facebook account details.
- You are not allowed to be nasty to other people.
- You are not allowed to send rude pictures to other people or videos.
- You can't use Facebook to do anything unlawful.

Important information about [redacted]

History

- He would like the following:
 - To continue seeing his family. He would like to see them as often as he can.
 - To keep his phone to keep in touch with mum, dad, gran & grandad.
 - To go to Granddaddy Manchester.
 - To go to college to do a certificate.
- He likes doing the following things:
 - Playing Xbox
 - Fishing
 - Listening to music
 - Reading factual books
 - Being outdoors
 - Gardening
- Autumn
- Things that make him happy:
 - People being kind
 - Doing the things he likes
 - Knowing what to expect, having plans & a routine
 - Planning change, don't like having no knowledge about changes, bringing the day before.
- It's very important that he keeps his [redacted] notes.
- Has had lots of support & practice with being assertive & needs to continue this.
- Things that make him annoyed:
 - When someone irritates him, when people don't listen to him, when things don't go to plan
 - When people are not confident with supporting him.

Rules about my personal space

In my bedroom I'm entitled to:

- Sleep
- Relax in my room
- Homework
- Independence time

People are allowed to say no. They could be offended. They could be embarrassed. and their stuff could be checked.

In my personal space it is mine, not yours, my age and men do not to look at.

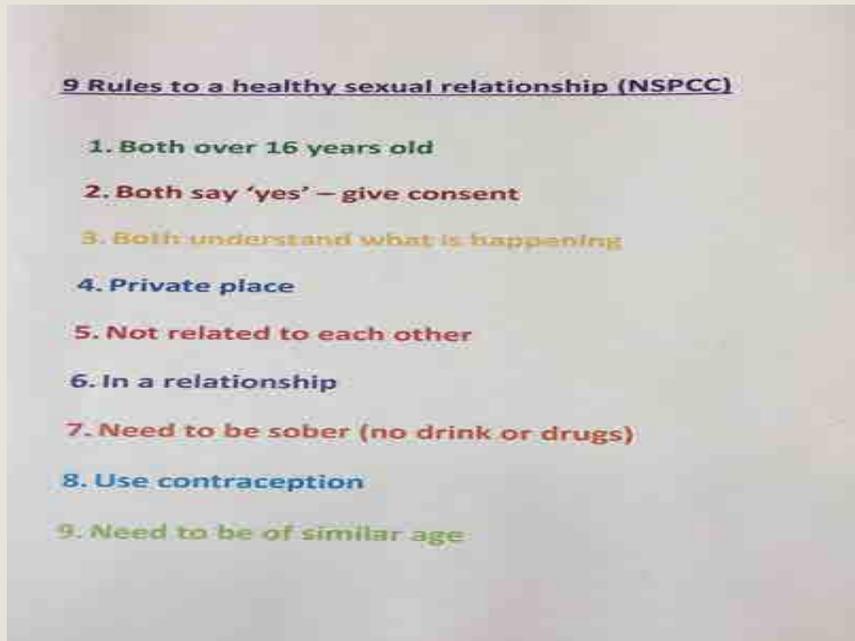
Care staff can come. Care staff are like a [redacted] and whilst at visits there is my [redacted] me, who can be in my bedroom.

- Don't contact people on Facebook from the Past.
- You can't create an account for anyone other than yourself.
- You are only allowed to have one account at a time.
- Do not allow anyone else on your account.
- Do not repeatedly contact people.

The people have to consent, be over 18 years of age, not be jointly read and be in a private place and the people have to be aware.

- If I feel like I am watching this too much freak to someone.

Healthy Rules



Would use '5 rules' with boys who do not have any additional needs but found this was too ambiguous for those with an ASC

Social skills are in individual and group sessions in therapy, within the school and in the house

Specific strategies and targets are set and reviewed in the monthly TAC (Team Around the Child) meetings

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Working with families to support YP around sex and relationships

- Support the family in recognising their young person as a 'sexual being' separate from any diagnosis and exploring potentially difficult discussions around sexual relationships, contraception and parenthood in the future
- Providing skills and resources to enable conversations to take place at home with parents or carers
- Working together to construct safety plans and manage risk within the family setting
- Developing messages across the life cycle
- Setting up and developing a support network with the family for the young person post placement

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Summary

- Individualised approach is key when working with young people with an ASC
- Individuals within this group are likely to need additional opportunities to practice social skills and to reinforce understanding of information provided – particularly around consent and boundaries
- It will be helpful for them to have some form of 'take away' tool kit to help remind them of important rules in terms of inter-personal relationships and emotional intelligence
- Working holistically within organisations, alongside external agencies and with families will improve the outcomes for young people with an ASC

'When you have met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism'

Dr Steve Tyler, Manchester Metropolitan University

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Selected Reading List

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