



2023-1-EL01-KA220-VET-000153647

## Feel, Address, Contemplate, Talk & Share

Work Package 2

December 2024

## Training Curriculum

| Developed by: | Assessed by:                 |
|---------------|------------------------------|
|               | Cyprus Certification Company |

# Contents

- Contents
- Introduction
- Introduction to the F.A.C.T.S project and its Curriculum
- Curriculum of the F.A.C.T.S. Project
- Aims of the Training
- Who is This Training For?
- Purpose and Structure of the Training
- Guidelines for Professionals
- Suggested Recommendations for the group meetings
- Suggested Principles for Professionals
- Suggested Teaching Methodologies & Training Tools
- Content Outline
- Module 1: Awareness of the body
  - Short description
  - Duration
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Module 2: Gender Identity and Gender Expression
  - Short description
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Module 3: Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation
  - Short description
  - Duration
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Module 4: Sexual Relationships
  - Short description
  - Duration
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Module 5: Challenges in Sexuality
  - Short description
  - Duration
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Module 6: Safety in Sexuality
  - Short description
  - Duration
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Module Contents
- Examples of Methodologies and tools for goals of each module
- Accessible Guide for Autistic Beneficiaries: Suggested Principles and Recommendations
- General guidelines and principles for administrative/ general staff
- 10 Best Practices
- References

# Introduction

## Introduction to the F.A.C.T.S project and its Curriculum

### 1. Introduction

The F.A.C.T.S. project was born from the observation that many autistic individuals express a need to discuss gender and sexuality-related issues. However, professionals often struggle to address these topics due to a lack of knowledge and appropriate training. Research has shown that autistic individuals are more likely to experience diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and they frequently face challenges such as lower gender self-esteem, gender dysphoria, and increased risks of bullying and harassment. The F.A.C.T.S. project aims to equip professionals with the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to support autistic individuals in navigating these issues, fostering a deeper understanding of sexuality and gender diversity. By updating practices in vocational education centers, the project seeks to enhance the well-being and quality of life for autistic beneficiaries by addressing sexuality, gender identity, and relationships in a more holistic, informed, and supportive way.

The F.A.C.T.S project emphasises the importance of understanding the influence of parents' and caregivers' beliefs and biases in the development of an autistic person's sexual identity.

### 2. Curriculum of the F.A.C.T.S. Project

The F.A.C.T.S. project curriculum is designed to provide a comprehensive guide for professionals working with autistic individuals, particularly in the context of sexuality and gender issues. The curriculum focuses on:

- **Learning and Understanding:** Professionals will receive academic knowledge and insights from clinical research, aimed at deepening their understanding of sexuality in autistic populations. This includes a state-of-the-art report and the development of a curriculum that synthesizes the latest evidence and practices.
- **Addressing Misconceptions:** Through role-play and experiential activities, professionals will learn how to address and correct misconceptions about the behaviour of autistic individuals related to gender and sexuality.
- **Gender and Sexual Diversity:** The curriculum will include content on gender roles, feminism, masculinity, and sexual orientation, aimed at helping professionals engage in more informed, respectful conversations with their autistic beneficiaries.

- **Supporting Autonomy:** Professionals will be trained to respect and support the decisions of autistic individuals regarding their sexual identity and orientation, ensuring that these individuals are treated as equal members of society.
- **Promoting Sexual Well-being:** The program will focus on fostering positive sexual well-being by improving the self-esteem and gender identification of autistic individuals, thereby enhancing their psychological health and overall quality of life.
- **Preventing Inappropriate Behaviours and Victimization:** A key element of the curriculum will involve helping professionals prevent inappropriate sexual behaviour, sexual harassment, and bullying, ensuring that autistic individuals are able to express their sexuality in a healthy and safe manner.

The F.A.C.T.S. curriculum will be also available through an online platform, supplemented by educational videos and practical guidelines. The professionals will have access to all training material, ensuring them better understanding and coping with gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual relationship, safety etc. of neurodivergent people. In addition, an important part of the curriculum consists of two chapters, one with basic guidelines and principles addressed to professionals supporting autistic beneficiaries in sexuality issues, and the other one to administrative, and general staff of vocational centres, on how to manage, intake and refer to gender and sexuality-related issues.

### 3. Aims of the Training

The primary goal of the F.A.C.T.S. project training is to enhance the skills and knowledge of professionals working with autistic individuals in the area of gender and sexuality. The training aims to:

- Equip professionals with the latest knowledge on sexual identity and gender diversity in autistic populations.
- Address misconceptions and biases that professionals may hold, promoting a more respectful and inclusive approach to supporting autistic individuals.
- Promote the psychological well-being and healthy socio-sexual functioning of autistic individuals by empowering them to understand and express their gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Provide professionals with practical tools and strategies to prevent inappropriate sexual behaviour, sexual harassment, and bullying, and to support the development of positive sexual behaviours and relationships.
- Encourage awareness and understanding of the role that parents, caregivers, and social environments play in shaping an autistic individual's

experience of gender and sexuality.

#### 4. Who is This Training For?

The F.A.C.T.S. project training is designed for two key target groups:

- **Direct Target Group:** Professionals working with autistic individuals, particularly in vocational education centers, mental health services, and care facilities. These professionals will be trained to incorporate gender-informed practices into their daily work with autistic beneficiaries.
- **Indirect Target Group:** Autistic individuals who will benefit from the enhanced knowledge and support provided by trained professionals. These individuals will also play a significant role in the research and development of the training, providing insights into their experiences of gender identity, sexual orientation, and expression.

#### Important note!

#### Words about autism: Dos and DON'TS

Language is important because it embodies, and can therefore help change, attitudes towards autism.

It is important to use language that is respectful of autistic people's identity, sensitivity, and self-representation. What words do autistic people prefer to use to describe themselves? **What is community-preferred phrasing and wording?**

In the autism community, there are two main different approaches when it comes to this matter. **Identity-first language** understands autism as an inherent part of an individual identity and therefore uses it as an identifier by saying '**autistic person/people**'. On the contrary, **person-first language** considers autism as merely an addition to an individual identity that shouldn't come first by saying '**person/people with autism**'.

Using one approach or the other is a matter of preference. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities uses person-first language, for example. Recent studies in the United Kingdom, however, found out that **most people on the autism spectrum prefer identity-first language**.

A piece of research published in the *Autism Journal* in 2015 looked at the preferences of people on the autism spectrum, their families, friends, and professionals around the language used to describe autism. The research was conducted by the National Autistic Society (NAS), the Royal College of General Practitioners (GPs), and the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education.

The findings confirmed that there is no single term that everyone prefers. However, they suggest a shift towards more positive and assertive language, particularly among autistic communities **where autism is seen as integral to the person's identity.**

Survey responses from 3,470 people were analysed, including 502 autistic adults, 2,207 parents of children and adults on the autism spectrum, 1,109 professionals, and 380 extended family members and friends. The survey found that all groups liked the terms 'on the autism spectrum'. Autistic adults liked the identity-first terms 'autistic' and 'Aspie', whereas families didn't like 'Aspie'. Be careful, though: even if some autistic people refer to themselves and one another as an 'autist' / 'autie' / 'aspie', it is often considered less acceptable when used by a neurotypical person.

According to the 2015 research, professionals like the term 'autism spectrum disorder (ASD)'. Be careful, though: even if the term ASD is widely used by many professionals, it would be preferable to avoid the negative connotation of 'disorder' when referring to autism, when not used in a diagnostic or similar context.

The survey responses also showed that some terms were strongly disliked or no longer used, particularly 'low functioning', 'Kanner's autism', and 'classic autism'.

To reflect the findings of this research, the NAS has begun to gradually increase the use of the term 'autistic person' and 'on the autism spectrum' as the default way of describing autistic people.

**In brief, here's a short recap on DOs and DON'Ts according to Autism-Europe guidelines on acceptable language:**

#### **DOs**

- **Autistic person/people** (Identity-first language)
- (Potentially also, if contextually appropriate) **people on the autism spectrum**

#### **DON'Ts**

- **Suffering from / being a victim of autism**
- **Kanner's autism**
- **Having autism / an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**
- **Disease / illness** – Use 'disability' or 'condition' instead.
- **Retarded / mentally handicapped / backward** – These are insults! Use 'person with disability' instead.
- **Normally developing people** – Use 'neurotypical'.

Information available on Autism-Europe's website:

## 5. Purpose and Structure of the Training

The overarching purpose of the F.A.C.T.S. project training is to promote the healthy sexual and gender development of autistic individuals through a structured and well-researched educational program for professionals. The training will:

- **Focus on Evidence-Based Practices:** The training is grounded in recent research and clinical findings, ensuring that professionals receive up-to-date and scientifically supported information.
- **Multimodal Delivery:** Traditional educational methods will be combined with innovative techniques, such as role-playing, experiential activities, focus groups, and the use of digital platforms. This approach will increase the engagement of professionals and ensure that the material is both accessible and practical.
- **Transnational and Collaborative Approach:** Given that sexuality and gender are influenced by cultural factors, the training will benefit from the involvement of organizations from multiple countries. The transnational nature of the project will allow for the exchange of best practices and insights from different cultural perspectives, ensuring a well-rounded curriculum.
- **Certification and Standardization:** The training program will be assessed and adapted to European standards by a certification company, ensuring its credibility and transferability across different professional contexts.

The structure of the training will be flexible, allowing professionals to access resources through an online platform, complete with guidelines, instructional videos, and interactive activities.

The curriculum will be continually updated based on feedback from professionals and autistic individuals, ensuring it remains relevant and effective in promoting healthy sexual and gender identity development.

**Sexuality constitutes a very sensitive issue and it is necessary to handle it properly. Especially, professionals working to support autistic persons is mandatory to follow basic guidelines that ensure the creation of a safe space and promotes open communication based on respect, acceptance and uptodate knowledge.**

The following section includes a number of recommendations aiming to effective conduct of training groups related to the sexuality of autistic individuals. Our focus will be at these elements: group composition, venue, and trainers' principles.

## **Guidelines for Professionals**

### **Suggested Recommendations for the group meetings**

To start with, some fundamental features to take into consideration referred to the group synthesis. The group of autistic people is expected to consist of 10 to 12 people. It is also preferable that there are no significant deviations as for the learning profile and the support needs of the participants.

The **space** where the program will be held should be as autism-friendly as possible. We should take in mind the light, the colour of the room, sounds, smells, the physical space around them (small or big room), the furniture etc. Also, it is important that the place will be provide privacy, so they can share personal questions if they want.

At the beginning of the program, the professionals are strongly suggested to create a **contract** with the participants, in order for all basic principles to be followed and adopted during training process to be clear. One part of the contract should include the practical issues that describe a stable, structured and safe framework, such as the time of beginning and ending, the breaks, phone use etc. Another important aspect of the contract is setting some rules for the group, promoting and encouraging an open, non-judgmental listening space and assuring validation of all members' perspectives. The members should acknowledge and respect the opinion of others, even if they have diverse viewpoints and interpretations. The members should speak in turns etc.



## **Suggested Principles for Professionals**

The WHO Regional Office for Europe and Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) (2017) set a framework for core competencies of sexuality educators, which is strongly suggested for the trainers to consider:

### **Commitment to sexuality education**

- Be convinced that comprehensive and holistic sexuality education has a positive impact on the (sexual) health and well-being of learners
- Be prepared to examine and challenge harmful sexual and gender norms and practices, injustices and vulnerabilities
- Be willing to challenge personal opinions, norms and feelings related to topics in sexuality, different cultural and religious backgrounds, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientation of learners, their parents and colleagues (other educators)
- Be aware that own experiences, attitudes and behaviour influence the way of educating learners
- Be responsive to parents' concerns about sexuality education and be prepared to address them with respect and by reasoning with evidence-based information

### **Respect for integrity and understanding of boundaries**

- Respect privacy and the physical, psychological and sexual integrity of oneself and others
- Refrain from disclosing information about the sexuality of learners
- Refrain from sharing personal information about own sexuality
- Be willing to reflect on and understand personal and other people's situations, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values (including own biases and personal opinions) regarding sexuality and relationships
- Be aware of and accept own boundaries and limitations and be willing to refer to other professionals.
- Be committed to treating all persons, regardless of their different backgrounds, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientation, with respect and dignity
- Demonstrate zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination and be prepared to protect learners from it.

### **Open-mindedness and respect for others**

- Regard sexuality as a positive potential of all individuals
- Demonstrate a positive attitude and respect towards sexuality in adults, according to their development level
- Be willing to leave young people their freedom and the social space they need to develop their sexuality according to their age and development level
- Be open about different backgrounds, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientation
- Demonstrate an understanding for societal, cultural, religious, familial and individual factors influencing sexual behaviours and other expressions of sexuality
- Demonstrate understanding of and respect for human rights that apply to learners, their parents and colleagues, including sexual and reproductive rights as stipulated in relevant policies, conventions and declarations
- Understand and respect the many different perspectives relating to sexual choices, behaviours and expression
- Respect and create awareness of social responsibility and promote tolerance

#### **Ability to create and maintain a safe, inclusive and enabling learning environment**

- Be able to create and maintain a safe, inclusive and enabling learning environment so that all learners of different cultural and religious backgrounds, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientations feel protected, included and empowered to participate
- Be able to use sexuality education to promote and reinforce health-promoting- policies (including prevention of sexual and gender-based violence)
- Be vigilant for early symptoms, markers or signs of aggressive behaviour, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse among learners and colleagues and respond adequately
- Be able to establish rules about respect, confidentiality and questions.

#### **Ability to use interactive teaching and learning approaches**

- Be able to use a wide range of interactive and participatory approaches and tools to help learners stay engaged, acquire

knowledge, stimulate reflection and communication and develop skills necessary for building healthy relationships and making informed decisions

- Be able to search and assess existing materials and methods in order to identify evidence informed, age- and developmentally-appropriate materials and effective methods.

### **Ability to communicate effectively**

- Be able to communicate with confidence and in a non-judgemental way
- Be able to use appropriate language that is understood by the learners, that feels comfortable and takes into account different cultural and religious backgrounds, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientations
- Be able to discuss openly various sexuality-related topics and issues with learners in an age appropriate and developmentally-appropriate, culturally sensitive and multiperspective way
- Be able to refrain from imposing personal views, beliefs and assumptions on learners
- Be able to analyse and critically discuss social and cultural contexts and factors that influence sexuality and sexual behaviour of learners
- Be able to communicate effectively with learners and their parents on complex and controversial topics related to sexuality in a professional and non-judgemental way
- Be able to respond appropriately to provocative questions and statements.

### **Ability to reflect on beliefs and values**

- Be able to reflect critically and constructively on and understand personal feelings, beliefs, experiences, attitudes and values (including biases and prejudices) regarding sexuality and relationships
- Be able to reflect on and better understand others' feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values regarding sexuality and relationships
- Be able to reflect on what is understood as "normal" by learners and in the wider society (e.g. body image, gender roles)
- Be able to support learners in developing critical thinking (for example in differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources of information).

## Important Notes

The trainers are important to have basic knowledge as for what autism spectrum is, in order to better coordinate the group and conduct each group meeting with adaptability. Therefore, the trainers will show multi perspective respect to autistic individuals, responding in parallel to the group's needs. It would also play a vital role if the trainer is familiar with strategies that facilitate communication, because this will help the group deal with emotions, sensory issues or obsessive thoughts that may come out during the training.

Additionally, acknowledging that that sexuality is a highly dynamic aspect of life, professionals should be aware that F.A.C.T.S. is also an adaptable and dynamic project. Trainers could be flexible to offer more activities in each module, adapting communication to different learning profiles in order to better promote the understanding and processing of the discussed topics. Furthermore, it is expected that subjects discussed in one module could be interrelated to another, due to the complexity of these matters. We suggest that trainers should follow the order described in the curriculum, because it will better facilitate the knowledge of the autistic people.

## Suggested Teaching Methodologies & Training Tools

F.A.C.T.S. project aims at training neurodivergent adults to have the opportunity to think, express and discuss gender and sexual orientation. They will also need to be trained about their body, consent and also challenges in their sexual life. This is why a more inclusive approach is adopted. In the framework of the project, appropriate and effective teaching methodologies and training tools will be used by professionals, when training autistic people.

Based on research the most common and effective *Teaching methodologies* when working with neurodivergent people are:

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** may be defined as an educational approach or philosophy that aims to correspond to the needs of diversity in learning environments. It advocates for the use of flexible instructional materials, techniques, and strategies that empower educators in dealing with heterogeneous learning groups. By implementing the UDL approach, educators are proactively designing a curriculum that responds to the needs of the greatest variety of learners from the start, reducing the need for costly, time-consuming, and after-the-fact changes and adaptations (Rose

& Gravel, 2010).

The most common and effective *Training tools and strategies* when working with autistic people are:

**Social stories:** structured interventions that use short, simple stories to teach social thinking and skills and suggest appropriate behaviours, particularly to those with autism or other developmental disabilities with impact on the development of social competence. They are designed to be easy to understand and facilitate the processing and understanding of complex social contexts.

**Visual aids:** a tool that can be looked at and makes materials easier to understand. Visual aids can help to provide structure and routine, encourage independence, build confidence, improve understanding, avoid frustration and anxiety and provide opportunities to interact with others. A wide range of items can be used as visual supports (e.g. photographs, real object, symbols, video).

**Modelling:** an instructional strategy where a new concept, skill, behaviour or approach is demonstrated and then it will be imitated. Modelling and imitation will require repetition to give the autistic people opportunities to practice the skill/behaviour and receive feedback on their performance until they master the skill/behaviour. Modelling may be live or using video modelling.

**Mind Mapping:** an effective technique to connect concepts using lines, images, and linkages. With a mind map it is possible to illustrate the relationship between different ideas and F.A.C.T.S., which may support learning, improve problem solving and facilitate information recording (The University of Adelaide, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

**Experiential activities:** is the process of learning by doing. By engaging trainees in hands-on experiences and reflection, they are better able to connect knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Some of the experiential activities that would be used is **scenario**, which is an active learning strategy that uses interactive scenarios. With this approach, learners work their way through a storyline that promotes problem-solving and critical thinking. Learners make choices based on their subject knowledge and problem-solving skills.

Another activity is **role playing**, which gives adults the opportunity to assume the role of a person or act out a given situation. These roles can be performed by individual trainee, in pairs, or in groups which can play out a more complex scenario. Role plays engage trainees in real-life situations or scenarios that can be “stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial” which requires them to examine personal feelings toward others and their circumstances (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p.47).

# **Content Outline**

## **Module 1: Awareness of the body**

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 1.1 Body parts and function
  - 1.2 Language of the body parts
  - 1.3 Changes of the body

## **Module 2: Gender Identity and Gender Expression**

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 2.1 Understanding Gender Identity
  - 2.2 Gender Expression
  - 2.3 The Social and Cultural Aspects of the Gender
  - 2.4 Gender Euphoria

## **Module 3: Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation**

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 3.1 Understanding Sexual Identity
  - 3.2 Sexual Orientation and its Spectrum
  - 3.3 Coming Out and Disclosure

## **Module 4: Sexual Relationships**

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 4.1 Different types of Relationships
  - 4.2 Different Types of Hugs and Touches/ Hugging and Touching
  - 4.3 Stages of a love/sexual relationship

## **Module 5: Challenges in Sexuality**

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 5.1 General Sensory Issues (Sensory Sensitivities)
  - 5.2 Communication Difficulties
  - 5.3 Social Difficulties
  - 5.4 Understanding Feelings/Alexithymia
  - 5.5 Special Interests
  - 5.6 Masking

## Module 6: Safety

- Short Description
- Duration
- Learning Outcomes
- Module Contents
  - 6.1 Legal and Social Rights
  - 6.2 Internet and applications
  - 6.3 Consent and Harassment
  - 6.4 Personal Space
  - 6.5 Protection during Intercourse

## Examples of Methodologies and tools for goals of each module

## Module 1: Awareness of the body

### Short description

This module explores the major body parts and their functions, helping learners understand the human body's structure and how various systems work together to maintain health. It emphasizes the importance of body awareness and knowledge of physical health.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 1, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

### Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 1: Awareness of the body, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes   | Knowledge   | Skills  | Competences   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>LO1: Understand the structure and functions of the human body mainly sexual anatomy.</b> | Participants will remember and identify the major body parts and organs giving emphasis in sex organs (internal and external parts).                | Participants will apply this knowledge by labeling diagrams of the human body | Participants will analyze the relationships between different body systems and evaluate how body functions impact overall health. |
|   | Show the internal and external body parts on an image<br><br>Participants will understand the primary functions of different sex organs and systems | Identify the internal and external body parts                                 | Explain the function of each sexual part  |



|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>LO2: Language for body parts</b>                     | Name the external and internal parts of sexual organs<br><br>Select the appropriate word for naming the sex parts according the situation | Identify the words of the external and internal parts of sexual organs<br>Choose the appropriate word regarding the situation (eg. formal, slang, everyday) | Develop an appropriate language for the parts of sex anatomy<br>Modify the sex language for ex. from formal or everyday   |
| <b>LO3: Recognize how body systems change with age.</b> | Participants will understand how aging affects the body, with emphasis on major life adulthood)   | Participants will apply knowledge by identifying the signs of aging and describing menstruation)  | Participants will analyse the impact of aging on body systems and evaluate interventions to support healthy aging.<br><br>Participants will create strategies to address the challenges of aging and promote long-term health |

### Module Contents

- 1.1 Body parts and function
- 1.2 Language of the body parts
- 1.3 Changes

## Module 2: Gender Identity and Gender Expression

### Short description

Focusing on the concepts of gender identity and expression, this module educates learners about the diversity of gender experiences. It aims to promote respect, understanding, and inclusivity for individuals of all gender identities.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 2, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

### Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 2: Gender Identity and Gender Expression, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that

trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes  | Knowledge  | Skills   | Competences  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>LO1: Understand the concepts of gender identity and gender expression</b> | <p>Participants will remember and explain key terms related to gender identity (e.g., gender binary, non-binary, cisgender, transgender).</p> <p>Participants will understand the difference between gender identity and gender expression</p> | Participants will apply this understanding by discussing examples of diverse gender identities and expressions in different cultures and contexts. | Participants will analyse the societal factors that shape gender identity and expression and evaluate the impact of gender norms on individual well-being. Participants will create strategies or programs to promote gender inclusivity and respect for diverse gender expressions. |
| <b>LO2: Respect and support diverse gender identities and expressions</b>    | Participants will understand the importance of respecting and affirming diverse gender identities.   | Participants will apply respectful language and behaviour when interacting with individuals of different gender identities and expressions         | Participants will evaluate the importance of fostering inclusive environments and analyse the impact of discrimination on gender-diverse individuals   |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>LO3: Demonstrate the ability to understand the stereotypes of gender roles</b> | What is the difference between gender and gender roles? | Analyse the stereotypes of gender roles        | Evaluate the role of stereotypes by discussing the impact of cultural norms on gender expression.   |
| <b>LO4: Demonstrate the ability to understand the gender euphoria</b>             | What is the term gender euphoria?                       | Contrast gender euphoria with gender dysphoria | Estimate the feelings and experiences of joy and affirmation that arise when one's gender identity is recognized and expressed authentically. |

## Module Contents

- 2.1 Understanding Gender Identity
- 2.2 Gender Expression
- 2.3 The Social and Cultural Aspects of the Gender
- 2.4 Gender Euphoria

## Module 3: Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation

### Short description

This module delves into sexual identity and orientation, exploring the spectrum of human sexuality. It encourages learners to understand, respect, and support diverse sexual identities and the implications for personal and societal relationships.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 3, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

### Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 3: Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes   | Knowledge   | Skills  | Competences  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>LO1: Understand the concepts of sexual identity and sexual orientation</b> | Participants will remember and define terms related to sexual identity and orientation (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual). | Participants will apply this knowledge by identifying and discussing sexual identities and orientations in various scenarios. | Participants will analyse the impact of societal norms and stigma on sexual orientation and identity             |
|   | Participants will understand how sexual identity and orientation differ.  | Apply inclusive language when discussing sexual orientation with respect and sensitivity                                      | Participants will evaluate the importance of acceptance and inclusion of diverse sexual orientations in society. |

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>LO2: Recognise and respect the diversity of sexual identities and orientations</b> | Participants will understand the spectrum of sexual orientations and how they manifest in individuals. | Participants will apply this understanding in creating respectful and inclusive environments for people of all sexual orientations. | Participants will evaluate the effects of discrimination based on sexual identity and propose ways to foster inclusivity.<br><br>Participants will create educational resources or programs that promote the understanding and acceptance of sexual diversity.<br><br>Perceive that sexual orientation may change over time or due to different historical/ or cultural aspects. |
| <b>LO3: Understand the process of coming out</b>                                      | Demonstrate the process of coming out  | Examine the stages of coming out<br><br>Identify the challenges faced   | Evaluate the feelings of coming out<br><br>Discuss the factors that influence the coming out   |

### Module Contents

- 3.1 Understanding Sexual Identity
- 3.2 Sexual Orientation and its Spectrum
- 3.3 Coming Out and Disclosure

## Module 4: Sexual Relationships

### Short description

In this module, learners examine the dynamics of different types of relationships, including friendships, romantic, and sexual connections. It highlights the importance of communication, consent, and understanding the stages of relationships for fostering healthy interactions.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 4, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

## Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 4: Sexual Relationships, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes  | Knowledge  | Skills  | Competences   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>LO1: Understand the dynamics of different types of relationships.</b> | Participants will remember and define different relationship types (e.g., family, friendship, romantic, sexual). | Participants will apply their knowledge by discussing and identifying the characteristics of healthy relationships          | Participants will analyze the factors that contribute to relationship success or failure.<br>Participants will evaluate the importance of communication and respect in maintaining healthy relationships. |
| <b>LO2: Recognize different types of hugs and touches</b>                | How are hugs and touches different?  | Identify the different types of touches and hugs?   | Determine the different types of touches and hugs in different type of relationship   |
| <b>LO3: Recognize the stages of romantic and sexual relationships</b>    | Participants will understand the stages of romantic relationships (e.g., attraction, dating, intimacy).          | Participants will apply their knowledge by discussing behaviours typical of each stage of a romantic or sexual relationship | Participants will evaluate the importance of consent, mutual respect, and healthy communication in the progression of relationships.  |
|  |  |   | Participants will create scenarios or case studies to help others recognise healthy versus unhealthy relationship patterns.   |

## Module Contents

- 4.1 Different types of Relationships
- 4.2 Different Types of Hugs and Touches
- 4.3 Stages of a love/sexual relationship

## Module 5: Challenges in Sexuality

### Short description

This module addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals, particularly those on the autism spectrum, in navigating sexuality. It covers topics such as sensory issues, communication difficulties, and the impact of societal expectations on personal experiences.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 5, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

### Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 5: Challenges in Sexuality, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes   | Knowledge  | Skills  | Competences   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>LO1: Understand the challenges related to sexuality in autistic individuals.</b>         | <p>Participants will remember and describe the sensory, communication, emotional, and social challenges faced by autistic individuals in sexual contexts.</p> <p>Participants will understand how these challenges impact their relationships and experiences.</p> | <p>Participants will apply knowledge by identifying strategies for managing sensory sensitivities communication, emotional and social challenges in relationships</p> | <p>Participants will analyse how specific challenges (e.g., masking, special interests) influence sexual identity and relationships.</p> <p>Participants will evaluate the importance of creating supportive environments for autistic individuals to navigate sexuality healthily.</p> |
| <b>LO2: Develop strategies for supporting autistic individuals in navigating sexuality.</b> | <p>Participants will understand the importance of tailored support in helping autistic individuals with challenges in their sexual life</p>  | <p>Participants will apply strategies such as clear communication and sensory management to foster healthy sexual relationships.</p>                                  | <p>Participants will evaluate existing support systems and suggest improvements for better sexual health and well-being. Participants will</p>  |

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  | create guidelines or resources for supporting autistic individuals in navigating relationships and sexuality. |
|--|--|--|---|

### Module Contents

- 5.1 General Sensory Issues (Sensory Sensitivities)
- 5.2 Communication Difficulties
- 5.3 Social Difficulties
- 5.4 Understanding Emotions/Alexithymia
- 5.5 Special Interests

## Module 6: Safety in Sexuality

### Short description

Focusing on the critical aspects of safety in sexual and online interactions, this module educates learners about consent, boundaries, and protective measures. It emphasizes the importance of safe practices to promote healthy relationships and well-being.

### Duration

The suggested duration for the successful completion of Module 6, including the Module's assessment is 1 hour.

### Learning Outcomes

The table below presents the learning outcomes of Module 6: Safety in Sexuality, in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences that trainees will acquire upon successful completion.

| Learning Outcomes   | Knowledge  | Skills                     | Competences  |
|---|--|----------------------------|--|
| <b>LO2: Understand the Legal Rights regarding their sexuality</b> | Explain the legislation concerning their sexual life | Identify the sexual rights | Participants will discuss the support of legal and social equality for LGBTQ+ individuals. |

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p><b>LO1: Understand the importance of safety in sexual and online interactions</b></p>      | <p>Participants will remember and explain key concepts related to sexual safety, including consent, online safety, and protection.</p> | <p>Participants will apply this knowledge by identifying risks in online interactions and practicing safe behaviours</p>        | <p>Participants will analyse the impact of unsafe practices, such as non-consensual touch or unprotected sex, on personal well-being.</p> <p>Participants will evaluate the effectiveness of current safety measures and suggest improvements for online safety, protection, and consent.</p> |
| <p><b>LO2: Recognise the importance of consent and boundaries in sexual relationships</b></p> | <p>Participants will understand the concept of consent and its critical role in healthy relationships</p>                              | <p>Participants will apply knowledge by practicing respectful communication about boundaries in personal or sexual contexts</p> | <p>Participants will evaluate the consequences of ignoring consent and boundaries in relationships.</p> <p>Participants will create resources or workshops on the importance of consent and safety in sexual and online interactions</p>  |

### Module Contents

- 6.1 Legal and Social Rights
- 6.2 Internet and applications
- 6.3 Consent and Harassment
- 6.4 Personal Space
- 6.5 Protection during Intercourse



## Examples of Methodologies and tools for goals of each module

The table below presents the suggested match of the teaching methodologies and training tools with the specific educational goals that professionals and educators should aim to achieve when training neurodivergent people in gender identity and sexual orientation.

| <b>Matching the teaching methodologies and training tools with the educational goals of beneficiaries with DD/ID.</b>   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Module 1. Awareness of the body</b>  | <b>Suggested Methodologies/Tools</b>   |
| <p><b>Module 1.1: Body parts &amp; function</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explain the structure of major human body systems and to emphasize sexual anatomy.</li> <li>• To briefly describe the function of each body part and emphasize on reproductive and erogenous zones.</li> <li>• To apply knowledge of body systems in everyday health contexts.</li> <li>• To understand the unique body shape of each person and to not promote body shaming</li> </ul>   | <p>videos, experiential activities, mind mapping, visual aids (eg.cards, book)</p> |
| <p><b>Module 1.2: Language for body parts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explain the basic vocabulary related to reproductive and erogenous zones in [language].</li> <li>• To apply vocabulary in sentences and conversations about health and body functions.</li> <li>• To explain the differences between formal medical terms, every day and slang language for sexual anatomy.</li> </ul>  | <p>experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards)</p>                             |
| <p><b>Module 1.3: Changes of the body</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explain the natural physical changes that occur during different life stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age).</li> <li>• To describe the changes in body composition, skin, and muscle as people age.</li> <li>• To explain how hormonal changes (e.g., puberty, menopause) impact body functions and appearance.</li> <li>• To apply strategies for maintaining health and wellness during each stage of life.</li> </ul> | <p>experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards), video, mind mapping</p>        |

| Module 2. Gender identity and gender expression  | Suggested Methodologies/Tools                             |
|--|---|
| <b>Module 2.1: Understanding Gender Identity</b>   | visual aids, video, experiential activities, mind mapping |
| <p>To explain the concept of gender identity and how it differs from biological sex.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To describe different gender identities, such as cisgender, transgender, non-binary, etc.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge of gender identity by using inclusive language in conversations.</li> </ul>  |   |
| <p><b>Module 2.2: Gender Expression</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the difference between gender identity and gender expression.</li> <li>● To describe how individuals express gender through clothing, behaviour, and mannerisms.</li> <li>● To apply understanding and use the appropriate language by respecting and recognizing diverse forms of gender expression.</li> </ul>                                 | visual aids, scenario, experiential activities, video     |
| <p><b>Module 2.3: The Social and Cultural Aspects of Gender</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the difference between gender identity and gender roles.</li> <li>● To describe the stereotypes regarding gender roles</li> <li>● To apply this knowledge by discussing the impact of cultural norms on gender expression and how gender roles and expectations vary across different cultures and societies.</li> </ul> | video, scenario, experiential activities, role playing    |
| <p><b>Module 2.4: Gender Euphoria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the concept of gender euphoria and how it contrasts with gender dysphoria.</li> <li>● To describe the feelings and experiences of joy and affirmation that arise when one's gender identity is recognized and expressed authentically.</li> </ul>  | scenarios, social stories??                               |

| Module 3. Sexual identity and sexual orientation   | Suggested Methodologies/Tools             |
|--|---|
| <b>Module 3.1: Understanding Sexual Identity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain the concept of sexual identity and its distinction from gender identity.</li> </ul>   | scenarios                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To apply this knowledge by recognizing the fluidity and diversity of sexual identities</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Module 3.2 : Sexual Orientation and Its Spectrum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain the concept of sexual orientation and its wide spectrum.</li> <li>To describe sexual orientations such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, etc.</li> <li>To apply inclusive language when discussing sexual orientation with respect and sensitivity</li> <li>To explain the concept of sexual fluidity and how a person's sexual orientation may change over time or due to different historical/ or cultural aspects.</li> </ul> | videos, scenarios, visual aids (eg.cards) |
| <b>Module 3.3: Coming Out and Disclosure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain the process of "coming out" and the challenges faced by individuals.</li> <li>To understand the importance of an supported environment in the whole process and how to identify it</li> </ul>   | scenarios, social stories, mind mapping   |
| Module 4. Sexual relationships   | Suggested Methodologies/Tools             |
| <b>Module 4.1 : Different Types of Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain the characteristics of different types of relationships (e.g., friendships, familial bonds, professional relationships, romantic/sexual relationships).</li> <li>To describe the boundaries and expectations within each type of relationship.</li> </ul>   | scenarios, role playing, mind mapping     |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Module 4.2: Different Types of Hugs and Touches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the role of physical touch in human connection and relationships.</li> <li>● To describe different types of touches and hugs, such as friendly hugs, comforting touch, romantic embraces, and the significance of consent in each.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge of appropriate physical touch by respecting personal boundaries and understanding the cultural significance of touch in different contexts</li> </ul>                   | <p>scenarios, role playing, modeling, experiential activities</p> |
| <p><b>Module 4.3 : Stages of a love/sexual relationship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain how a relationship can evolve</li> <li>● To understand how to recognize the signs to move on the next stage</li> </ul>   | <p>scenarios, visual aids (eg.cards)</p>                          |
| <p><b>Module 5. Challenges in sexuality</b></p>  | <p><b>Suggested Methodologies/Tools</b></p>                       |
| <p><b>Module 5.1 : General Sensory Issues (Sensory Sensitivities)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain how sensory sensitivities can impact physical touch and sexual experiences for autistic individuals.</li> <li>● To describe common sensory challenges (e.g., sensitivity to touch, sound, or light) and how they may influence intimacy and relationships.</li> <li>● To apply strategies for managing sensory sensitivities in romantic or sexual situations, respecting personal boundaries and comfort levels.</li> </ul> | <p>scenarios, experiential activities, videos, mind mapping</p>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Module 5.2 : Communication Difficulties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the role of communication in sexual relationships and the unique challenges autistic individuals may face.</li> <li>● To describe common communication difficulties, such as interpreting non-verbal cues, expressing emotions, or discussing intimate topics.</li> <li>● To apply effective communication strategies, including clear and direct conversations, and creating a supportive environment for open discussion about needs and boundaries.</li> <li>● To apply understanding by identifying healthy and respectful communication practices in various relationship types.</li> </ul> | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids, mind mapping</p>            |
| <p><b>Module 5.3 :Social Difficulties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the social challenges autistic individuals may encounter in forming and maintaining romantic or sexual relationships.</li> <li>● To describe difficulties with understanding social norms, expectations, and unspoken rules of romantic interactions.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge by identifying ways to support autistic individuals in building healthy social connections and navigating social aspects of intimacy.</li> </ul>   | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards),mind mapping</p>  |
| <p><b>Module 5.4: Understanding Feelings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain how understanding and recognizing ones and others' feelings (alexithymia) has an impact in the sexual lives of autistic individuals</li> <li>● To apply strategies for integrating feelings into relationships in a positive and balanced way, while respecting both partners' needs.</li> </ul>  | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards), mind mapping</p> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Module 5.5: Special Interests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the role of special interests in the lives of autistic individuals and how these may influence relationships and sexuality.</li> <li>● To describe how special interests can both enhance and challenge romantic relationships, especially when balancing shared activities and individual passions.</li> <li>● To apply strategies for integrating special interests into relationships in a positive and balanced way, while respecting both partners' needs.</li> </ul>                                      | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards)</p>               |
| <p><b>Module 5.6 : Masking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the concept of masking (the act of hiding one's true self to fit social norms) and how it affects sexuality and relationships for autistic individuals.</li> <li>● To describe the emotional and psychological toll of masking in intimate situations, including its impact on self-expression and authentic connection.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge by promoting an environment where autistic individuals feel safe to express themselves without masking, fostering honest and respectful relationships.</li> </ul> | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards), mind mapping</p> |
| <p><b>Module 6. Safety</b></p>  | <p><b>Suggested Methodologies/Tools</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Module 6.1: Legal and Social Rights regarding sexuality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the legislation regarding sexuality</li> <li>● To describe the importance of advocacy and equal rights for sexuality</li> <li>● To apply knowledge by identifying ways to support legal and social equality for autistic individuals</li> </ul>   | <p>scenarios, visual aids (eg.cards), mind mapping</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Module 6.2 : Internet and Apps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the potential risks associated with using the internet and dating apps, including pornography, privacy concerns and online harassment.</li> <li>● To describe best practices for safely navigating social media and dating apps, including setting privacy controls and recognizing red flags in online interactions.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge by identifying safe strategies for communicating online and maintaining personal boundaries while using apps.</li> </ul> | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards),mind mapping</p> |
| <p><b>Module 6.3: Consent and Harassment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the concept of consent in sexual and romantic relationships, and the importance of ongoing mutual agreement.</li> <li>● To describe different forms of harassment, including verbal, physical, and online, and the impact on individuals.</li> <li>● To apply understanding by recognizing situations where consent is absent and by identifying appropriate steps to prevent or respond to harassment.</li> </ul>   | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, social stories, modeling, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards)</p>    |
| <p><b>Module 6.4: Personal Space</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the difference between appropriate and inappropriate physical touch in various settings (e.g., friendly, romantic, professional).</li> <li>● To describe how personal boundaries can vary between individuals and cultures, and the importance of respecting those boundaries.</li> <li>● To apply understanding of personal space by practicing and recognizing consent and boundaries in physical interactions.</li> </ul>   | <p>videos, scenarios, role playing, modeling, social stories, experiential activities, visual aids (eg.cards)</p>    |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Module 6.5: Protection during intercourse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To explain the importance of protection in sexual relationships, including contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).</li> <li>● To describe different methods of protection, such as condoms, birth control, and STI prevention measures.</li> <li>● To apply knowledge by discussing how to effectively use protection and make informed decisions about sexual health.</li> </ul> | <p>scenarios, social stories, visual aids (eg.cards)</p> |
|--|--|

## Accessible Guide for Autistic Beneficiaries: Suggested Principles and Recommendations

This section includes a number of principles and recommendations toward effective preparation and usage of the Guide for people with autism.

### 1. Suggested basic principles to the guide format and usage

**Accessible format of the guide.** The text and pictures/ photos/ pictograms have to be in balance, in order to assure easy reading, accepting and understanding. Appropriate colours, fonts, size of the letters and other characteristics of the information used that have impact on the learning style will be used.

**Development and usage of the guide content.** The guide will be clearly structured in brief and logically separated 6 sections – following the 6 sections in the training programme. The beneficiaries will not be pushed to read the whole guide in one sitting. They could read the sections in their own way. They could read one section several times. They could not read a section if they are interested at that time.

**New topics – known topics.** Some of the topics might be new to the person, while others could be familiar. If something appears difficult to understand, the person could go to the first or to the more familiar sections to build more knowledge.

**Language of the guide.** The information in the guide will be presented in a clear, simple, easy to read, accept and understand language and symbols. Examples will be integrated in order to be used by the person to express own perceptions, emotions, behaviour.

**Skills development.** The guide will present concrete steps how the person could develop a special skill – how to talk about important topic, how to protect personal



boundaries, how to develop different relations, etc.

**Trusted adult to talk with.** Because the personal perceptions and personal situation is unique, the person will need a trusted adult with whom to talk with – a family member, social worker, therapist, or other **Self-test**. A few questions will be provided at the end of each section to let the person check their own understanding of the concepts from the module.

**Usage of the guide.** The guide will be designed to be used individually or with a partner. Simple rules/ principles will be defined related to sharing information with another person.

Specific rules will be integrated if/ when the guide will be used as a peer mentoring material – ex., speak in turns, listen to others, accept that other people have different views, not to judge others, etc.

## **2. Suggested Principles to the Guide for People with Autism related to the Curriculum/ Training Modules**

### **Module 1: Awareness of the body**

- To raise the awareness of the unique character of the body of each person and its role for sharing feelings, well-being, wishes.
- To support the person understand that people have different preferences for what terms they like to use for their body parts. This language may not work for everybody.
- To discuss a few of the major body parts involved in puberty and the reproductive system so that the person can begin to understand the basics, to learn about how puberty impacts people whose sex is different and how to relate better to others.
- To support the person accept that everyone’s body is different and there is no one “right way” to look, and if a person is struggling with the body image, they might talk to a friend, doctor, or other trusted adult to feel better.
- To discuss the physical changes that everyone (both boys and girls) experiences during the life and how they affect the behaviour of the person in order to stay healthy and safe (ex., how to manage own personal hygiene needs).
- To support the person understand that emotional changes occur in relation to the personal development and maturity and among them are increased mood swings and sexual feelings.
- To support the person to share own opinions, norms and feelings related to people’s differences in age, abilities, gender, sexuality, cultural and religious backgrounds, etc.
- To understand and maintain health and wellness during each stage of life.

### **Module 2: Gender Identity and Gender Expression**

- To introduce the key words used when discussing gender identity and gender expression - gender, sex, gender norms, etc.
- To raise awareness that the gender is related to that how people feel about themselves and how they relate to the world.
- To discuss that clothing, behaviour, gesticulations are part of the gender expression.
- To normalize and accept that gender identity could affect the personal experience and emotions in a way that the person might feel confusion, anxiety, and sadness around their gender identity.
- To assure the person that they are loved and accepted by their family and closed people no matter what they feel about their gender identity.

### **Module 3: Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation**

- To introduce the key words used when discussing sexual identity and sexual orientation and to accept that each person might use own words and expressions.
- To assure the person that they are safe to discuss openly how they are feeling and that they can ask questions about sex and sexuality.
- To assure the person that they could refrain from disclosing information about their sexuality.
- To be informed how to recognize examples of homophobia and to learn concrete steps that could be taken.
- To assure that if the person feels isolated, depressed or attacked regarding their sexual identity or orientation they might search and find help and support

### **Module 4: Sexual (Romantic) Relationships**

- To present the important types of relationships in the life, how they change and progress.
- To discuss that each person deserves to have happy, healthy relationships and to be able to express their sexuality in ways that work for them.
- To clarify the different meanings of “Having Sex” to different people.
- To talk about personal values about sex – the thoughts, feelings, words and actions related to readiness to have sexual relationship (in order to

connect with someone or just to be like others).

- To train the person how to communicate with a sexual partner about things they do and do not enjoy.
- To clarify that relationships can be complicated and to support the person to learn a few ways how to maintain healthy sexual relationships.
- To present the differences between appropriate or inappropriate sexual relationships.
- To support the person learn how to recognize healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships.
- To support the person to define and protect their personal boundaries – physical, emotional, communication and sexual boundaries.
- To discuss that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to respond to sexual feelings.
- To present the different meanings of the word “friend” and the difference between “friend” and “friendly”.
- To discuss the different types of friends – who spend time together at school or work, or at someone’s home; who have fun together, talk together or care about each other, etc.
- To support the person understand that sex is natural and should be enjoyable.

### **Module 5: Challenges in Sexuality**

- To understand the sensory sensitivities some people have and how they affect the
- relationships from dating to intimate moments
- To discuss and normalize that for some people, sensory sensitivity to the sounds and physical sensations of sex may cause a person to feel uncomfortable.
- To acknowledge that communication and social skills are important parts in creating/maintain relationships.
- To find strategies to overcome difficulties in communication and

socialization

- To raise awareness about the special interest, which may be an obstacle in an intimate relationship
- To understand that some people have difficulties in expressing feeling and also understanding the feeling of someone else
- To acknowledge that being yourself is the key element in a healthy relationship without masking
- To discuss that people may wish to end a sexual relationship if their partner ignores their communication needs, ignores their sensory needs or tries to make them feel bad.

### **Module 6: Safety in Sexuality**

- To discuss the difference between public, semi-public, semi-private, and private places and what conversations, personal information, and behaviours are appropriate in each type of place.
- To present the imbalances and power dynamics in sexual relationship – age differences, work relationships (ex. inappropriate sexual relationship between supervisors and the people they supervise), other.
- To discuss with them about boundaries and how to discuss these with a sexual partner.
- To let the person know they deserve to be treated with respect by any prospective partner.
- To support the person to recognize unhealthy and abusive relationship qualities early in relationships in comparison to healthy relationship qualities.
- To present the early warning signs in sexual relationships.
- To assure that if the person is uncomfortable or does not want to do something, they should share this with their partner. No one should feel required to do anything they are not comfortable with.
- To introduce key words related to challenges in sexuality – consent, giving and getting consent, boundaries in sexual relationships, needs and rights, etc.
- To support the person understand that sexual behaviours are private and should only involve consenting adults.

- To raise awareness in the importance of communication when entering a sexual relationship – how to talk about the personal needs, how to say clearly “yes” or “no”, how to say clearly “stop”, etc.
- To discuss the online relationships and the ways how to remain them safe.
- To understand how to protect your personal identity in online platforms
- To support the person understand if their rights are ignored or abused by another person (ex. ignoring their autism-related or sensory needs and sensitivities).
- To get informed about legal rights concerning sex and harassment etc
- To inform the person that they could search for support if they feel they are not fitting in school, at work, in the local community

In summary, the guide could not integrate all the needs, challenges and skills needed by neurodivergent people. But helping an autistic person understand own gender identity, sexual feelings and how to navigate their feelings and behaviour is important. Without proper support, people may feel worried or unprepared when it comes to gender identity and sexual expression. The guide is one of the tools that could bring relevant information, arise important questions and provide positive ways for self-expressing and searching for friendship and love without labelling and judgement.

# General guidelines and principles for administrative and general staff of educational/ therapeutic units

## **General staff of an educational/therapeutic unit: role and importance**

- An educational-therapeutic unit consists of health professionals and professionals related to the general operation of the unit, (administrative staff, drivers, secretary/reception, cleaning staff, caregivers etc.)
- All staff members, regardless of their professional status, play an important role in the **beneficiaries' relationship with the unit.**

## **General staff: being a bridge**

Administrative and general staff may either work on the front line, or stay in less visible positions. They may:

- be the **first contact** of the beneficiary with the place
- be **the bridge** between beneficiaries and health professionals
- bring a **different perspective** on social situations
- deal with situations where important issues emerge and **incidents or discussions come to their attention**

Even if all issues are important, some must be dealt with **great attention and care**, aiming to create a safe place for the beneficiaries to process them with the greatest support and to promote open communication

Sexuality can be a great example of important issue where respect, acceptance, inclusion, open communication and safety are crucial.

## **What is sexuality?**

Sexuality is an integral part of human nature and sexual development is a **natural procedure** that starts with our birth and develops as we get older, interact & communicate with the significant others, while we create and maintain relationships.

Sexuality is a **fundamental need**, so...

**Every** human has the right to understand and enjoy sexuality.

**Sexuality consists of many components such as:**

- body awareness
- sexual expression
- body image
- gender issues
- fantasies & desires

- beliefs
- roles & relationships
- sexual intercourse
- feelings & thoughts

### **Sexuality: attitudes, prejudice and myths**

- Generally, the concept of sexuality is full of various myths, and misconceptions created by social views, beliefs and ethics.
- Many myths regarding sexuality can be viewed when addressing the matter of sexuality in the spectrum such as:

"Autistic people are asexual or hypersexual"

"Autistic people cannot fall in love or cannot control their sexual instincts"

### **Myths reproduce myths and create attitudes**

Even though professionals want to support their beneficiaries, when it comes to sexuality issues there is a lot of **uncertainty, fear & prejudice.**

### **Professionals usually feel:**

- Confused
- Scared
- Helpless
- Inadequate
- The burden of responsibility

### **Professionals tend to :**

- Ignore these matters
- Not give enough information
- Focus on inappropriate behaviours and restrictions
- React in a way that narrows communication and eliminates emotional validation
- Perpetuate myths

### **Beneficiaries may feel:**

- Ashamed
- Confused and helpless
- Excluded and not validated
- Disappointed
- Angry
- Deprived of the right to a healthy sexual life

### **So, beneficiaries tend to:**

- Stay uninformed
- Address to questionable or inappropriate sources of information
- Silence their reflections or big feelings
- Give up their right to make decisions for themselves
- Engage in risky behaviours

### **Fundamental principles**

- Administrative and general staff of a care unit play an important role on the **emotional well-being** of the beneficiaries.
- Especially on matters regarding sexuality, staff must be trained and guided on how they react or hear on things referring to that matter.
- Educational/ therapeutic units should adopt protocols that clearly describe procedures that promote the better framing of beneficiaries and principles that must be followed by all staff members.

All staff members should keep in mind that **sexuality is experienced and expressed differently for everyone**, so it is necessary to:

- Create an environment where people feel respected and accepted for who they are
- Never judge a person's appearance or/and clothes, even if they personally find them weird
- Never criticize a person's personal sexual preference and expression
- Avoid jumping to conclusions about behaviours that they may find inappropriate or different
- Seek for support, when needed, all staff members are part of the unit, and support must be given to everyone, a discussion with a health care



professional may help employees to talk through worries, reflect on any strong feelings, and recognise any impacts

- Make sure all information that may come to their attention, or are shared, get transferred to a health care professional to better intervene and support autistic beneficiaries
  - Always respond to sexual behaviour
- ⇒ If you witness sexual behaviour happening or are told about sexual behaviour by a beneficiary or receive a report about sexual behaviour from someone else, you must immediately **alert** a health care professional at the time of the incident, report or disclosure.
- ⇒ Respect **the privacy of the beneficiary** and speak about it only to the health care professional.

### Main guidelines

| It is important to:   | Never:  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a formal, calm and respectful attitude</li> <li>• Identify your personal biases or difficulties in the matter</li> <li>• Acknowledge the role boundaries, keep in mind that only health care professionals can properly support autistic beneficiaries, aiming to process their sexuality</li> <li>• Recognise how important your role is, as a bridge between the beneficiaries and the health care professionals, make sure to transfer information</li> <li>• Use proper language when talking about sexuality</li> <li>• Be coordinated with information that come to your attention, so you can directly share them to a health care professional</li> <li>• Stay active in situations and make beneficiaries feel safe and to redirect to professionals</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow a judgmental or directive attitude</li> <li>• Give advice, share personal opinions or experiences</li> <li>• Be sarcastic or giggling</li> <li>• Play the role of a “detective”, asking personal questions, aiming to search for information</li> <li>• Treat them as friends or in a childish way</li> <li>• Use exaggerated facial expressions, showing surprise, disapproval or disappointment</li> <li>• Using slang language</li> <li>• Stare at a person or talk in front of them, like they are absent</li> <li>• Use expressions that show to the beneficiary that these matters are forbidden to talk, or they are doing something wrong, or that they should silence</li> </ul> |

## Helpful expressions that foster communication and properly guide beneficiaries to a safe place:

“I understand how important this is for you. Why don't we go together to... so you can further discuss it with him/ her /them?”

“You are talking about something important, I don't believe talking it here is the best place. Would you like to have this talk with...? I am sure he/ she/ they can help you on that/” “Thank you for trusting me with this matter. I think we should both talk to ..., he/she/ they can listen to you, and help you with that”

“You really seem having big feelings, I will accompany you to..., it is important to talk about it”

## Try to avoid:

“What are you talking about? We don't talk about these things! It is inappropriate” “I don't want to hear you saying this stuff! It's a shame!”

“Let's keep it a secret! Let's not talk about this to anyone” “This is not for you to talk about”

“This is not that important, try to forget it!” “You are just a ... (kid, nice lady, a strong man)”

“Oh my God! Why are you doing this? This is so bad! I'll inform your teacher!”

## Conclusion

Keep in mind that all staff members may not have the same duties, but they all have the

**same importance and responsibility as a role** and part of the whole system-unit.

On the other hand, educational/ therapeutic units have the responsibility to organise **trainings and awareness days for all staff members** regarding important issues, such as sexuality, in order for everyone to get familiar with proper language, up to date knowledge, and the mentality of the unit. These actions foster **better communication among all parts** of the unit, **stabilize common mentality** and upgrade the required skills of all members.

**Kind Reminder!**

**Respect, acceptance, inclusion and safety should always be the foundation of our work!**

**It is our duty to advocate our beneficiaries' right to informed decisions about their life!**

## 10 Best practices

In this final section, the best 10 practices, that the health professionals should keep in mind concerning sexuality and gender issues, will be added based on the literature review. These practices is referring to sexual education in general, to guides/psychoeducational programs aiming to parents, mental health professionals working with autistic LGBTIQ+ young people.

1. [Bradford Parenting Cygnet Service](#). Psychoeducation program for parents for Puberty, Sex Well-being and Relationship
2. NHS (2024) NHS talking therapies for anxiety and depression: Lgbtq+ positive practice guide. ([https://lgbt.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/LGBTQ-Positive-Practice-Guide-20248\\_DIGITAL\\_FINAL.pdf](https://lgbt.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/LGBTQ-Positive-Practice-Guide-20248_DIGITAL_FINAL.pdf))
3. National Autistic Society (n.d) [Sex education - a guide for parents](#)
4. GAB (2018) Sexual Pleasure: The Forgotten Link in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights ([https://www.gab-shw.org/media/1038/gab\\_sexualpleasuretrainingtoolkit\\_final\\_webversion\\_with\\_hyperlinks\\_updat\\_ejune2018.pdf](https://www.gab-shw.org/media/1038/gab_sexualpleasuretrainingtoolkit_final_webversion_with_hyperlinks_updat_ejune2018.pdf))
- 5 I can network (2021) Checklist of good practices for service providers working with autistic LGBTIQ+ young people <https://icannetwork.online/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Tip-Sheet-3-Checklist-of-Good-Practices-for-Service-Providers-Working-with-Autistic-LGBTIQ-Young-People-2024.pdf>
6. National LGBT Health Education Center (2020) Neurodiversity & gender diverse youth: an affirming approach to care (<https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/publication/neurodiversity-gender-diverse-youth-an-affirming-approach-to-care-2020/>)
7. LGBT Foundation (2024). Best practice Model for working with LGBTQ+ communities who are also autistic and/or neurodiverse <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/Best%20Practice%20Model%20For%20Working%20with%20LGBTQ%20Communities%20who%20are%20Autistic%20and%20Neurodi>

[verse.pdf](#)

8. The Trevor Project (2024). Supporting LGBTQ+ Young People with Disabilities. ([https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2024\\_Guide\\_Supporting-LGBTQ-Youth-With-Disabilities\\_V4.pdf](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2024_Guide_Supporting-LGBTQ-Youth-With-Disabilities_V4.pdf) )
9. Trauma Informed Oregon (2021) Providing Trauma Informed Care to Autistic Adults. (<https://traumainformedoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/Providing-TIC-to-Autistic-Adults-TIP-Sheet-Screen-Reader.pdf>)
10. The LoveAct project (2023). Guide for professionals with the aim of reducing the risk of gender-based violence and dating violence in Comprehensive Sexual Education (<https://thegendertalk.eu/media/love-act-educators-guide-en.pdf> )

## **References**

Attwood S. (2008). Making Sense of Sex: A Forthright Guide to Puberty, Sex and Relationships for People with Asperger's Syndrome. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. (1991). Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom.

Washington, DC: The George Washington University.

Gerhardt, P, Cohen, M. (2014) Visual supports for people with autism: a guide for parents and professionals. Woodbine House

ISEAN (2015). Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Training Package. Jakarta, ISEAN.

Paterson, C. R. (2004). Using modelling for teaching social skills to children with autism: A literature review &, effects of video-modelling on the acquisition and generalisation of play behaviour in children with autism.

Simone, R. (2010). Aspergirls. Empowering Females with Asperger Syndrome. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The University of Adelaide. Mind mapping. Writing centre learning guide. Preprint <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/sites/default/files/docs/l>

earningguide- mindmapping.p df (2014).

Trudel, C., & Nadig, A. (2019). A role-play assessment tool and drama-based social skills intervention for adults with autism or related social communication difficulties. *Dramatherapy*, 40(1), 41–60. doi:10.1177/026306721983471

WHO Regional Office for Europe and Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), (2017). A framework for competencies of sexuality educators. [https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/BZgA\\_TrainingMattersFramework\\_EN.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/BZgA_TrainingMattersFramework_EN.pdf)