

Sexual Education for Adults with Disabilities



Tool 9

Handbooks Preventative Education



Preventive Education

This instructional guide talks about preventive sexual education and why it is important. It also offers step-by-step guidance and tips for providing information in a methodological, solution-focused fashion.

Contents

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <u>Preventive Education</u> | - | 2 |
| What is Preventive Education and Why is it important? | - | 2 |
| <u>Solution-focused Approach to Sexuality and Intimacy</u> | - | 2 |
| Talking to the Client | - | 2 |
| Goal Formulation | - | 3 |
| Asking about Exceptions | - | 4 |
| Scaling Questions | - | 5 |
| Follow-up Sessions | - | 5 |
| Conclusion | - | 5 |
| Specific solutions for Dealing with Sexual Abuse | - | 6 |

What is Preventive Education and Why is it Important?

People with intellectual disabilities are extra vulnerable. That is why it is important to focus in particular on prevention. Preventive sexual education can help reduce risks.

Making sexual education a regular topic has a preventive effect and allows educators to detect problems and take action at an early stage. The sooner problems are detected, the more effectively they can be resolved. The sooner the client has the chance to ask questions, the quicker they can be dealt with.

The better informed the client is, the better he or she will be able to react to and deal with undesirable situations, such as sexual abuse.

Contrary to reactive strategies, preventive strategies help prevent incorrect perceptions. Once ideas or perceptions are formed, it is very difficult to change them. Pornographic material can, for example, give individuals the wrong idea about sex. It is important to discuss with the client beforehand that these images do not reflect reality.

Solution-focused Approach to Sexuality and Intimacy

Talking to the Client

In teaching sexual education for the first time, there are a number of important points that should be considered. The following protocol consists of various steps that can be used as a guideline for your sessions.

1 Role clarification

Information on the structure and duration of the session, whether there will be a break to reflect, and, if necessary, an explanation of the solution-focused approach.

2 Matching the client's style/worldview

The first step consists of building a positive working relationship with the client by appealing to his or her experiences and interests.

3 Improvement prior to first session

'What has changed since we last met or spoke with each other? The improvement question taps into the change process that may have already been initiated.

4 Formulation/acknowledgement of problem

'What brings you here?'

'How is that a problem for you?'

'What have you already tried and what has been useful?'

Acknowledgement is important: listening in a respectful manner, reflecting on feelings, giving compliments, defining the relationship between the professional and the client (customer, complainant, visitor), 'walking on two legs'.

5 Goal formulation/miracle question (or related question)

'You will go to sleep tonight, and in the middle of the night, a miracle happens and the problem that prompted you to talk to me (name problem specifically) today is solved or nearly solved. What has changed when you wake up tomorrow morning? What else?'

6 Exceptions

Are there any exceptions? When is the problem absent or less noticeable? Together with the client, the professional looks for differences and exceptions, and the extent to which the client is able to control the occurrence of the exceptions.

7 Scaling

If 10 is: 'I have reached my goal' and 0 is: 'I have yet not reached my goal', where are you now on a scale of 10 to 0?

Scaling is used to gain insight into the following areas:

- The client's progress during the sessions;
- The degree of hope the client has;
- The amount of energy the client is willing to invest in improving his or her life;
- The confidence the client has in terms of reaching his or her goal;
- The client's willingness to put the necessary effort into reaching his or her goal.

This is explained in more detail later in this document.

8 Competency questions

The hermeneutic circle can be used for asking competency questions. For more information, see the guide 'Talking about Sexuality and Intimacy with Clients'.

The professional compliments the client directly, asks competency questions (indirect compliments) and gives positive character interpretations:

- 'How brave of you to...'
- 'Where did you get that good idea to...?'
- 'It takes a strong person like you to...'; 'Please tell me more.'

9 Feedback

Feedback to the client consists of three components:

- Compliments for what the client has accomplished and positive character interpretations. Compliments are a positive way of reinforcing past successes and competencies.
- A reason (rationale) for the goal to be achieved (preferably in the client's own words). The bridge connects the compliments to the homework suggestions or tasks. The bridge often begins with 'and because...'
- A task or homework suggestions. This component comprises one or more behavioural or observational tasks.

The solution-focused professional can introduce a five-minute break before the feedback, allowing time to think about what feedback to give.

The feedback provided differs for 'visitors', 'complainants' and 'customers':

- Visitors are not given suggestions for homework assignments (they do get compliments).
- Customers are given observational tasks and/or behavioural tasks.
- Complainants are only given suggestions for observational tasks.

(Roeden & Bannink, 2009)

Goal Formulation

Goal formulation is an essential part of a solution-focused approach. It encourages the client to envision a future without the problem or in which the problem occurs to a lesser extent.

The first small steps are defined in a clear and concrete manner. The miracle question is a goal-setting question that can be used to help the client picture his or her preferred future. See step five of section 'Talking to the Client'.

(Roeden & Bannink, 2009)

Asking about Exceptions

Finding exceptions

Exceptions are circumstances in which the stated problem does not occur or occurs less often or intensely. These moments or experiences need to be examined because they form the building blocks of solutions. To discover these exceptions, the educator asks questions to find out what the client did differently or in what way the situation was different. A solution-focused approach focuses on the 'who, what, when and where' of the exception, rather than the 'who, what, when and where' of the problem.

Asking for details

Clients with intellectual disabilities may experience difficulties in exploring the past to retrieve exceptions. Therefore, the use of a technique called topographic analysis can be useful. Topographic analysis describes specific behaviour at a specific time and place. If topographic analysis is solution focused it will focus on the exceptions and magnify the desired behaviour.

Finding resources

When clients receiving sexual education encounter problems, they often forget that they have the competencies to solve the problem. They may also not be aware of the available resources. The educator should therefore provide information on all available resources that can help them.



Scaling Questions

Scaling questions can be used to communicate with the client about sexual issues.

For instance, they can be used at the start of teaching sexual education to see where the client is now as well as to measure progress during the sessions. The client indicates his or her present situation on a scale of 10 to 0. There are several ways to ask scaling questions. For example, you can use a scale from 10 to 1 (leaving out the worst possible situation). It has been shown that clients using a scale from 10 to 0 tend to rate their experience higher. The advantages of scaling questions are:

- Numbers can be compared: more, less, equal
- Numbers are measurable: half way, far removed, close
- Numbers are flexible
- Numbers have a personal meaning to the client: 'his or her' number
- Numbers have no emotional meaning or connotation and are therefore more neutral than words
- Numbers allow you to look at the problem from a distance
- Numbers simplify a complex situation
- Numbers can be used to compare different persons' estimations

Scaling questions can also be used in combination with pictograms. For example, '0' is a thundercloud and '10' is the sun. There are, of course, many more possibilities to ask scaling questions.

Follow-up Sessions

After the first session, several follow-up sessions are scheduled to determine whether the client's circumstances have improved. In almost all cases, minor improvements can be found. It is important to focus on them and to encourage the client to repeat these successes. If nothing has improved, make sure the client tries new things rather than doing more of the same. Follow-up sessions also offer the opportunity for evaluation.

An opening question for a follow-up session could be: 'What is better?' This question can be answered in four ways: 'Things are better', 'Things are the same', 'Things are worse' or you may disagree on this issue.

Conclusion

From the very first sexual education sessions, clients are stimulated to construct a vision of a future situation. This is done by using positive behavioural terms and attainable goals. As an educator, it is your job to give clients hope and confidence in their ability to reach these goals.

There are several ways to end a sexual education programme. In a solution-focused approach, creative elements are incorporated into the teaching method. Below are some examples:

- Make a certificate with a list of compliments.
- Make a certificate or pamphlet stating the 'miracle' that the client has accomplished.
- Ask how the client would like to celebrate completing the programme and incorporate this in the last session.

- Celebrate with cookies, potato chips or flowers.
- Ask how the client would like to celebrate his or her accomplishment.
- Ask who the client would like to invite.
- Ask the client to make a drawing of his or her starting situation and the end result.
- Mark the occasion with a cuddly toy or other item (transitional object).
- Ask if the client would like to help others with similar problems as a mentor.

Specific Solutions for Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Clients with a history of sexual abuse often suffer from negative thoughts and are more likely to end up in a downward spiral. A methodological approach to sexuality and intimacy issues involves actively stimulating clients to improve the quality of their life. Various interventions have been developed to influence positive behaviour in a structured way in one-on-one situations, including:

- *Making a list of positive things in life.* This can be used to remind clients of good things in life or as a prompt of enjoyable activities that they can do.
- *Bodywork*, e.g. dancing, to develop an awareness of touch as a pleasurable rather than negative medium.
- *Artistic self-expression.* Find a medium through which to express positive emotions and experiences which acts as a counterbalance to verbal expressions of guilt and self blame.
- *Identifying a healing symbol* such as a plant or animal to be nurtured and act as a symbol of the person's emotional and personal growth. (Note: determine whether the client is able to handle this responsibility).

- *Self-nurturing rituals*, e.g. beauty treatments, give clients permission to pamper themselves with pleasurable activities as opposed to condemning themselves.

- *Present-focused learning.* Learning a new skill or hobby geared towards leading an active life now and in the future.

(Roeden & Bannink, 2009)

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