

# ASD – the ‘A’ is not ‘asexual’

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CLINICAL SEXOLOGIST



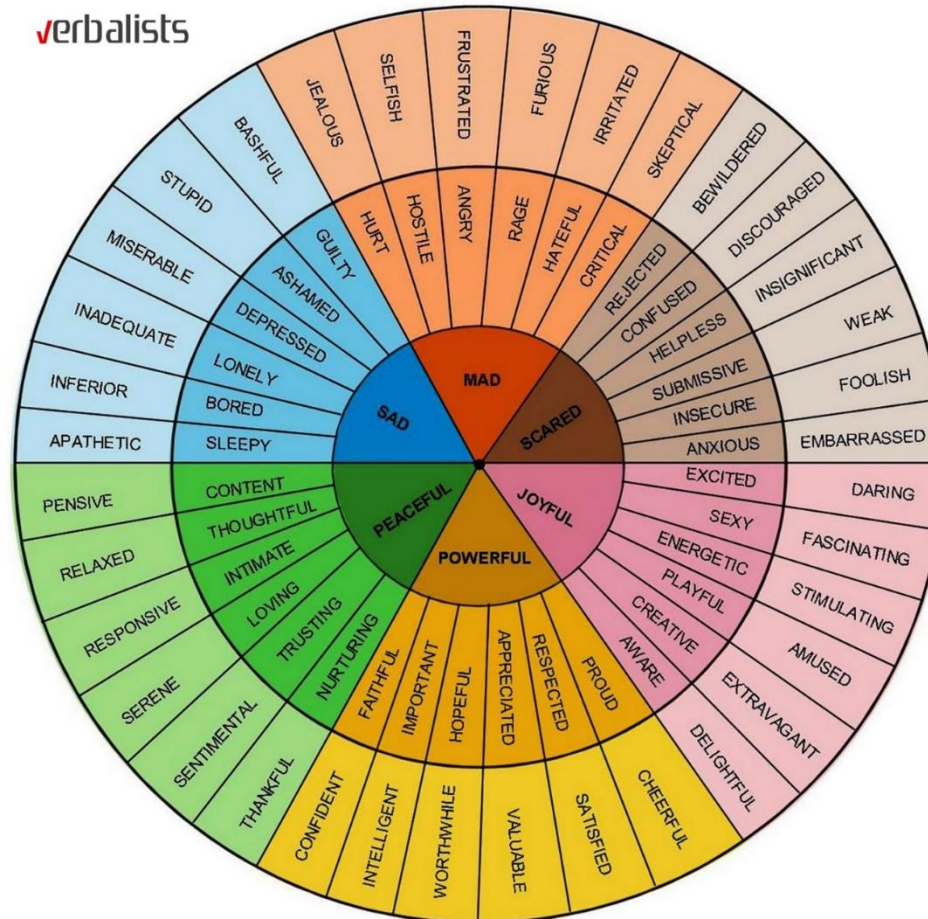
# What is Sexology?

- ▶ The study of human sexuality
- ▶ *What people do sexually and how they feel about it*
- ▶ Interests, behaviors, fantasy
- ▶ Research, education, therapy, forensics, assessments, consultations, policy development



# What is Sexology?

verbalists



# Clients

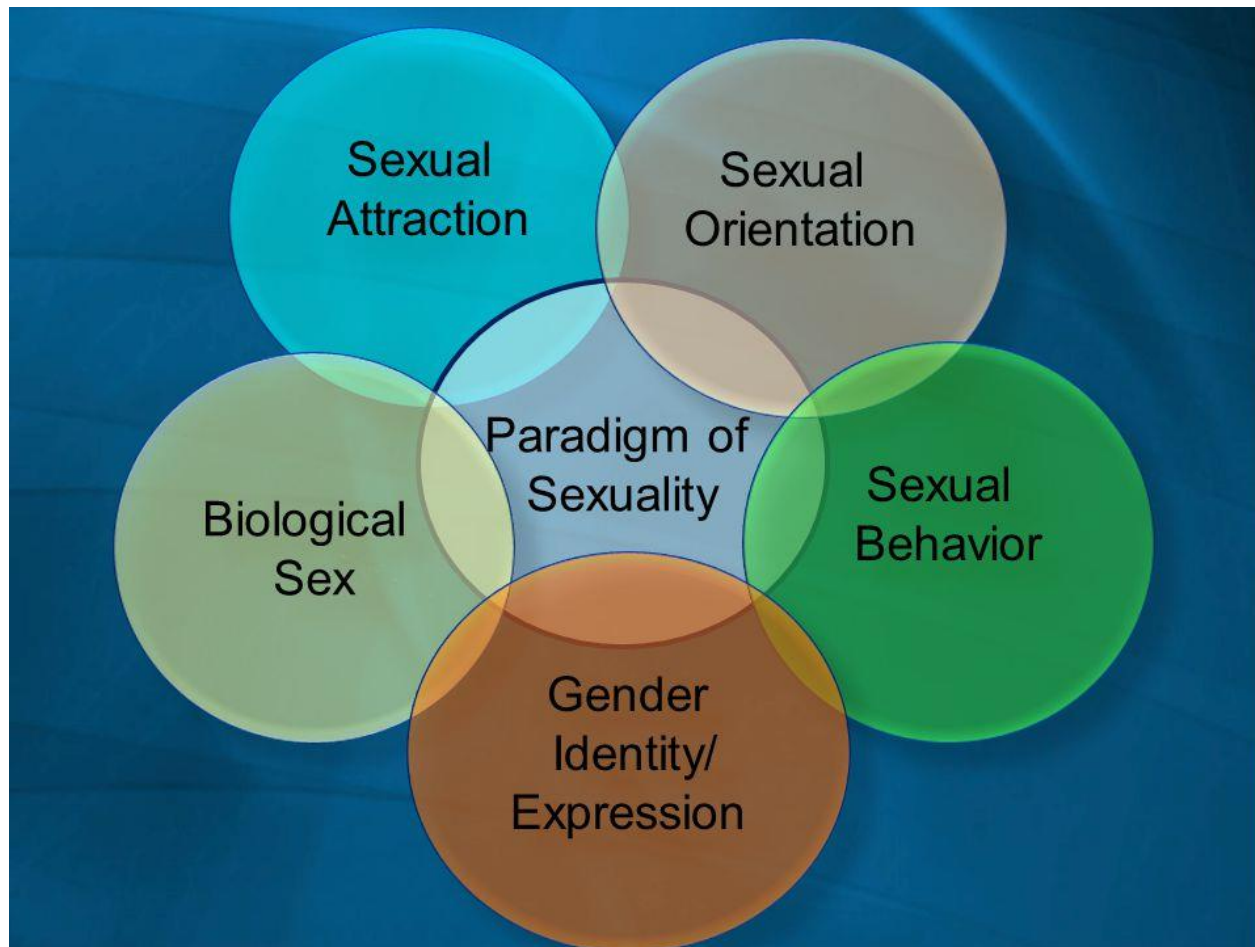
- ▶ Concerns with function - erection, orgasm, ejaculation, arousal
- ▶ Concerns with sexual desire/interest (including discrepancy between partners)
- ▶ Sexual and pelvic pain/discomfort
- ▶ Paraphilia
- ▶ Sexual orientation concerns and questions
- ▶ Clients requiring sexual health education
- ▶ Gender dysphoria, transitioning

# Workshops



- ▶ Coalition of Persons with Disabilities
- ▶ Breast Cancer Conference
- ▶ Child and Youth Care Conference
- ▶ Prostate Cancer Retreat
- ▶ MUN School of Medicine
- ▶ Girl Guides of Canada

# Sexuality



# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ Hold up your left hand if you think it's a myth, and your right hand if you think it's a fact !

LEFT = MYTH

RIGHT = FACT

# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ Autistic people are asexual



# MYTH BUSTERS

LEFT = MYTH

# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ People with autism have a higher than 'normal' sex drive

# MYTH BUSTERS

LEFT = MYTH

# MYTH BUSTERS

- People with autism are four times more likely to experience sexual abuse or sexual exploitation

# MYTH BUSTERS

RIGHT = FACT

# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ Ignoring the topic of sex is a good idea to avoid raising anyone's curiosity

# MYTH BUSTERS

LEFT = MYTH

# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ Autistic people wouldn't bother accessing pornography



# MYTH BUSTERS

LEFT = MYTH

# MYTH BUSTERS

- ▶ People with autism can handle sex ed

# MYTH BUSTERS

RIGHT = FACT

# Why sex ed?

- ▶ Historical lack of access
  - ▶ Constantly changing
- ▶ Sexual development is inevitable
  - ▶ Infantilize
  - ▶ Chronological age, developmental age
- ▶ Safety
  - ▶ Higher levels of abuse and exploitation
  - ▶ Avoiding involvement with the criminal system
- ▶ Self awareness
  - ▶ Puberty can be terrifying
  - ▶ Self soothing

# Why sex ed?

- ▶ Correct terminology
  - ▶ Medical appointments
  - ▶ Explaining an act they engaged in
- ▶ Higher prevalence of gender exploration
  - ▶ Identity and orientation exploration
  - ▶ Can be confusing
- ▶ Asexual cannot be assumed
  - ▶ Not the same as abstinence
- ▶ Where else are they going to learn it?
  - ▶ Peers, online and in person
  - ▶ Social cues to know what is a joke

# Vignette

- ▶ Relieved to 'be in puberty'
  - ▶ Grade 4
  - ▶ Nocturnal admissions (wet dreams)
  - ▶ Spontaneous erections
  - ▶ Tactile sensitivity

# Vignette

- ▶ Stalking in Starbucks
  - ▶ Attempting to flirt
  - ▶ Unable to read rejection
  - ▶ Persistent rule follower
  - ▶ Repetitive behaviors
  - ▶ Police involvement re:stalking

# Vignette

- ▶ Gender can be confusing
  - ▶ Self identity and expression
  - ▶ Self esteem
  - ▶ Not a concrete concept
  - ▶ Black and white thinking

*“I had a rigid way of seeing the world, and this prevented me from accepting my sexuality. I sort of denied it to myself because I have very concrete black-and-white thinking and it didn’t quite fit in.”* Autistic adult male participant in focus group



# Vignette

## ▶ Masturbation

- ▶ Hands in my pants feels good
- ▶ Not okay to have my hands in my pants on the bus, in sobeys, at the movies
- ▶ School – punishable behavior
- ▶ Public perception – pervert, predator

People with autism are generally rule followers –

but they have to know the rules in order to follow them!

# NOW ONLINE!



## Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism

Developed by: **Autism Nova Scotia**

**Autism Society Newfoundland & Labrador** has partnered with Autism Nova Scotia and is offering a **NEW** program on healthy relationships and sexuality for adults with autism. The program runs once a week for 13 weeks.



### Topics include:

- Anatomy & Function
- Gender & Sexual Orientation
- Sexual Health
- Sexual Behaviours
- Relationships
- Dating
- Emotions

**Who:** Individuals with autism ages 19 and up.

**Where:** Online! Through a video call program

**When:** Tuesdays, 6-8pm September 8 - December 1, 2020

For more information,  
please contact Jennifer  
**Email:** [jspracklin@autism.nf.net](mailto:jspracklin@autism.nf.net)



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

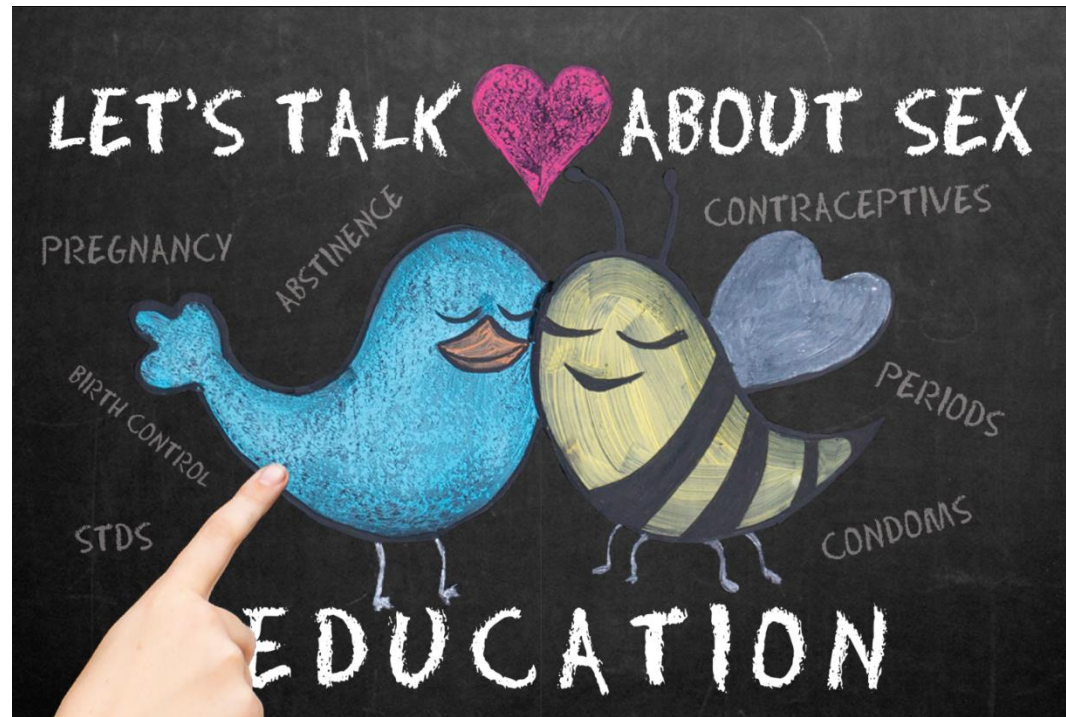
Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada

**Autism Society**  
Newfoundland & Labrador



# What should sex ed look like?

- ▶ SIECCAN core principles of comprehensive sexual health education
- ▶ Sex positive
- ▶ Providing scientific information
- ▶ Non biased
- ▶ Non judgemental
- ▶ Inclusive



# COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

## FOR CANADIANS:

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- ✓ Is accessible to all people regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, STBBI status, geographic location, socio-economic status, cultural or religious background, ability, or housing status (e.g., those who are incarcerated, homeless, or living in care facilities).
- ✓ Promotes human rights including autonomous decision-making and respect for the rights of others.
- ✓ Is scientifically accurate and uses evidence-based teaching methods.
- ✓ Is broadly-based in scope and depth and addresses a range of topics relevant to sexual health and well-being.
- ✓ Is inclusive of the identities and lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, Two Spirit (LGBTQI2S+), and asexual people.
- ✓ Promotes gender equality and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.
- ✓ Incorporates a balanced approach to sexual health promotion that includes the positive aspects of sexuality and relationships, as well as the prevention of sexual health problems.
- ✓ Is responsive to and incorporates emerging issues related to sexual health and well-being.
- ✓ Is provided by educators who have the knowledge and skills to deliver comprehensive sexual health education and who receive administrative support.

# What should sex ed look like?

- ▶ Not just the basics!
  - ▶ Think back on your own experience with sexual health education...  
Did you learn about: puberty, contraception, sti's, pregnancy
  - ▶ What about the rest?  
How did you learn about privacy, relationships, puberty, gender, consent, when to have sex, peer pressure, masturbation?  
How did you learn about love, flirting, telling dirty jokes, using innuendos?
- ▶ Gaps in learning from peer feedback, social cues
- ▶ Specifically adapted, direct education

# What should sex ed look like?

- ▶ Be proactive
  - ▶ There is no such thing as age appropriate language for body parts
  - ▶ Saturated with sex, important to distinguish it is not mandatory
- ▶ No need for 'the talk'
  - ▶ Look for teachable moments
  - ▶ Uneasy with eye contact – walking, driving, prepping supper together
- ▶ Practice 'what if' moments
  - ▶ Prepare for potentially embarrassing situations by practicing solutions ahead of time

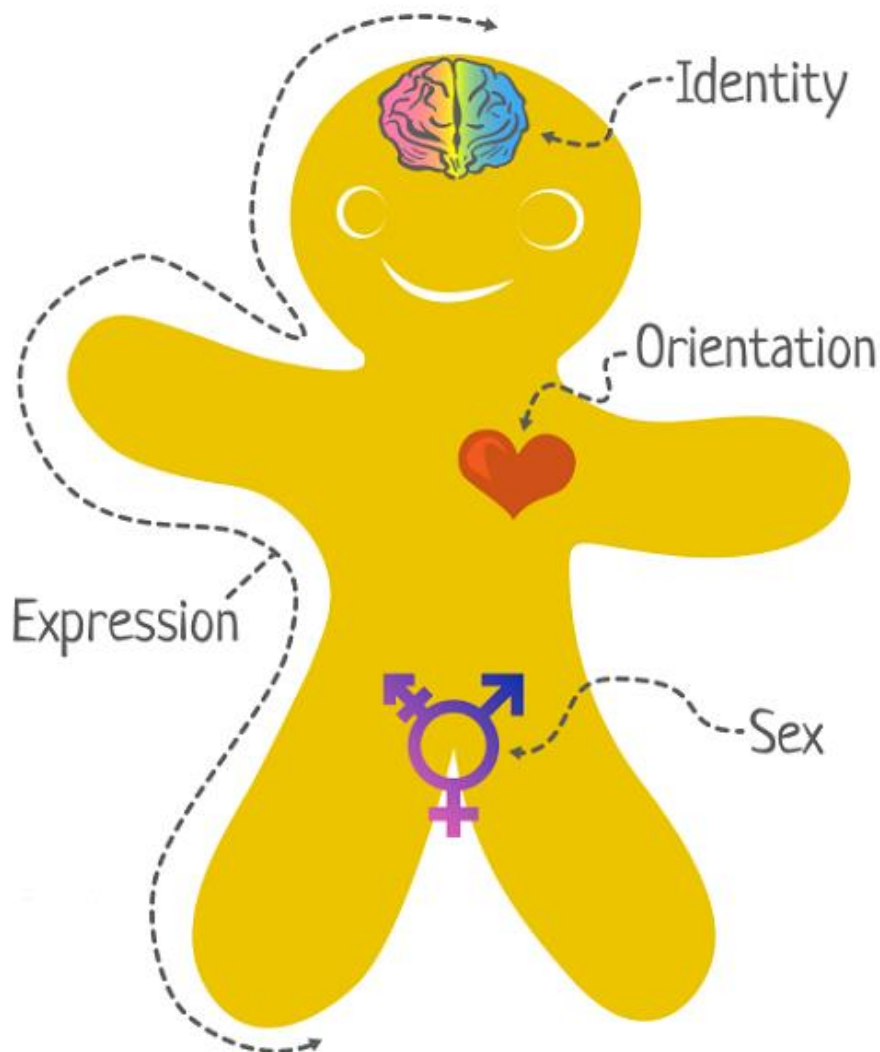
# What should sex ed look like?

- ▶ Parental figures are biggest source of information
- ▶ Consider:
  - ▶ Extra time to process
  - ▶ Not a 'one and done'
  - ▶ Language – inclusive terms, pronouns
    - concrete e.g. voice is cracking
  - ▶ Visual, tangible signs in everyday life
  - ▶ Skill teaching strategies
  - ▶ Role model – older cousin? family friend?



# The Genderbread Person

by [www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com](http://www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com)



## Gender Identity

Woman

Genderqueer

Man

Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.

## Gender Expression

Feminine

Androgynous

Masculine

Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.

## Biological Sex

Female

Intersex

Male

Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.

## Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual

Bisexual

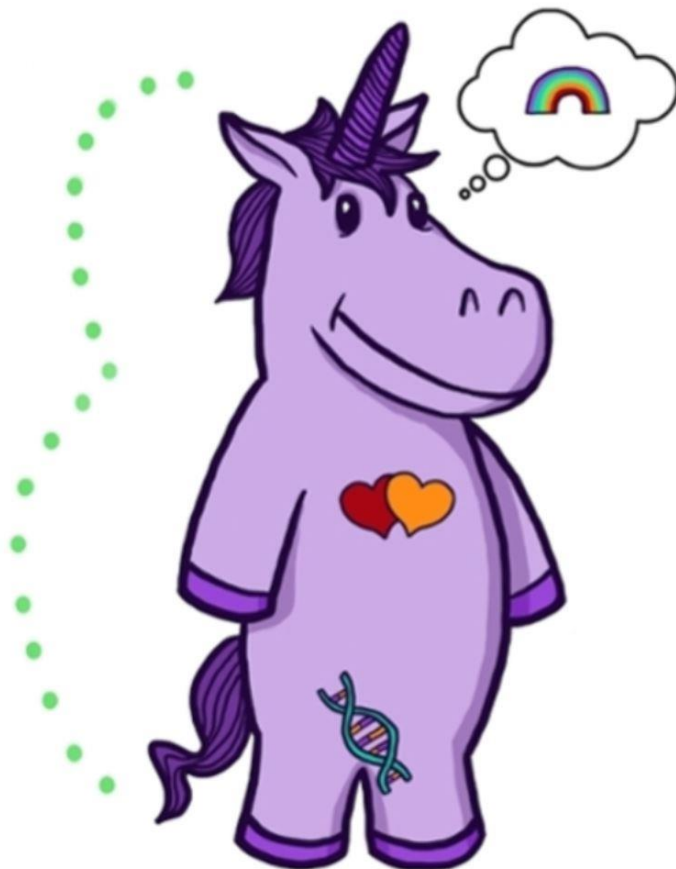
Homosexual

Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.



# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan

# Sexual orientation

## ▶ LGBTQIA2+

- ▶ Heterosexual
- ▶ Homosexual
- ▶ Bisexual
- ▶ Gay
- ▶ Lesbian
- ▶ Trans
- ▶ Pansexual
- ▶ Queer
- ▶ Questioning
- ▶ Intersex
- ▶ Asexual
- ▶ Ally
- ▶ Two spirited



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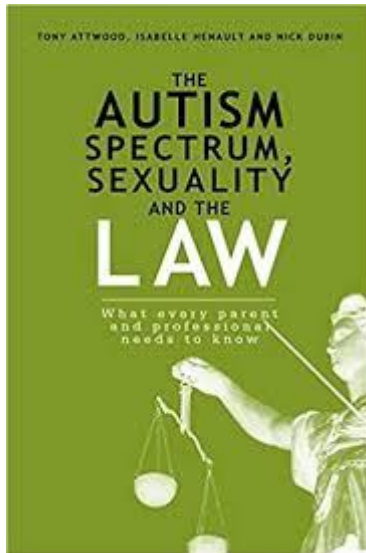
- ▶ Surveys consistently show higher percentage of LGBT identifying individuals amongst ASD population than general population – what odds?

\*self report!!

# What should sex ed look like?

- ▶ Don't forget:
  - ▶ Puberty, body parts, functions
  - ▶ Masturbation
  - ▶ Reproduction, contraception, STI information
  - ▶ Crushes, relationships, online dating
  - ▶ Pornography, sexting, cybersex
  - ▶ Expressing emotions
  - ▶ Showing affection appropriately
  - ▶ Innuendos, flirting, slang
  - ▶ Sexual activity is not a given – from either partner
  - ▶ Sexual readiness
  - ▶ Gender
  - ▶ LGBT
  - ▶ Societal representation

# Vignette



## ▶ Nick Dubin

- ▶ Wondered was he gay? Afraid he might be, unable to say the word
- ▶ As an adult, found male friends attractive and sought therapy to explore his sexual orientation
- ▶ 33 years old, doctorate in psychology, working as a consultant in a school for autistic students
- ▶ Takes therapists advice to explore pornographic magazines, stumbles across internet porn and begins saving images to his computer

*"I had no concept of how something I was doing in the privacy of my home without interacting with anyone could be breaking the law"* Nick Dubin

## Closing thoughts

The best decisions are  
**informed** decisions!

Knowledge is power!



Questions?

Thank you so much!  
All the best!