

Better Together: Healthy Relationships

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I'm so excited to be invited here because, this sounds really trite, but this is my passion. So, a little bit about me, but not much. I'm gonna keep my eye on the clock. I have a, for those who like degrees, I have an undergraduate in Clinical Psychology and a Master's in Social Work. I've been working on this program for 12 years now and my current grant is from the Centers for Disease Control through their Rape Prevention Education Grant. So what I am tasked to do is primary sexual abuse prevention. That said, this is not about, really, sexual abuse prevention today. This is really about how, what I teach students as sexual abuse prevention is really, and I like this phrase because it makes me think of food, the secret sauce for a good life. And that's what I tell the young people when I start and that's what I'm gonna tell you. My hope today is you'll understand why this education is important for all young people. And that teachers will want to use the Healthy Relationships curriculum, which is being, and has been, evaluated by Washington State's, what is it, oh, Office of Superintendent of Public Schools for their sexual abuse prevention programming across all the State of Washington. And it's designed specifically for students in high school and transition programs with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I was on the committee that evaluated sexual abuse prevention programs for the state and I want you to know that I was disappointed but not surprised to find that very few of them were appropriate for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They didn't even offer an

adaptive version on their website. So mine is one of the few that takes this student population into consideration. I developed what I'm going to talk about today with the assistance of my awesome crew of teachers in Spokane, my transition teachers and my high school teachers, and most of all I developed this with feedback I got from students, the over 1,000 some students I trained in over 8,000 hours of doing this curriculum. 'Cause I love to talk. So let's get started.

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Healthy relationship education can support people in their employment, promote stable relationships, and decrease possibility of abuse. Who here is a parent of a child with a disability? Somebody tell me what they want for their kids. What do you want for your kids when they grow up? Shout it out. You don't have to raise your hand. We're all grownups here. Independence. What else do you want for them?

- Safety
- Be included.
- To be included. You want inclusion. What else do you want for them?
- To be safe.
- You want safety. Anything else?
- To have the same opportunities as any other child.
- You want them to have a real life?

- Yeah, a real life. The same opportunities as any other child, yeah.

- Right. Not some sort of narrowed down, tailored, semi, sort of, kind of but not really opportunities, but real, real opportunities. So, if we want people to be successful what they really need is healthy relationship education because that's going to give them the skills they need to achieve successful employment and to promote those stable personal and professional relationships, which decreases the possibility of abuse.

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So, in healthy relationships what do young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities need to know? Well they need to know the social rules about relationships. Frankly everybody needs to know this. I'm often asked about this for the typically developing students in the school system and my answer is, "Nope. They're on their own." No. I'm not going to do it because I think the students I work with need this more than anybody. Because they're separated from typically developing kids almost as soon as they hit school, they don't get an opportunity to see what the rules of the game are. So, when they make a mistake, it's usually attributed to their disability when in fact it should be attributed to the fact that they don't have an opportunity to learn with people who know the rules. They need to know the difference between the types of relationships. If you're on Facebook, and hit "relationship" what does that mean? You've got a little button on Facebook and it says, "I'm in a relationship." What does that mean? Anybody still here use Facebook? Oh come on. Yeah, us old people do.

- It means you have a significant other.

- Right. What it does, is it narrows that word "relationship" down to mean only intimate relationships. Well we have hundreds of relationships in our lives and we have healthy relationships class because a lot of the abuse that happens in the lives of people with disabilities occurs in all the relationships. It's not just happening in those intimate relationships. But all the information

I've found on abuse prevention in relationships only talked about dating. Only talked about dating as though that were the only unsafe place in the world. So, in healthy relationships class what they learn is the difference between all the relationships. We learn to name them all when they find out how many there are. And then we talk about how they're different. And then, and this is really important, they need to know when some sort of relationship they're in is no longer safe.

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So, how does this help? Well, if you work, you need to be able to keep a job. If you want to keep the job, you have to know why you're at work. You're not at work to meet dates and you're not at work to make new friends. You're at work to do a job. In my agency, the ARC of Spokane, we have a lot of people who receive employment support and one of the top reasons for losing a job is not know why you're there at work. Not knowing about coworkers. Not knowing the difference between a coworker and a friend, or thinking that job is a place to find a girlfriend or a boyfriend. So in healthy relationships class we teach them the difference between the relationships, and that difference is gonna help them keep their jobs.

If they know the reason they're there at work is to get a job done, they're less inclined to get in trouble for visiting or talking with people and less inclined to get in trouble for trying to date the customers.

How to make and keep friends. That's really the foundation of everybody's life. Real friendships, not fake friendships, not people who see a child with a disability and within 5 minutes identify themselves as a friend. That's not a friend. I don't even know what to call that, but that's not a friend.

How to make and keep real friends. What it looks like, what it feels like, and how do you tell. And finally, what does a safe social life look like? Is it really my girlfriend if I met her on Facebook and she lives in California and I live in Spokane and have never even met her. Is that a real relationship? Or is that not a relationship? So, safe social life. The program identifies that.

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So what are healthy relationship classes? Well, I provide information to the students to help them be successful in employment and in their personal relationships, but I also give them a safe place to ask questions. Now, in Spokane, I do this for the teachers so the teachers bring me in as a guest speaker, but I also have healthy relationships classes that are going to start in the Tri-Cities in the transition program there and the teacher's going to teach them there. And I have healthy relationships classes in Idaho and I have them on the other side of the state, and those teachers teach them there, and they can still do the same thing. They can provide a safe place in the class to ask questions - and ask any question, and feel safe asking those questions, and it gives the students a resource to take home. So, I'll explain how this works, but every student who's in the healthy relationship class gets a workbook so that when we're done with what we're doing in that class, they can take it home. My hope is that the students are sharing this with their parents. Once in a while I get some feedback from parents that indicate that they're doing that which is awesome.

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So, here's how I do it. ...what they need to know so when I'm in the class with the students I'm working with students across a wide range of abilities. And I honestly never know when I get in the classroom who I'm talking to. And I do the same thing with all the students. I take the information in the workbook and I break it down into 4 conceptual areas - which I'll talk about. I define and discuss every single term of importance I use in that classroom. And I break it down to the most concrete level I'm able to break it down to. I'm trying to get abstraction completely out of the picture. And then, once we have all this defined and discussed, then I put all the information back together, and at the end of the day if the student is able to tell me what a healthy relationship looks like, which is a safe relationship and what an unhealthy relationship looks like.

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So the 4 main areas are: what makes any relationship healthy, the difference between friends, acquaintance, boyfriends & girlfriends, we can add coworkers & bosses onto that, what is consent, and recognizing dangerous relationships and getting help.

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So the basic things that I invite the students to learn is that a healthy relationship has these 3 things in it. They have to have mutual respect and equality. They have to be able to trust each other. And they have to be able to make their own choices. And one of the first choices I tell kids they get to make is whether they even want to be in a relationship. This is wonderful. This prohibits strangers coming up and announcing that they're their friends. Cause that's dangerous. And I know you've all seen it happen. Somebody comes up and they'll just say, "Oh, I'm so-and-so and I just met you and I'm your friend." No you're not. It's more than that to be a friend, but more importantly, everybody gets a choice in whether or not somebody is their friend.

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So, in the class we discuss all types of relationships and then we discuss subtypes - healthy and unhealthy. And these are the things that belong in healthy and those are the things that belong in unhealthy. This way no matter what kind of relationship they're in, if it's missing these 3 important components it doesn't matter if it's a boss or a coworker, or a roommate, or a bus driver, or a fellow student, or a teacher, they're going to pay attention to this and identify that as either good for them or not good for them. They're not going to just limit themselves to that boyfriend girlfriend arena, or that intimate relationship or sexual relationship. This tells them that if this is missing from any kind of relationship, that that by definition is no longer a good for them relationship.

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And there's my example that I give to the kids. That is our definition of an unhealthy relationship. It's missing one of those 3 elements. This way it makes abuse recognition concrete and specific. It's not an abstract idea. They know that if somebody's not treating them with respect they should be suspicious of that person. They know that if somebody lies to them that's not somebody they can trust, and they know that if that person tries to take their choices away, which we would call manipulation or intimidation, that that is also an unhealthy relationship. So we don't have to use terms like manipulation, we're just pointing out what should and shouldn't be in a relationship.

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And here's why. So, the rates of sexual abuse of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the lifespan, so that's across the whole lifespan, is somewhere between 70 - 98%. So, and I think the reason for that is, is that we haven't really addressed the issues behind this and it hasn't been given a lot of attention. So, we're actually doing anti-abuse work in this room right now just talking about

healthy relationships. But I want to point out that if we just left it to the romantic relationships, it would probably fit in here somewhere. This is why when we teach about healthy relationships we talk about every single kind of relationship. And what I did notice about a lot of abuse prevention programs is they focused on stranger danger. Well obviously it's not the stranger we need to worry about. It's the people they're already in relationships with that are disturbing in this (muffled). So, the healthy relationship model addresses all of those potential abusers by pointing out what needs to be in a relationship and what shouldn't be in a relationship.

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So this is the artwork from the student workbook. The student workbook, which is what the kids get, which is what I teach from, is a coloring book. This is the old artwork. Every single year it gets new artwork. The book that I just showed you had different artwork than this, but what I try to do is I try to create images that can explain the concepts that we're talking about so that they don't have to guess what we're talking about.

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These are the pages that the students get in our class, and this one here just shows that we do discuss the different many types of relationships. This is the one that I think is, this one I think is one of the most important ones that we teach - the friend or acquaintance. And the one that concerns the parent most - what is a girlfriend or boyfriend - so we actually define them. So, the friend or acquaintance, this is really gonna help people in their work life because if they know that an acquaintance is somebody doing their job then they're somebody's acquaintance or coworker if they're doing their job when they're with somebody. This is what we use to teach students that when they're at a work place, they're going to do a job. They're not there to make friends. We actually spend a lot of time on this, but I've noticed in the disability services arena that there are a lot of professionals who deliberately confuse friendship with their professional roles. And that will take us back to the image of the perpetrators being people in the disability field. So, it does 2 things. It identifies behaviors that belong in specific relationships, but it also identifies the difference between a friend and an acquaintance. So, we talk a lot about getting paid to do a job as an acquaintance. I'm trying to think of which story to tell. So the story that created this is I was with a young man and he wasn't getting a job. Remember we were talking about jobs being really important. And so they bring him together with his job coach and I was invited as a support person for the young man but I was not asked to speak. So I had to sit there and keep my mouth shut. So while I'm listening, the employment specialist started talking about what she had been doing for him. And the things she listed were: we go to the movies, we play video games at his house, I take him with me when I pay my bills, sometimes we pick up applications at job sites, and we hang out together. And I was listening to that thinking, "you're, that, you get paid for that, yeah? 'Cause I don't see how that's going to get him a job." And to his credit, he heard it too. So he pauses, and he pauses, and he says, "I think I need a new job coach." And this page was born. She leaned across the table and she put her hand on his hand, and she looked straight into his eyes, the job coach did, and she said, "You can't fire me. I thought we were friends." And then he was confused. I didn't have permission to speak. I thought my head was gonna blow up. And he looked and "Oh. Ok. Ok." So he kept her for another month. He came to my

office and we did this. This page. We did this and we did this. And finally when we got done with this I was able to say, "None of your other friends get paid to come over to your house and watch movies with you." "So that means she's not doing her job." "You're right, she's not doing her job." And after a month he was able to go back into that company and say, "I want to fire her. She's not doing her job." I see this over and over again. So, if young people know that people around them who are responsible for doing jobs, that's what they should be doing with them. Then if the bus driver asks them on a date or the teacher asks them on a date, they know "Hold it a second. The teacher's here to teach me. The bus driver's here to drive me. They're not here to ask me on a date." They learn that. But they also learn that when they're at work, they're not getting paid to ask cute girls out. They're not getting paid to chat up guys. They're not getting paid to make new friends. They're getting paid to work. The difference between a friend and an acquaintance. When I can find a way to make people pay me to make friends, I'll tell you all about it. So, this is also really an important one that we do a lot. There's a lot of confusion among the students about what this is and I'll see a lot of students just jump into this immediately. So, we actually break this down, take an entire class to discuss this. And what we talk about in the class is what does it take to use that boyfriend/girlfriend name. This one came out of a student who was going to fly to California to meet his girlfriend. And I said, "So you know people in California?" and he said, "No." "Have you been to California?" "No." "What's your plan?" "Well I'm gonna get on the airplane 'cause she told me what plane to get on and I'm fly to California, and I'm gonna meet her." So I kept, "Has she come up here? Have you seen her?" "No. But she's my girlfriend." Boom. Here's this page. It's like okay, scratch and sniff test. If you've never actually been close enough to smell her, she can't be your girlfriend. So, this is both good for relationship confusion - so they know that there's a, it takes time to develop these relationships and you slow down and show them what that looks like. But also that you have to know say, I don't know, somebody's last name. And this is the spot where I do a lot of talking about the internet and I point out that there was a study done a couple years back that showed that a significant portion of women on the internet are men, which creped all the guys out and that anybody can put any picture on it. Anybody can say anything and then we back up to our definition of honesty and being truthful, which is you have to know whether people are lying to you. If you never ever see what they look like you don't know if they're lying.

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This is the boundaries part. So, parents, big on boundaries, so this is the one that's the most important. You have to have rules about people who touch you. I use "rules" because every student I know understands about games and rules, but when I start talking about "boundaries," I'm getting a little abstract. And I'm trying to give them a concept that they already use, and "rules" turned out to be a great concept for that. Because we know what happens...we have a name for people who break rules - cheaters - so they already have that figured out and they already don't like cheaters. So, this is probably the best part of the safety information that we're giving. Uh! It's one of the three important parts. Right here. This is consent. You have to have rules about who touches you. Who gets to touch you and where you want them to touch you. A lot of them are still struggling with the idea that they get to say, "no" to hugs or "no" to people touching them. So, I ask them to write down their personal rules and we actually talk about who gets to touch you. But this goes the other way too. So, some people lose their employment because they don't know that you can't go up and hug people just because you want to. Because they do at the community center, and they do at their sports games, and they do at home, so

hey, why can't I do that at work, and then they get fired because somebody was frightened that a person with a disability came up and hugged on them and somehow that makes it worse than anything ever. And so once they understand that they get to make their rules, then we learn that other people have their own rules and we have to ask. That's what consent is. Consent is asking permission. So now we're talking about consent which later on becomes a very important part when they get into sexual relationships, but we don't start there. We start here. We have rules about who touches you, and if somebody wants to touch you they have to ask your permission. This is the part where I need parent buy in, because a lot of students will tell me, "If I tell my mom she can't hug me she's gonna get mad at me." "If I tell my mom that Grandma can't hug me I'm gonna get in trouble." And like, I hear you. I understand. But, maybe you need to have a conversation with your parents and let them know you're becoming a young adult now and try to talk them through, but if they never get to practice this, they're not going to be good at it. I see it in our community center all the time. People come downstairs and they have, they're hugging all over each other and nobody's asking for permission. That teaches them that anybody can hug all over them without asking permission, or that they can hug all over other people without asking permission. We have a lot of young men right now who live in "line of sight" facilities because they didn't know you have to ask for permission to touch and they touched a girl inappropriately. And do you know what happens to young men with intellectual disabilities who touch a girl inappropriately? What do you think? They end up in a facility with "line of sight" for practically the rest of their lives. They get a sexual assessment. I got involved in one of those and all, all we did is we had somebody who didn't ask for permission for touch. So if you teach young adults about these rules, like I have to ask permission. You have to ask permission. Here's what it looks like. Here's how we can do it. It's really fun and great. You're protecting them so that they don't, they can draw the line on other people, but it also prevents them from making missteps that can have lifelong consequences, the least of which is losing a job. We talk about, this is really important here. I let them know that these rules tell them who their friends are. After we practice letting people know what our rules are, very nicely teaching our rules, and maybe, you know, very gently and nicely letting people know what they need and don't need, I point out that if you teach somebody your rule and they change and they listen to you, that's a real friend. If you teach somebody your rule and they tell you your rule is stupid and that they don't have to do it, maybe that's not a friend. Maybe that's not a friend you need to have. So, if you have a rule about punching in the arm and you're like, "Yeah, I really don't like that," and someone keeps doing that, maybe think about whether that's a real friend or not. So this way we're able to identify people who are potentially harmful without using any abstract concepts. It's all based on how people behave. I ask them to write their rules down because often they don't think about what their boundaries are. Most people don't. Most people don't know they've had somebody break a boundary right up until it happens and you have an emotional response. So I ask them to think about the ones that are the most important to them so they can put them right up on the front burner and they have it right there. They don't have to have a moment to reflect and pause and say, "Why am I upset about this thing that just happened?" What's really important for them if they're got them right up there in front it's going to be easy access in case somebody violates a boundary. Maybe

- Can I ask you some questions?

- Yeah.

- So if you have kids, 'cause you've got lots of visuals here, how do you, what if they don't, you know, they're not readers so they don't write, do you have, do they have visuals?

- Well, yeah. She's not a plant. So, we do the pages one at a time. I ask for volunteer readers. There's always a really good volunteer reader, and because I never know how people are going to connect to information, we have a couple of ways of doing that. One of them is a series of photographs. So, these are from our "Respect or Rude" collection. So I make a game out of it and I will put these pictures up on the overhead and then they tell me whether it shows respect or whether it shows rude behavior. And that way it's concrete. I'm nailing it right down with actions that you can see, behaviors you can understand. We also have sorting cards, which are cards with words on it, and we play a game for the students. We spin a wheel, win a prize, pick up a card based on a color, and then read out whether something is like, um, a healthy behavior or an unhealthy behavior or whether somebody is a friend or an acquaintance, and then they can go, we have stickers up on the board, and they can go put those cards where they belong. So that's yet another way that they can access the information, but doing the card sort, as well as the visual.

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So, we also talk about consent in the boyfriend and girlfriend context. We talk about it in the greater context, ask for permission, but then it's important, I think, to break it down, particularly in the boyfriend or girlfriend arena, because they seem to think that once somebody kissed them on Monday that means they get to kiss them on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. And so I'm trying to teach them that they both have to ask each other for permission, and I do mention sex. So we talk about the laws in the State of Washington, and I do bring in the consent laws, so we'll talk about this and then we'll discuss the laws. I actually have students argue with me about the laws, and it's exciting because that means they're listening. So, this is why this is important. One of my classrooms, it's a transition program, were talking about the law. It's like, you know, consent is a thing, it's where we ask for permission, but it's also a set of laws. So it's two things, you know it's like always ask for consent and permission, but in the State of Washington if you don't ask for consent and you have sex with somebody that's called rape. And people go to jail for that. So we pointed out that the law says you both have to be 16 or over, and one of the kids went, "No." "What? Yeah." Well we did that back and forth. Like, "Why? Why are you? So that you heard, you've been sleeping through the whole class." And, it turns out he was on the sexual predator list. And here's why and here's why I love these classes. He had a girlfriend he had since I think they were 14. Alright, so 13 or 14, and they did everything right. They took their time to get to know each other, they were friends first, there was that little spark of romance. They both decided that they were ready for sex. They knew about condoms. They had discussed it. He was a really articulate young man. She agreed. He agreed. I believe candles were involved at some point. Um, and they consummated their relationship and then she went home and she told somebody in her family and the police were at his house and had him arrested for statutory rape. He was 16 and she was 15. He will be on the sexual predator list for the rest of his life unless somebody goes to the judge, goes to the governor and asks for a pardon. Now, he's not a sexual predator. He did everything you'd hope somebody would do. He cared about her. This was a real relationship. They thought about it. They prepared for it. They knew what they needed to do, but here's the deal. They didn't have sex ed. They didn't talk about this at home. We're just not going to do anything about it. So nobody ever said the magic number is 16. Magic number. If it's not 16, it doesn't matter if any of the rest of that happened. And so he was shocked. And it was really sad because the teacher and I had to work with him. The probation department wanted to prevent him from attending any activity with vulnerable adults or

vulnerable children. And I said, "but that's all his classmates." "Yes, yes, he shouldn't hang out with any of them." I said, "Well where do you, he's a kid. Where's he supposed to go?" "Well he can't hang out with vulnerable kids." So, we had to work on that. But that's the kind of thing that can happen when people don't get the information they need. That's going to affect his ability to get a job. That's not going away. And all it would have taken is a little bit of information and they would not have made that mistake.

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So, at the end of the class, after we talked about defining healthy and choice and respect and then we go through all the different relationships we talk about the types of abuse. And this is really hard to do with young people because most of the students I get, and I get high school and transition students, have already been abused. So, what I'm teaching them at that point - I don't always mean sexually, although many of them have been sexually abused - almost all of them have experienced some kind of abuse by the time I meet them, because most of the students have been through the foster care system. Not all, but a lot. So when I'm talking about this, there's always a student in class who has an epiphany in the classroom. And they learn to name this thing that happened to them that they had no name for. And this can happen in any kind of a relationship. Right. You could have parents who financially abuse you, you could have a payee that financially abuses you. You have to understand what that is, so it doesn't matter what the relationship is, it's the behavior you're looking at. So, we're doing the physical abuse and we're talking about how it's used to scare you and how it's used to control you and some of the things that it could look like, and so we're discussing this in the classroom and one of the girls who was maybe 100 pounds, had this blonde flowing hair and this pale beautiful little face says, "Mrs. Fears." And I was like, "Yeah. What's up?" And she goes, "So, when my foster mother used to grab my hair and shake my head around that was physical abuse." I was like, "...yeah." And she said, "Why did she do that?" "I don't know." But imagine, she's in this situation and she doesn't have a name for it. So at the end of healthy relationships classes we're talking about relationships. This is what happens in those wonderful things you're missing, then they have a name for it. They can't ask for help if they don't know what they're asking for help about. So, part of having great relationships is when the relationships aren't good, and they're really not great, you need to know why they're really not great and be able to ask people for help using the correct language. So, we had a...one of the other things that we do in class is we, we have a body part bingo game but we don't play it in every classroom, but we do talk about correct anatomical language. It's as close to sex ed as my class gets, and I ask them, you know, what are the correct names of the guys' personal body parts and the beauty part is they get to give me all the wrong names first, 'cause that will warm them up. And they're like, "Can I really say this in class?" "Yes you can. Let me get you started." Then (unintelligible) and we have this wonderful conversation out of it. But what I need them to know is they have to be able to say those words. They have to be able to say those words because if they ever have to go to the doctor for a health problem, doctor needs to know what you're talking about so they can help you. And the other is, if they ever need to make a report on sexual abuse to the police, they need to use the correct words. And, I always feel bad about having to tell the students this, but this is the hard, cold truth. If they appear to the police to have a deficit of any kind and that's demonstrated through language, that case just stopped. Unless you've got somebody else who's an eyewitness or you've got genetic material, that case just stopped. They're not going to do anything. They're "unreliable witnesses." Intellectual disability alone makes them an unreliable witness.

So, my way of countering that is I have young people who know the names of their own body parts and they can say those names. And they know the names of the guys or gals body parts so they can say those names. Because, if they're going to turn in a report for the police, they need to know the words. Here's an example. We had the class for a bunch of girls, it was just a girls group. We had the class. The girls take off. I'm BSing with the teacher 'cause I like her, and one of the students comes in and she's shaking and she's weeping. It's like, "So, What. Just. Happened?" We get her to stop crying and she says, "A boy touched my shirt." And the teacher's like, "Let's call the security, police." It's like, "Nope, nope, nope. It's not gonna do it." A boy touched my shirt looks like this. It's not against the law. Right? So I had to sit down with her and get her to do some breathing, we back up the truck, and we had just talked about these words. I just made them say the words out loud, and she still didn't say them. It's like, "Can you show me what part he touched?" And then she shows me. "Right here." And I say, "And what did we call that?" "Do we have a name for that?" It's like, "Yeah. That's my" then she whispers it. "Nope. Say it louder." We had to practice saying it. By the time the police comes to the room she can look at the police officer, you can tell she's been crying because her eyes were red, and she said, "I was standing at the bus stop and a boy I don't know grabbed my breast." That's something the cop can do something about. I watched the cop's face. He believed her. Now, if he had come in and she was weeping and said, "A boy touched my shirt," and then whispered "breast," it would have ended right there. He would've like, "Yeah, yeah. She doesn't know what she's talking about." So, a lot of... what I teach the students is that they have to know the words because those words have power and the words that they need to know are the words that, oh my gosh, and this is where I'm gonna sneak in really quick for my bid for sex ed. So, in my research on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and sexual abuse, the number one, the number one recurring theme is no sex ed. No sex ed. So, if we go back 40 years to the early research by Dr. Richard S??? in Canada, his group of women, victims, none of them had sex ed. When I was a long term care ombudsman, the worst criminal case in the State of Washington had to do with a man with an intellectual disability who was horribly abused in his Adult Family Home. He had never had sex ed. And here's what I've learned: if people don't have knowledge they need to navigate the world, somebody else will be more than happy to fill in those blanks, and when they fill in those blanks they're not doing it out of altruism. They're doing it because they have an agenda. So I think of sex ed as absolutely necessary information that literally everybody needs to move forward safely in their own lives. It gives them important anatomy and physiology so they have the words so that they can describe what happens to them. And it gives them knowledge about what sex is and what relationship sex belongs to. And you're not gonna get that any other way. It needs to be explicit. So I think teach - schools, schools absolutely have to have adapted special education sex ed starting early, starting often, repeat, repeat, repeat. And then parents, there's a parent's job, you need to give it a context. It's a physical activity if you don't.

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So, the last thing we do is, so keep in mind that 7/8ths of this class is positive, positive, positive. Healthy, healthy, healthy. Looks good, looks good, looks good. Relationships, yeah, yeah, yeah. 1/8th of it is this. This is the last, so that we build up to this. We don't launch into this. So once we identify these things that could happen in any relationship, it could happen at work. Then, we talk about what we can do. And we emphasize this. This is the image for the books that went outside of my local area. The one for my local area has our numbers in it right there, so the students can have the numbers on hand.

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And then I ask them who they can talk to. Because I'm still working with people 21 and under, I've learned that if you go talk to power, people in positions of authority, and you're a younger person, particularly if you're a younger person with a recognized disability, sometimes you don't get taken as seriously as you should. So I ask them to think of an adult that will go with them and support them in saying what they need to say so that whoever they're talking to, either the doctor or a nurse or the hospital, will listen to the person with a disability. Somehow just having that other person in the room is all it takes to get them to take that person with a disability seriously and actually listen to them.

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This was a couple years ago, but we do have a healthy relationships workbook. That's what I showed you. The teacher's guide. That's the body part bingo game, and then I have multiple picture packs.

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When I do the classes I need the students to listen to me because I think that their future happiness is really important. I don't know them, but they're young and they're at that exciting cusp in their life and I want them to go forward and have really awesome lives. And I think this information can help them do that. But they don't want to listen to me. I'm just another old lady who showed up in the class, blah, blah, blah, blah. So I like to do what I call "bribe them." And I'll tell them that. I'll bring them cookies. You guys got your bribes tonight. And I'll say, "I'm bribing you so that if I give you 2 cookies you'll listen for 15 minutes. But, I also bribe them in lots of other ways. And one is with the 10 color ink pen. If they're going to have a coloring book they sorta kinda need a 10 color ink pen to color it all in. Plus it also has the "Healthy Relationships" on it. They take this home at the end of the year. Their parents might go, "What is Human Resource class?" and then they can say, "Oh, no. It's Healthy Relationships class." To get them to listen to me, oh, you know we do something where everybody talks together. So here's the beautiful thing about the healthy relationship class, whether I'm teaching it or the teachers are teaching it, this subject matter is really intense and highly personal and I've yet to have a class where students don't break down - which is my plan - I don't mean weep, but I mean like their barriers drop and they really talk to me about what they're thinking about. And they talk about their parents, and they talk about their relationships and that way I learn what they need and I improve the workbook with that. So, when we do that we have to have celebrations so when we finish up a class, after I do my evaluation, then we do the, uh, we give out certificates and we give out Tshirts. So, once they finish the class and they get a certificate to show future employers, for their employment information, so if they go in for a job they can say, "You know, I'm a good employee because I had a healthy relationships class and I know the difference between a friend and a coworker." And I think that's going to help them get a job. But they also get the Tshirt. And what I love about this Tshirt was we had a competition last year and this was designed by a student in a healthy relationships class. And he has such a gift for design that I literally had nothing to do to make this work. He even picked this like double colored thing. So, these are last year's beautiful Tshirts. We have new ones this year. So every

student gets it. This is also advertising. This is also like a point of pride. Only the kids in special education get these Tshirts. Only the kids in healthy relationships. When they're going through their high school, they're the ones in the cool Tshirt.

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And finally, the healthy relationship workbook comes in both Spanish and English. So, this is the entire curriculum. It's got all the pictures in it. The teacher's guide, and parents are welcome to download and read the teacher's guide, all this is free. All you have to do to get all of this is send me an email and I'll send it to you. I can't send it to you like this (in a binder) because this takes forever to put together, but this workbook this explains how I got where I'm at and why they need to know this. This is research based. So if you're just interested in having a conversation with your own children, this is the information you need to have those conversations. If you're interested in any of the stuff I talked about tonight and you'd like to maybe talk to your kids at home, this right here is the way to go. But for the teachers, they need to read this to understand why they're not teaching sex ed. All..each of those sheets looked really simple. There's a lot of thinking that goes on behind those. There's a lot of information that goes behind it that explains why what you're doing is really important, even though it doesn't look like much. I can't make it busy for the students so I made it busy for the teachers and parents. So, we've got our picture packs, and I've got a picture pack for all the important concepts. And then we've got, oh, this is important for teachers. I have a high literacy and a low literacy evaluation tool so you can track how well your students are doing. And the answer key. And then in the back there's the sorting cards I talked about. I put these on 3 x 5 cards and there's a... All you have to do is photograph that, photocopy that onto the stickers that I posted beside that and then you can make the cards.

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So here's the good news - this is all remedied with education. And here's the awesome thing - we've got teachers in the room. There's a lot we can do with just education, and that's a wonderful place to start. So, anybody can call me anytime for any information about how I do this or what I'm doing or when I'm in the classroom, but I really don't worry about teachers that much because I stole all my good ideas from them in the first place.

Questions and Answers

Q: Do you have other, like, organizations, Parent to Parent or Walla Walla Valley Disability Network, do this workbook at all?

A: Not to my knowledge, no. So, the new transition program in the Tri-Cities is a former teacher from up in Spokane area and she's had me in her classroom for 4 or 5 years now and she's getting one of these books and I'm going to come down this Friday actually and launch her healthy relationship classes. What I learned the hard way is that marketing doesn't work for this. What works for this is teachers who tell

other teachers that they should do it. Or parents who tell other parents that teachers should do it. So, it's kinda getting out and about. Yes.

Q: What do you think the likelihood of teaching what you would call "the normal population" is, because they don't get any relationship except for bullies and people that you're saying are not their friends?

A: Yeah. So let's call that social emotional education and in Washington State they're already supposed to be doing that and I think you answered your question. The way it's gonna come into the typically developing arena is through the anti-bullying work. Because, really, this is also anti-bullying work, isn't it? So, when I teach respect, what I teach the students is - it's really easy - you don't have to earn respect, this is what you get because you were born. And then I ask them how many were born? And some of them think about it, but they all eventually raise their hands. And so, the respect I'm talking about isn't that thing that you have to earn, it's because you breathe. It's because you exist, because you're a person. And then we talk about how respect is really just remembering other people have feelings and to not treat people like objects. And once in a while I'll have a student who knows the word "objectification" and they'll throw it out. And then we talk about the difference between people and objects. You know, what can I do with an object? Well they'll say, "you can buy it." "Yeah, I can." So what happens when we buy people? What's the name for that? Slavery. "Is that okay?" "No, it's not okay." So I point out that really if I'm showing you respect, I treat you like you have feelings. That's it. It's as easy as that. I don't have to like what you say, but I have to remember that my words can hurt you. And then we add a little bit to it and I say, and here's the anti-bullying, when I'm treating people with respect that's a choice I make and the choice is to tell people who I am. Am I the kind of person that thinks you're an object? "Some people are objects and some people aren't. Some people are erasers and some people are people." Or, am I the kind of person that sees everybody else as a person all the time. So really I tell them that's who you are. You're sending that message out to everybody. You're letting them all know, if they're paying attention. So that's really the anti-bullying work, because they've all been bullied. And for the typically developing students I think that's how the, what is it, real friendship come in. Also, it snuck into sex ed somehow. Yeah, most of the typically developing kids get their friendship information either from the anti-bullying or it's in the sex ed, which I find curious. Yes.

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Q: I just, I have a few questions just about logistics, like - do you, before you teach this, you get parent permission for their children to be...

A: I send out a parent letter. The parent letter says I'm gonna be teaching about healthy relationships. I've been invited into the classroom, and the teacher will never leave the classroom, and if you have any questions at all about what I'm talking about give me a call. And in the 12 years I've done that, I got one call. And the question was, "Are you teaching sex ed?" It was a really short call. "Nope." I'm not. See, and the reason I don't is because sex ed, it should be cumulative based on your developmental level, right - different ages, different needs. And Theresa coming in and trying to do one day at the end of your high school career is not gonna make up for 8 years of repeated information that grows along with you.

Not even comparable so no, I'm never gonna touch the sex ed. I think the public school system has a wonderful opportunity to do a really good job at that.

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Q: And follow up question: Do you, have you seen it be offered as a class like an hour over a 10 week period or... well, just as a class at the high school within the...

A: The only people who've done this is me. I'm it. So, here's the deal. This was a tough sell because everybody seems to think I'm talking about sex ed, and I didn't have a teacher who knows what I'm talking about and when I came in he reminded me that I'm not supposed to talk about anything that's sticky. "You've seen me 3 times already, you know I don't do that." So there's such discomfort with talking about sexuality that it's been slow to get it off the ground. It's taking off now. I've got 13 to 15 regular classes I do every single year and each class is between 8 and 11 weeks long, depending on the speed at which the students work or if there are special topics that the students wanted to do. I put it on your evaluation so now I need to say it out loud. The 3 magic words I have for the students are: respect, choice, and trust. Respect is acknowledging the dignity of every other person, and I mentioned that. The choice is your anti-abuse awareness because the first thing in a really dangerous relationship the other person takes away from you is your right to a choice. And it doesn't matter what that relationship is, the first thing somebody in a really dangerous relationship is gonna do is start nibbling away at your choices. And the last one we talk about is trust. A lot of them don't understand that trust has to be earned, and they're giving it away and it is the most valuable commodity they have. So, if I can get them to understand about respect, about having the right to make a choice and the obligation to allow others to make their own choices, and about how long it takes to actually develop trust, I know that I have somebody who's gonna be able to identify a really unhealthy relationship before it gets to the everybody gets hurt part. And I have somebody who's going to be able to work in an environment where they understand what all the rules are and are going to treat their coworkers well, which is really how you keep your job. People don't lose their jobs because they can't do their work. They lose their jobs because they don't get along with people. That's the number one reason for losing your job. So now I have young people who are more likely to do that. They're also going to think more closely about these relationships which is going to allow them to have richer, deeper, more real relationships. And when they run into that person who thinks that everybody with a disability wants a hug, they're going to be able to set some barriers on them. And when they say, after meeting them for 5 minutes, "Oh, but I'm your friend!" It's like, "Nope. I get to pick my friends and I don't even know your last name." So all of this both keeps them safer and helps them develop those skills so that they can have that life that we all want them to have, and that they should have. Because they've got all this awesome stuff to bring to the society and to the community. I think of people with disabilities as being the neon colors and the sparkly colors in the crayon box. So if you take that big box of 64 colors and you pull out all the really bright happy ones and you put them over here, that's what a segregated world looks like. And integration is taking the really fun people and popping them right back in the box so everyone can enjoy them. That's why I like working with them. Any other questions?

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Q: What is the age group for the healthy relationships?

A: The books are geared for about 15 to 21. Yes.

Q: The healthy relationships class that's starting in the Tri-cities, where would we go to get more information on dates, times, place? Libby: I think it's within the school district.

A: It's within the school district. All the classes are within school districts.

Q: So would it be open to people from...

A: No.

Libby: But I'm thinking about starting the same thing. I want to start the same thing here. I have some ideas about who could teach it too, so, let's talk.

Q: What do you use now for curriculum for our kids?

Libby: There really isn't any.

A: So in a perfect world we would have both, we would have a healthy relationships class and we would have a sex ed class. And in a perfect world the parents would be talking about both of those things at home with the students to kind of ground it and create a familial context for how to understand the material. So the sad part is, I'll be right with you, the sad part in our part of town is the largest school district, 81, didn't teach sex ed to students with intellectual disabilities until 2007 and it was the parents of the students who objected to it. So for years advocates were going to that and saying, "The students need this," and for years the parents said, and I still hear this, "If you talk to them about sex they'll go out and have sex." I hear that now. I have people telling me that to my face. So, that's still this fear that's kind of manifesting itself and then people are kind of overwhelmed by it and it seems, maybe, like it could be true, but fortunately we do have, we did change it in 2007. Unfortunately, up until this year, in Washington there were too many opt-out options. Although I believe a new bill has passed that changed that so now it looks like sex ed's going to be mandatory in all Washington State schools, with only the parent opt-out. I believe that one passed, yea.

- And I think it's harder, like there's no letter that goes out saying, "Sign this to opt-out." I think it's more like the parent has to initiate opting out in the new law. You know, one of the things that I've heard too, and I've seen it at the high school and at the middle, well at all grade levels, I really liked this idea about acquaintance and friend. Because, I would say, if you asked me before this I would think that I was more than an acquaintance to the students. But with that lens, you know, I'm getting paid to be there and work with them and I think that's so important and it's probably something we need to add to our para training that's a really good, non-offensive way to clear it.

Q: One of my questions is, yours is more an intervention type, I mean, you're getting up there where a whole bunch of them have probably been abused at 5 to 7 years old, and you say you're not starting until I thought 12 or 15?

A: So, yes. Children with intellectual disabilities, intellectual disability of all forms of disability, have a higher rate of sexual assault than do even other children with different types of disabilities and their typically developing peers, yes. That's true.

Q: I think the point you're making is, if this is happening when they're 7 or 9 years old and they're not being taught, yeah addressed, until they're 15...

A: So, the public schools are going to, the new law if I read it correctly says they're gonna start as soon as they hit school. As soon as they hit school. One of my goals is to get early intervention professionals on board with recognizing that this is an issue, and I love what you're saying because real prevention would be starting as soon as they brought that baby home from the hospital. So, my coworker - I'm trying to talk her into doing this - she does a...she trains professionals in our building. They have to take a sexual assault awareness intervention response and reporting training. It took me 8 years to get it done, but I finally pushed that camel right through that eye. So, I need her to take that to outside our agency to the early intervention professionals, and my new coworker has a degree in early childhood education so I think she's going to be a really good match for that content. I did a community assessment about 3 years ago and found that half the people I talked to refused to believe that anybody would be so horrible as to sexually assault a child with a disability. These were professionals. "So it's not happening?" "Well, who would do that?" "I don't know - a bastard?" But they're out there. So when I'm dealing with people who can't even wrap their head around the idea that it's even happening, I know that my coworker has a lot of work to do. And the first thing she has to do is make it real so they accept it. And then she can move on and what would prevention look like.

Q: My comment about this whole presentation is I'd rather have my kid have healthy relationships class than any sex ed class I've ever heard of.

A: Really?

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Q: Because then you'll know how relationships are so important to all the daily life of those kids, not just when they get some special, "I love 'em because I met 'em on Facebook." I'm telling you, it's gonna prevent more by just saying, you know this makes it healthy, you know the person, you don't just say, "God they're my friend," and I know them 2 minutes or they sang a song I liked.

A: Yeah, we've actually got a, in the back of the books, the kids have a....the student book has got a quiz on how well do I know my boyfriend/girlfriend and it's based on stuff I've heard students say to me like, "well I've never been to their house," and "I don't know their last name." And I'm like, "And that's your

boyfriend?" I knew my boyfriend's mother's last name. So, yeah. But I'm still gonna say I love quality sex ed and here's why. I don't want to crush anybody, but here's why we have to have sex ed. So, when I was a long term care ombuds - does anybody know what a long term care ombuds is? So, go into long term care facilities and you make sure that people's federally mandated rights are upheld, which was a wonderful job for me because I used to go in and get to tell people, "You did that wrong!" Yeah, 7 whole years of telling people that. So, when I first got there, one of the volunteers who had been a military investigator during Vietnam and had uncovered the Tiger Squad Debacle - if anybody's familiar with that? Ok. He's the guy who did the Tiger Squad investigation. Look it up. It's horrible. So he comes in and he gets an adult family home and he's like "something doesn't feel right, something doesn't feel right." Before he can figure out what it is, it all blows up. So here's what had been happening at the all-male adult family home. So, keep in mind I still have students who at 21 haven't had sex yet. We've got an all-male group. We've got, obviously, male caregivers, so 6 guys living in a house. One of them is up at Sacred Heart and he's bleeding rectally, and it's not the first time he's been up to Sacred Heart. And the same caregiver brings him up every time. And the nurse is like, "Well what is going on?" And he'd make up a story. He'd always have a story for why the guy was bleeding rectally, and nobody ever challenged the caregiver. So during the last, fortunately, time up at Sacred Heart, the man with an intellectual disability casually mentions that his worker's wearing his purple underwear today. Under what context does a client in an adult family home know what color his caregiver's underwear are? We do an investigation. APS gets involved. What happened was that this poor guy was really lonely and he wanted a male friend. He wanted a friend, and this typically developing guy said he's a friend. So now it's a win-win. It's like not only is it a guy close to my age, but he's like a "normal" guy. He's not like all these other guys. He's like a "normal" guy. So what the perpetrator did is he defined male friendships as involving sodomy, and he sodomized the guy. The anal bleeding came because he began to prostitute him out. This is a direct result of not even knowing what sex was. He renamed anal sex "buddy stuff" or something. He had a term for it. If that man had had sex ed, that would not have happened. It was like, "No, that's not what that is. Get that thing away from me! I know what you're doing!" But he didn't know. If he had known that our caregivers don't get to have sex with us, that would have ended it. My students learn that. If he had known that male friends don't have sex, that's generally not, "we're just buddies" you know, fist bump, let's go to a movie, you know, kind of guy, then it never would have happened. We had a lot of opportunities for this never, ever to happen, but this went on for months. And he was prostituting him out to his friends, making money off of that. So, in Spokane, late 90's early 2000's, at the time the largest lawsuit in the State of Washington. We had multiple points of protecting that man and we didn't do any of them. And one of the points is sex ed. That guy didn't even know what sex was, and if you don't know what sex is, you let somebody else define it for you and they're not gonna tell you the truth. That's just never going to happen. They have to have sex ed for their own safety and for the safety of others so that they don't do something that's gonna end up getting them arrested and incarcerated. Does that make sense? Ok. And I love the healthy relationships part too. I mean, there's a lot of room for that.

413 - 01:05:54,688

Q: Well I think it's also very important, I know in my house we have a rule that you're not allowed to give your private areas a nickname, like you have to call it a penis or a vagina, breasts, because the last thing that I want my kids to do is go to somebody that they trust and say somebody was touching my hooha

or my...and too many times people have these different nicknames for their private areas and so my little kid goes up to Alicia and is trying to describe and Alicia's like, "Oh, she's just describing like a toy or something," having no idea what children are talking about, and so in my house it's a very strict rule. We do not call anything but what it is.

A: And it's nice because it's just a medical term. It's just the right medical term. It's the correct medical term. You got an elbow, you got an eye, you got a penis. And, so, I did that too because I was in nursing when my kids were little. And they were looking in the books and so they learned all the words. I'm like, "You're gonna learn the words. You're gonna know the words." "If you want to talk those other words with your Daddy, you can." And so, he's 2 and he's talking already and he's in the bathtub with me and we're showering and he screams. Like, what, honey, what. And he goes, "Your penis. It's gone Mom! It's gone!" And I went, "Ok. You don't get to be in the bathtub with Mom anymore." But, yeah, I tell you the number of times I got called by the nun at his Catholic school! And it's like, "So what's the problem?" "Well he told the girls that that's called a vagina." And I said, "It is." "Well, he can't tell them that." I said, "Valid point." "Honey, if they want to hear 'cabbage patch' from their mom you gotta let them." But yeah, I love that because my son was sexually assaulted in a daycare when I was in school. And he came up to me and he was, oh whoa, shaking and crying and it's really an assault. And he said, "Mom, the caregiver put his hand on my penis." It's like, and I know what to do with that. But, if he didn't know that word "penis," and if we hadn't taught him this whole thing, this all belongs to you. And then the fact that it was somebody in a position of authority, who's 3 times his size and he's scary, he's big, and he still told Mom, and Mom still could do something about it. If you don't give people the information they need to empower themselves, you can't be surprised when somebody else takes advantage of them.