Identity, Sexuality, and Interpersonal Relationships

In the human services field, it is important to be open-minded and accepting of an individual's gender identification and sexuality no matter what your views on these subjects might be. Those you support have the right to understand and express themselves as human beings with regard to their gender identity and sexuality. Because the themes of sexuality and gender identification can be sensitive, and sometimes politicized, it is important for us to know how to support an individual who has questions, needs help understanding, feels isolated, or wants to express themselves safely. Additionally, helping a person with autism learn about gender identity and sexuality may increase their feelings of safety and confidence, which in turn make them less vulnerable to predatory or abusive behavior from others. Because our society is so very diverse, it can be helpful to know some terminology that is used to describe the cultural experiences of gender and sexuality. Using these terms can also show that you respect the person you support for who they are, which is a fundamental aspect of being person-centered as a professional.

GENDER IDENTITIES

CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF SEXUALITY

- Straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bi-sexual
- Monogamous (one partner or love interest)
- Polyamorous (more than one partner or love interest)
- Aromantic (not romantic)
- Asexual (not sexual)

DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

- Platonic
- Romantic
- Aromantic (not romantic)
- Intimate
- Sexual
- Asexual (not sexual)
- Committed or exclusive
- Uncommitted or non-exclusive
- Monogamous (one relationship with one person)
- Polyamorous (multiple relationships)

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

1. If your client asks for help understanding their gender identity, you can use the terms above to begin supporting them in understanding the various ways we talk about gender in our society. This could open new doors of self-awareness or even put their mind at ease about their own feelings and concerns.

2. If your client wants to talk about sexuality, the terms provided on this worksheet can assist you in sharing concrete information, which is critically important for many people with autism.

3. Consider connecting your client to the LGBTQ community in your region if they express interest in meeting others or learning more.

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