



Sexuality on the spectrum

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My “why”

- Prevent negative outcomes, improve positive outcomes!
- Sexuality: it’s just like everything else?
- Autonomy is good for us

Plan for today

1. Setting the stage
2. Four important pieces
 1. Be clear
 2. Use a positive and inclusive framework
 3. Keep safety in mind
 4. Start early... or now!
3. Resources

Sexuality & relationship education

★ Anatomy

★ Reproduction

★ Consent

Sources of information

★ Contraception

★ STIs

Communicating with a partner

Pleasure

★ Boundaries

★ Puberty

Specific sexual behaviors

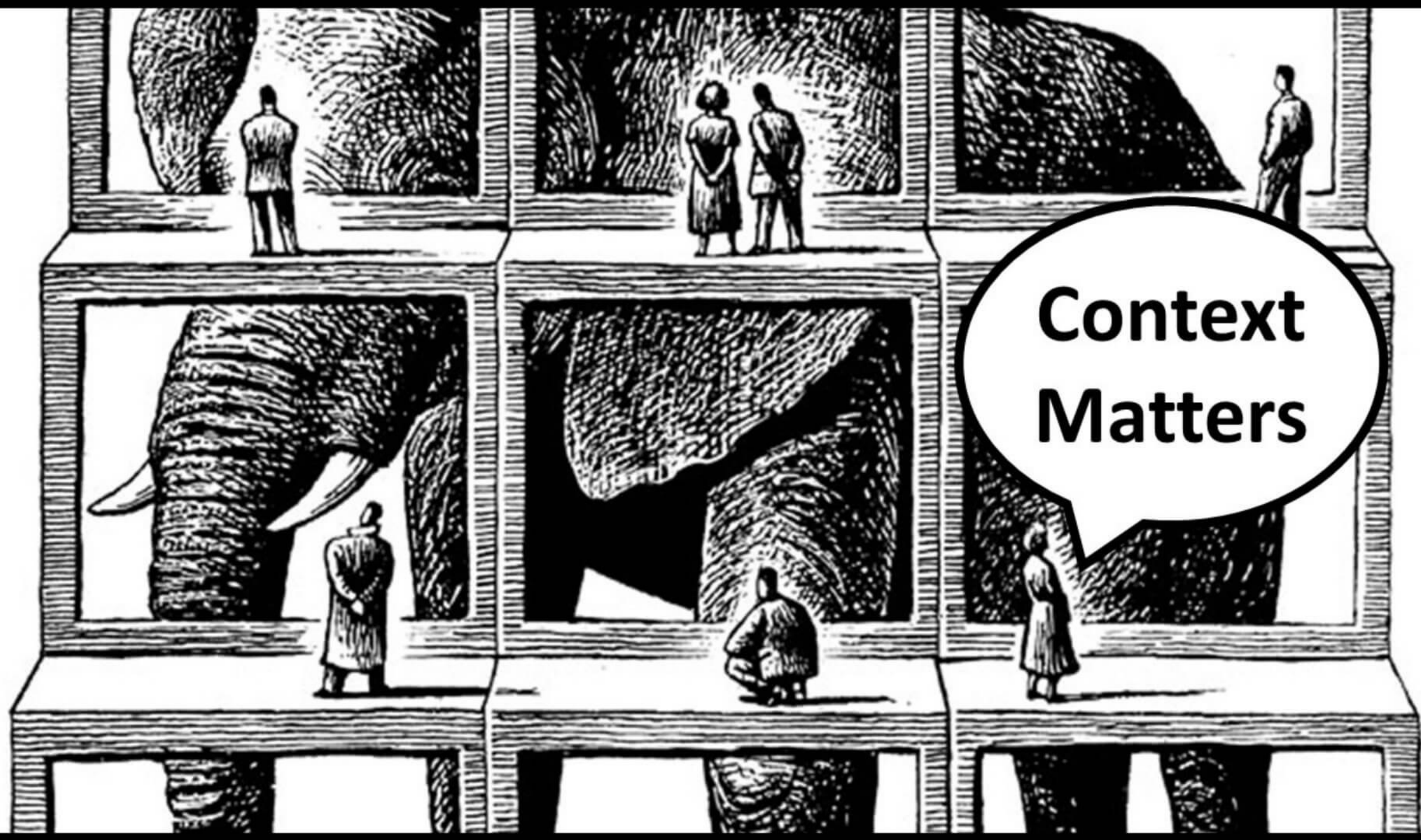
Technology and sexuality

★ LGBTQ+ identities

Autism & SRE

- Less access
 - Persistent myths!
- Social communication
 - Lower scores on applied questions
- Sensory profiles

(Burns, Crehan, & Loftin, 2017; Stokes & Kaur, 2005)



**Context
Matters**

A window with a dark wood frame is centered in the image. The window is open, and the view outside shows a town with houses and trees, with hills in the background. The scene is slightly faded. The text 'Be clear' is overlaid in white, and a subtitle is below it. The entire image is framed by a white border.

Be clear


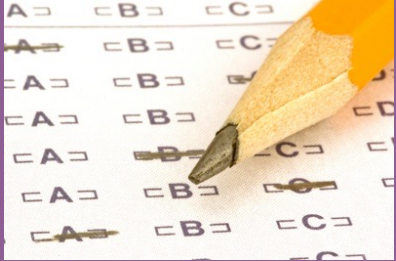


*You might need to say "penis" to yourself in the
mirror one hundred times...*

What to do about it

- Birds and the bees
- Score
- Wiener
- Fun bags



Example: Consent

	Direct	Indirect
Verbal	 <p>A red thumbs-down icon with the text "stop more" partially visible behind it.</p>	 <p>A yellow pencil resting on a form with checkboxes labeled A, B, and C.</p>
Nonverbal	 <p>A black silhouette of a stick figure pushing against a vertical barrier.</p>	 <p>A simple black and white drawing of a ghost.</p>

More info, please!

Sexual orientation

Gender identity

Consent

Assertiveness

(Crehan et al., 2022)



Use a positive & inclusive framework

Sexuality and disability has been through enough stigma!

Event

Strong reaction

Association of sexual behavior and negative reaction

Shame

Decreased chance of sharing/asking questions



Positive, proactive, frequent
conversations about sexuality

Event

Door for communication is already open

Stakeholders feel prepared to
provide support and resources

Increased knowledge, more prosocial behaviors



Finding the “celebrations”

- First period
- First crush
- Unrequited love



Gender identity & sexual orientation

More gender diversity
than in neurotypical
populations

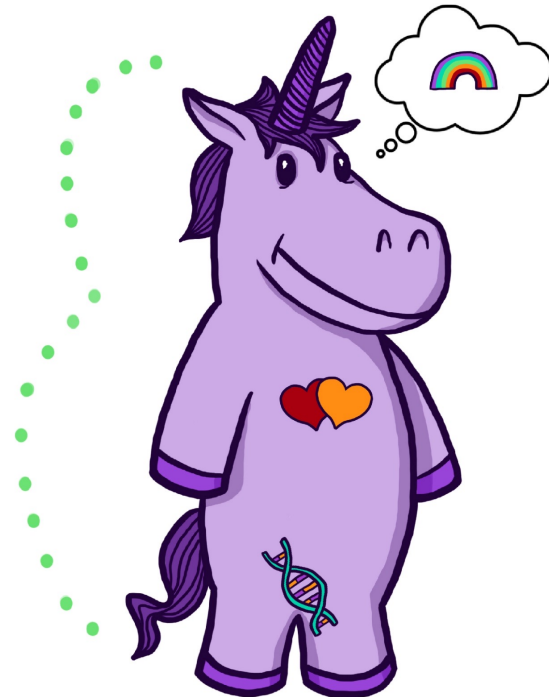
Autistic youth report less
access to SRE

Over 90% of SRE
curricula in the US focus
on heterosexual
relationships between
cisgendered people*

Big gap!!

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



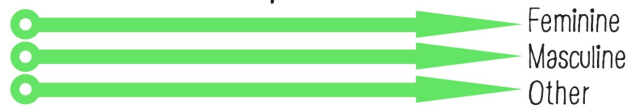
To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Gender Identity



Gender Expression



Sex Assigned at Birth



Physically Attracted to



Emotionally Attracted to

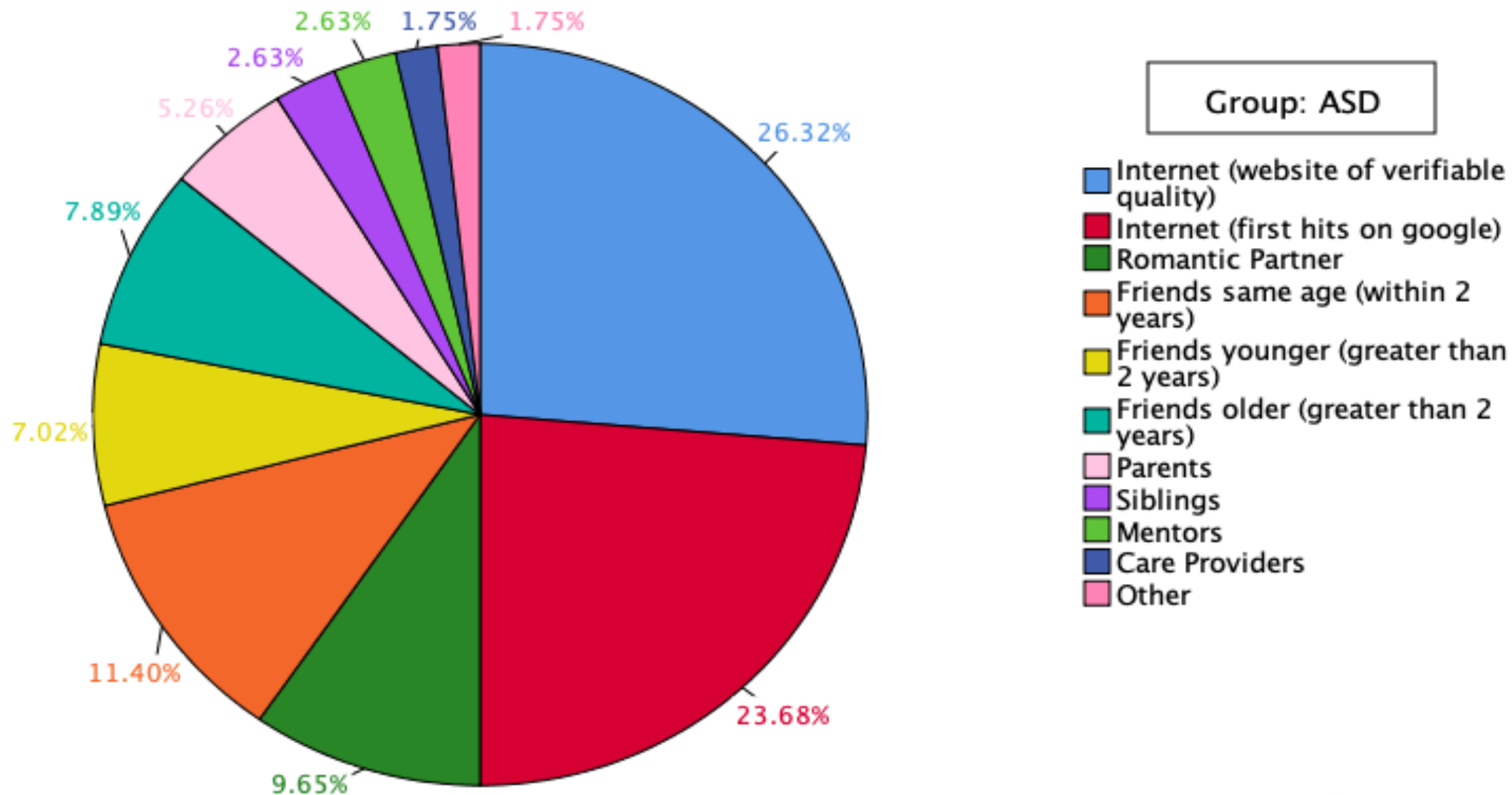




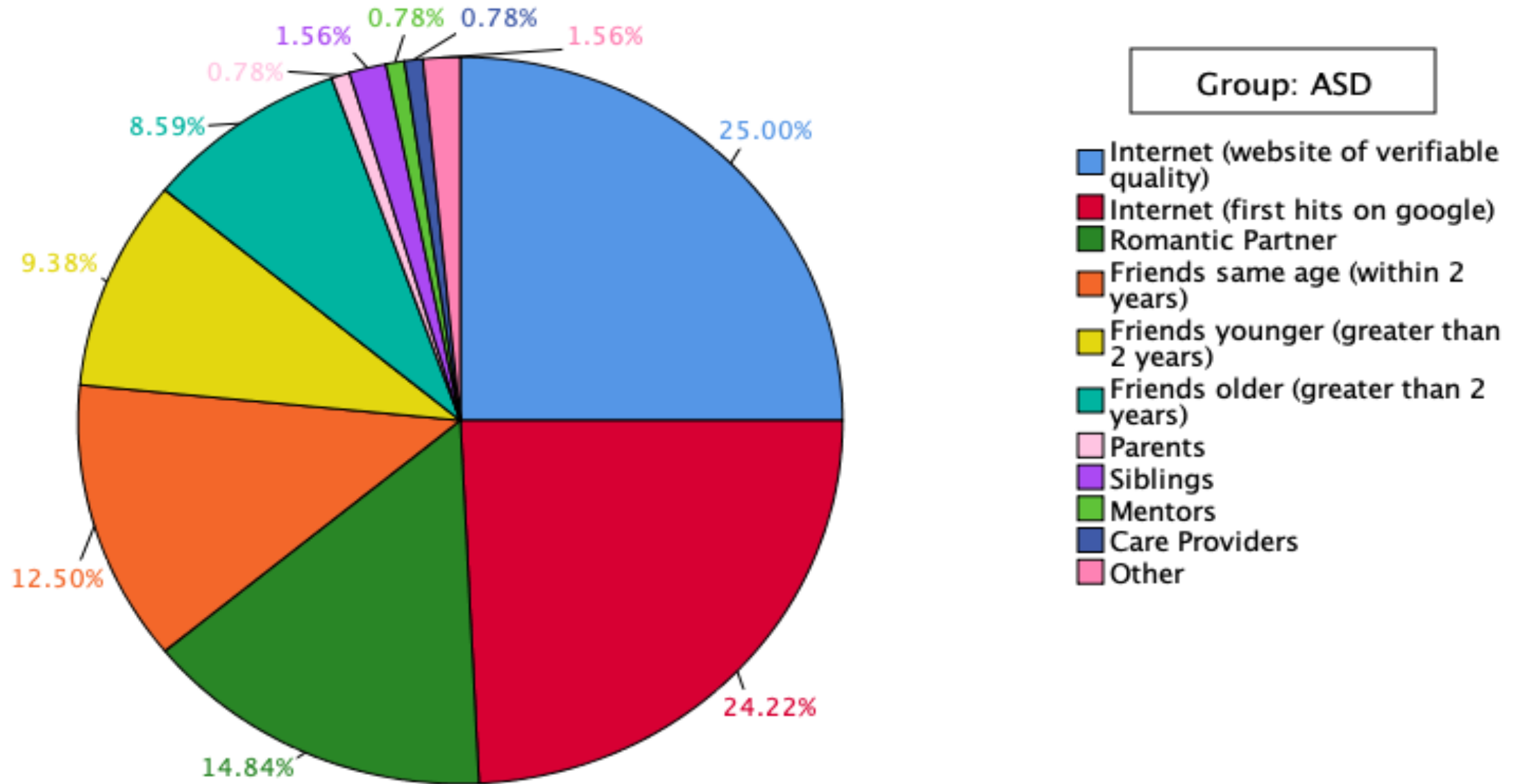
Safety

Setting the stage for success

Where do you get information about consent?



Where do you get information about dating?



Internet safety

- Check out and discuss the rules in your state
- Come up with a plan to be a detective about catfishing
- Parental controls and supervised time



A young child with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a light-colored onesie, is sitting on a light-colored floor. The child is holding a small, round, green plush toy that looks like a kiwi. Surrounding the child are various other colorful plush fruit toys, including a watermelon slice, a banana, a strawberry, a bunch of grapes, a kiwi, and several pieces of orange. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey filter.

Start early... or now!

It's never too late

Algebra

Counting

Adding

Multiplying

Word problems

< 22%

Sex education

Age 13:

60 minutes

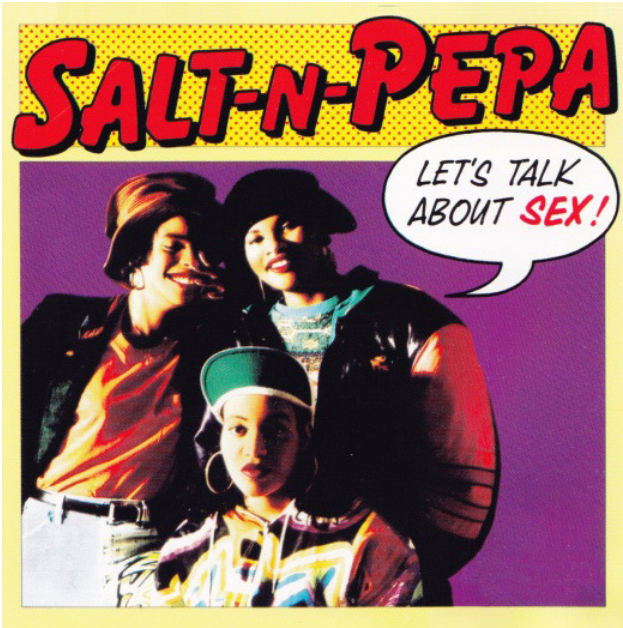
on how to

avoid STIs!

> 97%



Sex can be difficult to talk about!

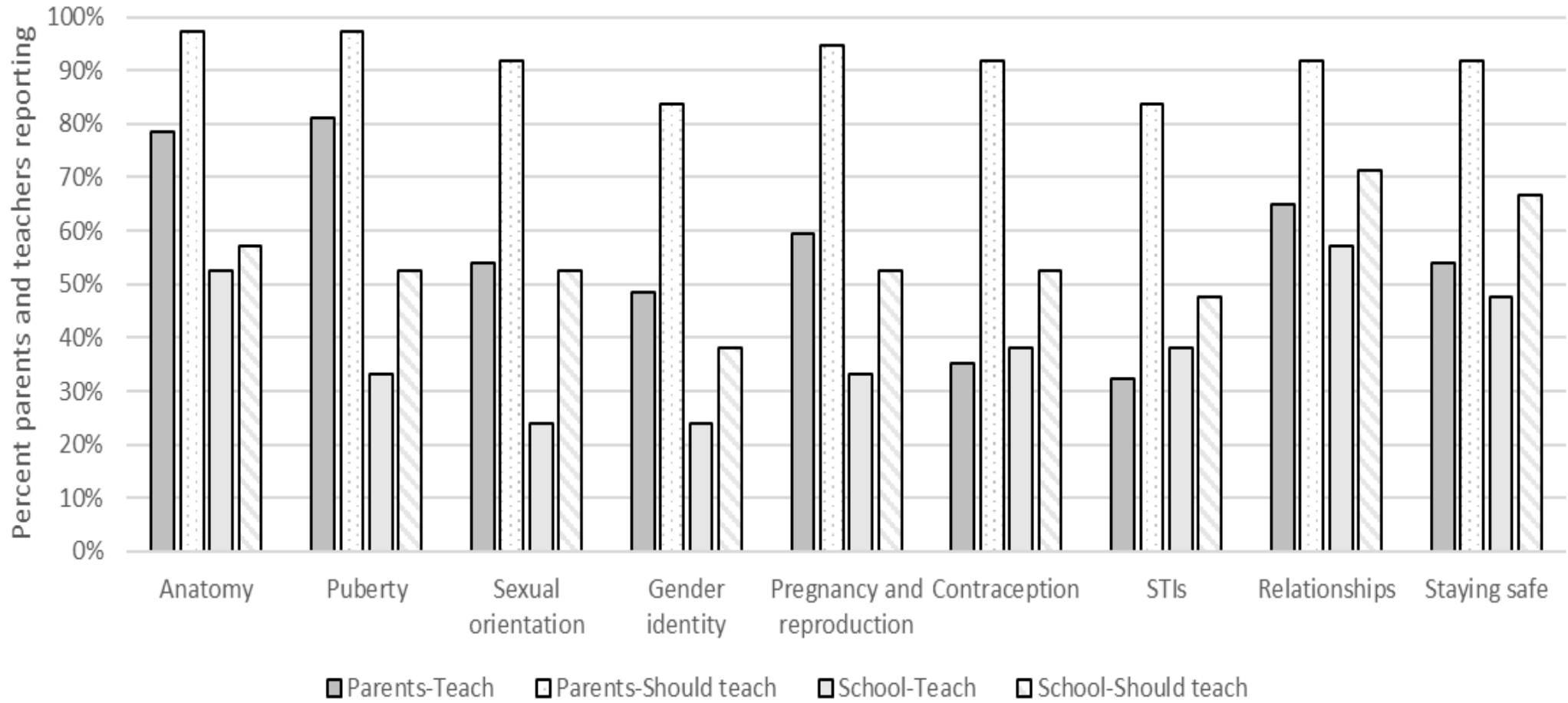


Personal values and the availability of curriculum had the greatest influence on the content of the curriculum, based on teacher report

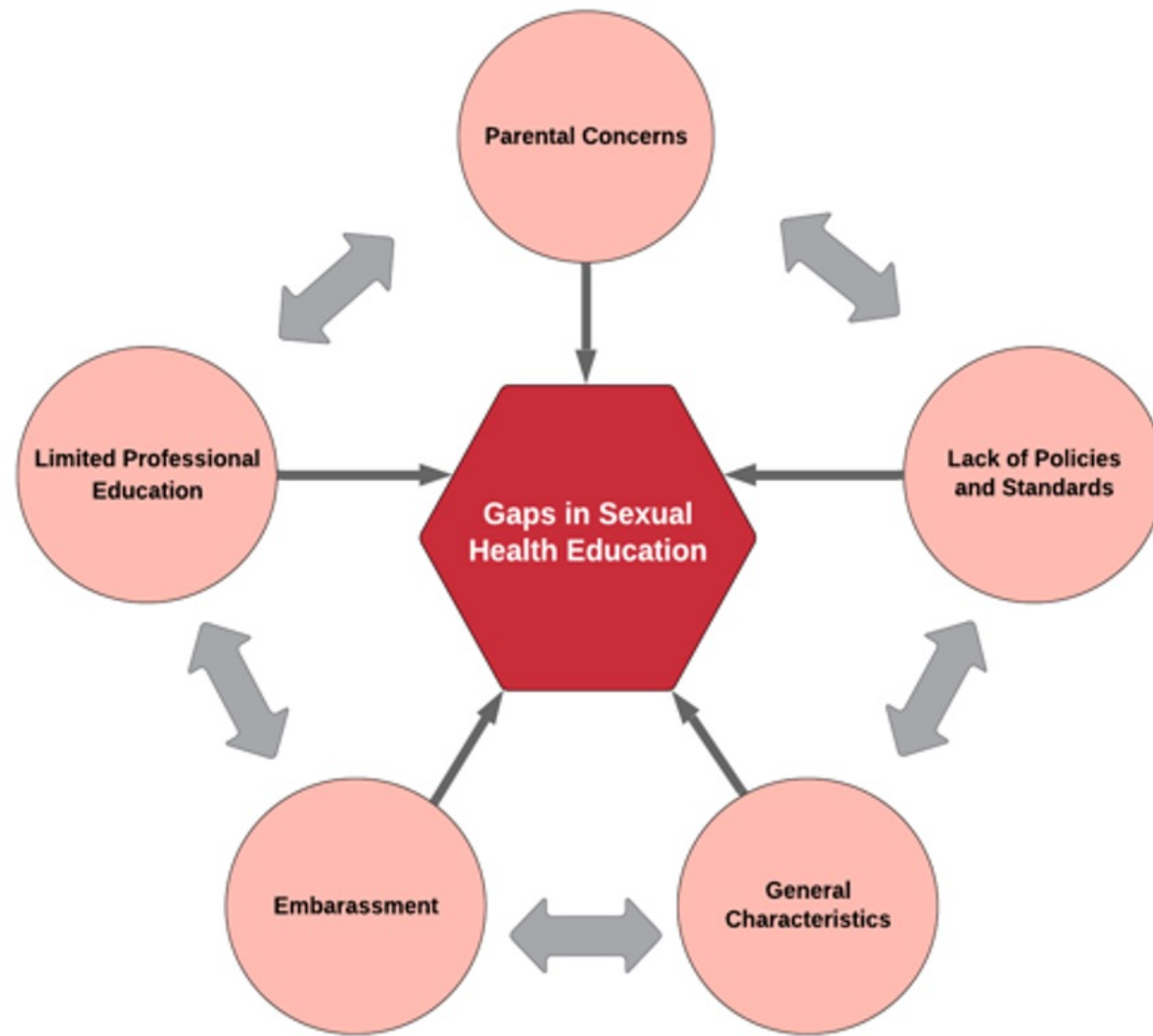
Autistic teens don't generally bring sex up, even with medical provider, but respond favorably when asked!

“68.8% of medical students rated addressing and treating sexual concerns as an important part of their future careers... 37.6% feel adequately trained to do so.”

Who is and who should be teaching sexual health education content?



(Crehan, Schwartz, & Schmidt, 2023)



- **Bystander effect: "And it's an um, it's almost a right... it's a right of a child to know how their body works. It's a right... but I don't know whose responsibility..."**

Sexual development

Gender roles → 3 yo

Attraction → 9–10 yo across identities

Puberty → 10 yo (avg) for girls, 11.5 yo (avg) for boys

Sexual behaviors → lifelong learners!

Timing was not significantly different by diagnostic group for

- First thought about gender identity and sexual orientation
- Viewing pornography
- Engaging in romantic relationships
- First kiss

What about onset of puberty?

- **Average of earlier onset of puberty (9.5 months) for autistic girls compared to neurotypical girls**
- **Higher rates of autistic traits in children with precocious puberty**

Four main takeaways?

1. Be clear
2. Use a positive and inclusive framework
3. Keep safety in mind
4. Start early... or now!



A top-down view of a wooden workbench covered with various tools. The tools are arranged in rows and include wrenches, screwdrivers, pliers, a hammer, a level, a tape measure, and a set of screws. The text 'Resources & Tools' is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

Resources & Tools

Ah! What do I do now?



CREHAN LAB | TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Let's spark conversation about sex education together!

WE'RE LOOKING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD AGES 13-17

We are running small group sessions to discuss important sex ed topics. In light of COVID-19, we are offering to host these discussions remotely, via Zoom. Sessions are provided free of charge and grouped based on age.

You will be compensated with a **\$40 Amazon gift card!**

CONTACT US

crehanlab@tufts.edu 617 804-7555

*Stay
connected
with us!*

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TUFTS UNIVERSITY
JOIN US!

Exploration of Gender: Autistic Children and Gender Identity

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR:

**Autistic children ages 9-12 with average or above average IQ
AND**

Their caregiver/parent

WHAT YOU WILL DO:

- Parents will fill out five questionnaires
- The child will undergo an interview about gender and gender identity, and complete a gender stereotype task

★ **The parent and child pair will receive one \$40 amazon gift card**

TO PARTICIPATE:

- Contact crehanlab@tufts.edu
- Text or call 617-804-7555
- Scan the QR code



IRB approval number: STUDY00002881

General puberty social story

My name is James. Sometimes I think about sex and private areas. It's okay to think about sex and private areas. I will try to keep my thoughts to myself. This is very important. I may ask mom or dad a question if I'm confused.

My name is Amanda. I am 13. My body is growing and changing. My mom knows about growing up. Sometimes, girls get breasts when they are 13. Soon, I will have breasts, too. Most women wear bras to hold and cover their breasts. This is a good thing to do. I will wear a bra. If I forget to wear a bra, my mom may remind me before I go to school. Wearing a bra is part of growing up.

THAT TIME OF THE MONTH



Thank you for listening!

**Big thanks to our Community Advisory Board,
Research Team, and participants!**

- Study announcements
 - CrehanLab on Facebook and Instagram
 - <https://sites.tufts.edu/crehanlab/activities/resources/>
- Training opportunities and parent groups
 - PegasusCAPS on Facebook and Instagram
 - www.pegasuscaps.com

