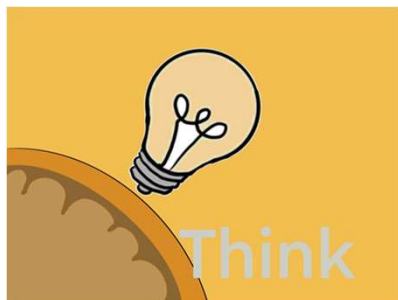


Talking about sex

When people talk about sex, they may be referring to a person's gender (see our *Gender* resource) or to the act of sexual intercourse. When people learn about sexual intercourse, they are usually taught about reproduction, contraception and pregnancy. Sex should be a positive and enjoyable experience for both people. For this to be the case, sex should be legal, consensual (see our *Consent* resource) and safe.



An Autistic person may find it difficult to know when and with whom it is safe and appropriate to discuss the topic of sex. They may not be familiar with some of the language, or, as a result of masking their needs, they may appear either more or less knowledgeable than, in fact, they are. This could put them at risk from peers who might take advantage of their vulnerability.



The topic of sex can be complex. What actually counts as sex may vary, depending on whom you ask. For example, some people believe the man must insert his penis into the woman's vagina for sex to take place, whilst others believe that penetration is not necessary for sex to take place. There are many different words for sex and each may mean different things for the person saying the word and the person hearing it. As they mature and their sexuality develops, Autistic people may face the same experiences and challenges as their non-autistic peers. However, Autistic people may also experience additional difficulties in terms of the language, social etiquette and complexity of sex and sexual relationships.



If you support an Autistic person, it may be helpful to make decisions together regarding terminology and the appropriate times and places for discussing sex. An open, non-judgmental approach will support an Autistic person who has questions about sex to clarify things and to learn in a safe environment. If you are Autistic and want to know more about sex, it may be helpful to ask a person you trust to have the conversation with you or to signpost you to an organisation that can provide guidance.