



Why is Masturbation an Important Issue to Address?

The topic of Masturbation is a very sensitive issue. It is a natural function and is practiced by people across all cultures. It is incredibly common, especially among young people learning about their own bodies. What and how to teach children about masturbation will depend on family values and faith beliefs.

Sometimes children may be denied the right to express their sexual urges in an appropriate way. If denied, children may use whatever means they can find to relieve their natural urges, often causing physical harm to themselves. It is important to work with the professionals involved with your child to find appropriate ways to help him/her deal with their sexual feelings.

What are some facts about masturbation that are important to convey?

1. Masturbation does not in and of itself impair physical health unless abusive means are used.
2. Masturbation is a natural function and is practiced by people across all cultures.
3. It is crucial to be clear and precise about the conditions under which masturbation is acceptable. Teaching may be needed to ensure understanding of the difference between public and private places.
4. People engage in masturbation throughout their lives, even if they have available partners and are having regular intercourse.
5. Masturbation is an effective way to learn about your own sexual responses, and thus assist with communication within an intimate relationship.
6. Masturbation can have benefits during menstruation to relieve pelvic congestion (only when carried to orgasm). It can also be a means of general tension reduction.
7. Appropriate masturbation should be associated with a sense of well being, rather than shame or guilt. Punishing someone for masturbating can be emotionally damaging to that person.
8. Masturbation may be the most satisfactory and acceptable way of expressing sexual feelings for persons with more serious developmental disabilities, including many with autism spectrum disorders.

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Potential problems with masturbation and strategies to help deal with these issues:

1. When an individual does not discriminate as to when or where it is appropriate to masturbate, touch, rub or scratch their genital area.
 - Try to determine the reason for behaviour (e.g., rash, infection, response to an emotion, desire for attention, etc.)...Rule out physical causes first.
 - Reassure that masturbation is normal but ONLY in private.
 - Teach concept of privacy, appropriate places and times.
 - Once understanding of those concepts is established, set limits on behaviour and consequences if rules are followed/broken.
 - If behaviour continues, look for other reasons/functions of behaviour.
 - If behaviour seems to be a means of coping with stress, teach an alternate behaviour (squeezing a 'koosh' ball, rubbing something else, doodling on paper).
2. When an individual masturbates too frequently and to the exclusion of other activities and interests.
 - Look for underlying emotional issues (e.g., is your child generally unhappy, bored, lonely, etc.) and attempt to alleviate the cause.
 - Assist your child in developing new interests, engage in interesting new activities, and meet new people.
 - Encourage your child to do manual activities such as drawing, painting, sculpting, writing or photography.
 - Encourage more physical activity.
 - Assist and teach your child to express his feelings and ensure someone is there to listen.
 - Refer for additional professional involvement if emotional issues persist or if the behaviour has become a fixed pattern where your child appears to have no control over his/her behaviour.
3. When an individual uses masturbatory techniques which are abusive, or that can cause physical damage.
 - These techniques may be used due to under sensitivity (common in children with ASD).
 - Provide specific information and explanation of what is dangerous and the possible consequences.
 - Enlist the services of an experienced professional who can provide specific teaching regarding appropriate masturbation (e.g., videos: Hand Made Love (Hingsburger 1995a), Finger Tips (Hingsburger and Haar 2000)).



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4. When an individual behaves in a sexually aggressive manner and has difficulty controlling their strong sexual desires.
 - Problems may include open seductiveness, promiscuity, or aggressive heterosexual or homosexual behaviour.
 - Assess if they have an appropriate outlet for their sexual tension (have they made to feel guilty about masturbation, or not allowed the opportunity to masturbate?).
 - Enlist the services of an experienced professional who can assess other causes of the behaviour (including masturbation which does not lead to orgasm leading to extreme sexual tension) and design an intervention program.

Adapted from: School Support Program, Surrey Place