

Making Connections: Incorporating Healthy Sexuality into Sexual Assault Prevention and Counseling

National Sexual Assault Conference

September 14th, 2011

Alison Bellavance, M.Ed.

alison.bellavance@gmail.com

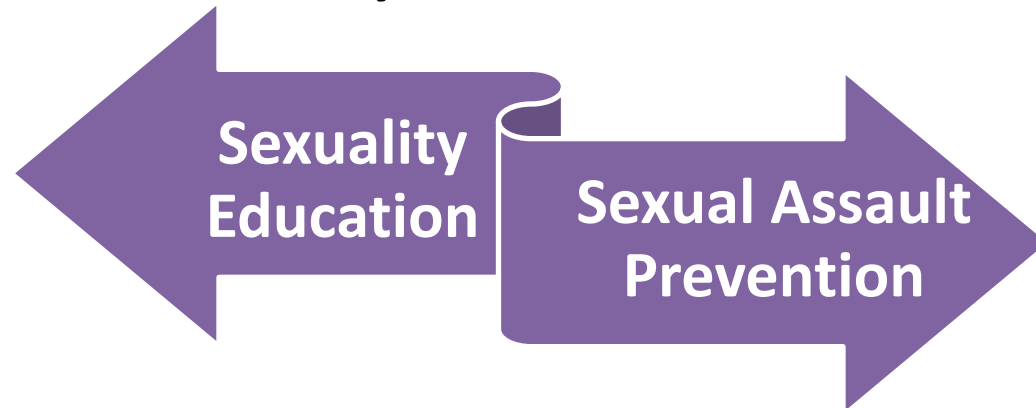
The Why?

Historically, the fields of sexuality education and sexual assault prevention and counseling have existed in separate spheres.



The Why?

In order to gain entry into classrooms, sexual assault prevention had to clearly define itself as focused on sexual violence and leave out content that may be construed as sexuality education.



The Why?

Recently the argument has surfaced that, in order to provide truly effective sexual assault prevention and counseling, healthy sexuality education must be included in training for staff and as part of the overall discourse.



Foundations

Knowledge Increases Comfort

- Increasing knowledge around sexuality has been shown to create more open attitudes and higher levels of comfort (Lewis & Bor, 1994). Training aimed at increasing knowledge around healthy sexuality will likely impact attitudes and help to increase comfort.

Foundations

Healthy Sexuality Education Can Help Support Sexual Assault Prevention Education

- Incorporating healthy sexuality education into sexual assault prevention programs may help improve outcomes by teaching characteristics of healthy sexual interactions, allowing for avoidance of unhealthy interaction such as sexual violence (Perry, 2006).

Foundations

Healthy Sexuality Information Can Help Survivors

- 58.6% of female survivors experience sexual problems compared to 17.2% of non-assaulted women (Becker et al. in Bolen, 1993). Sexual assault counselors can utilize training around healthy sexuality to help support survivors who are facing sexual problems post-assault.

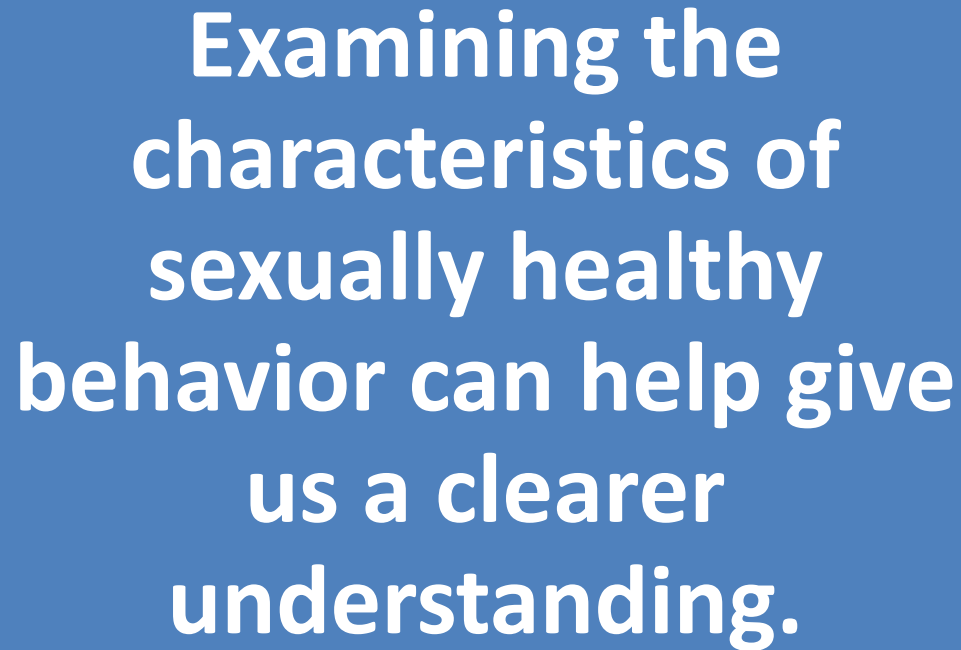
What is Healthy Sexuality?

Can be a difficult concept to define.

A variety of definitions and models exist.

Activity- How would you define healthy sexuality?

Characteristics of a Sexually Healthy Adult



Examining the characteristics of sexually healthy behavior can help give us a clearer understanding.

Training Should Be...



Aimed at exploring values, building knowledge and increasing comfort.



Designed with input from sexual assault agency staff.



Learner directed and focused on problem solving.

Core Curricular Content

Values
Clarification

Increasing
Comfort

Understanding
Healthy
Sexuality

Communicating
Around Issues
of Sexuality

The Impact of
Gender on
Sexuality

Additional Recommended Content

**Sexual
Orientation**

**Gender
Identity**

**Sexual
Anatomy**

**The Sexual
Response
Cycle**

**Healthy
Sexuality
Resources**

Benefits



Increased provider comfort when dealing with issues of sexuality.



Increased information and resources available for clients served by sexual assault agencies.



Potential improvement in the delivery of sexual assault prevention education programs.

Lessons Learned

Comfort level with issues of sexuality beyond sexual abuse and assault was relatively low.

- **During needs assessment, many were reluctant to even complete the survey.**

As predicted, staff indicated that they had received little to no healthy sexuality training.

- **Prior to training, participants expressed feeling less knowledgeable regarding healthy sexuality.**

Lessons Learned

Interest and engagement in training on topics related to healthy sexuality were high.

- **Staff expressed interest in wanting to learn more.**

Time constraints that non-profit agencies face are an important factor to consider.

- **Training may need to be concise or broken up into multiple shorter trainings.**

Prior to Training

Conduct a Needs Assessment

- Creates staff buy-in
- Allows training to be tailored to needs of your staff



Build Partnerships

- Planned Parenthood
- Community Based Organizations
- Sexuality Educators, Trainers, Consultants

Other Considerations

Training around sexuality can be challenging and, in some cases, triggering. Both the *format* and the *facilitator* need to reflect this.

Remember the Challenges

Format

- Allow for breaks
- Chunk content
 - Values vs. Knowledge
- Allow for anonymity
- Small group work
- Provide follow-up

Facilitator

- Experienced in teaching about sexuality
- Acknowledges the challenges
- Understands the audience
- Able to “read” the room

Future Directions



**Healthy Sexuality Incorporated
into Training for All Sexual Assault
Agency Staff**



**Collaboration Between Sexuality
Education & Sexual Assault
Prevention Fields**



**Evaluate Training to Ensure
Efficacy**

Questions?

Thank you!

alison.bellavance@gmail.com

Sources

- Bolen, J. (1993). Sexuality focused treatment with survivors and their partners. In P. Paddison (Ed.) *Treatment of adult survivors of incest* (pp. 55- 61). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Lewis, S., & Bor, R. (1994). Nurses' knowledge of and attitudes towards sexuality and the relationship of these with nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 20(2), 251-259.
- Perry, B. (2006). Beyond consent:: Healthy sexuality & sexual violence prevention (part 2). *Moving Upstream Vol 2. No 1*. Retrieved from <http://www.vadv.org/secPublications/Moving%20Upstream%202-1.pdf>