



Healthy Sexual Development vs. Maladaptive Sexual Behaviors

Training Material Property of:
Shanya Luther, M.Div
Among Friends, LLC

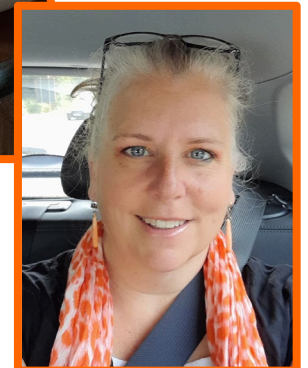


Introducing Your Trainer

Shanya Luther, M. Div

[Link to Shanya's training bio](#)

- Accessibility - Self Description
- **Social-Sexual Ecologist** with more than 25 years of experience
- I incorporate **other critical fields of study** including attachment theory, trauma informed care, social-emotional learning, neurobiology, and intersectionality



This Training is presented by



www.among-friends.org

Learn More!

Add your name and email to our [contact list](#) to SCORE! our monthly newsletter with tips and resources. (we never sell or give away your info!)

Our area of expertise is helping parents and professionals support issues and behaviors related to: **Bodies, Gender, Sexuality, Relationships, Communication, Rights, and much more!!!**

Among Friends works with people of all ages with diverse life experiences. Therefore, we use language, such as **a person who lives with cognitive challenges, vulnerable populations, people with disabilities and disorders, someone needing long-term care, and a supported person.**



Important Things To Know



- To prevent violence, abuse and exploitation **it's essential to promote healthy options and dismantle oppression**; for example: to prevent intimate partner violence and sexual abuse, we must promote healthy relationships and healthy sexuality.
- **Social services are responsible* for supporting self-determination and maximum independence**, which necessitates education and skill building related to sexuality and relationships!
- **People* have a right to take risks in their life**... even regarding sexuality and relationships. Our job is to help them make well-informed choices.
- **People* have legal rights to explore and express their sexuality.** We cannot respond to any incident or behavior in a way that prevents or impedes a person's sexuality altogether.

Key Reminders As We Get Into The Content



- In our work, we speak bluntly and matter-of-factly about sexuality and bodies and functions. Please know that this is not to be crass or to offend or harm you.
- Because sexual trauma is so prevalent, these topics can be difficult for many people; I will do my best to help create a thoughtful container for the material and discussions. But... we don't have the capacity to be able to process trauma together; please take care of yourself.

For Everyone's Safety – Disclaimer

- **When addressing sexuality, gender and relationships, it is extremely important to work as a team, create a plan, and have everyone sign off on it! And then document progress, outcomes and changes!**
- Ask for clear guidance from your organization for rules, boundaries, and expectations.
- Document who is providing what supports and how to respond if a supported person asks you for something that's not in your arena.
- Address sexuality with two or more people present in addition to the supported person – such as family, staff, case manager, etc.
- Contact the departments that investigate abuse allegations and notify them of the plans you are working on in advance. And if they have concerns, you're invited to give them our contact information.

Training Goals

- Identify common behaviors related to healthy sexual development
- Learn to recognize sexually maladaptive behaviors
- Understand how to respond to concerning sexual behaviors as a team



Our Related Training Topics:

1. Decoding Sexual Behaviors
2. Atypical Behavior Development
3. Social-Sexual Assessment Tools

Real Life Stories

Ricky, 14 – making out

Christine, 17 – sexting

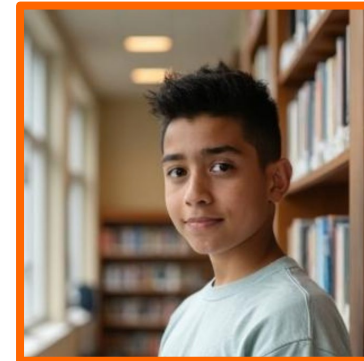
Jesse, 19 – diapers

Chris, 12 – foot fetish

Brenna, 16 – talking about sex

Kyle, 9 – “humping” people

Later you’ll hear more about these situations and which of them qualify as maladaptive sexual behaviors.





Sexual Development

Context for Healthy Sexual Development

Sexuality is far more than ‘intercourse’ (or any sexual activity); it’s a birth-to-death experience related to almost every aspect of our lives. (housing, health, finances, etc.)

- ‘Sexual’ exploration/play is a natural part of everyone’s development.
- Needs related to relationships, bodies, sexuality, and touch are on the Pyramid of Basic Human Needs*
- Helping professionals and family members need to use positive, proactive, and person-centered strategies when addressing sexuality and relationships at every age!
- When a person’s support team understands typical behaviors, they are better able to promote healthy attitudes and choices – and take advantage of teachable moments.





Milestones of Healthy Sexual Development

What is Healthy Human Development?

Human development is measured by behaviors that are typical for most people at different ages:

- **Physical Milestones**

Examples: height, weight, crawling, walking, hearing, etc.

- **Cognitive Milestones**

Examples: learning, exploring, problem-solving, etc.

- **Social-Emotional Milestones**

Examples: building trust, making friends, following rules, building confidence, emotional regulation, etc.



What is Healthy Sexual Development?

Sexual development has some markers, too; especially during puberty:

- **Physical Markers**

Examples: development of reproductive systems and secondary sex characteristics – body hair, breasts, voice changes, etc.

- **Cognitive Markers**

Examples: foresight / being able to anticipate, impulse control, understanding consequences

- **Social-Emotional Markers**

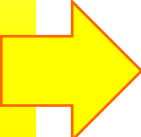
Examples: empathy / considering others, self-correction in response to social feedback, etc., ...but also egocentrism, emotional dysregulation, etc.



This All Starts Long Before Puberty!



Examples of typical ‘sexual exploration’ at different ages.

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- 0-2 yrs:** curiosity about bodies, touching genitals for self-soothing
 - 2-5 yrs:** consensual play with children of the same age, playing “house” and “doctor”, asking where babies come from, no inhibition about nudity, curiosity about adult bodies
 - 5-8 yrs:** slang terms for body parts, more awareness of gender expectations, activities that explore sexuality & bodies may occur with dolls or friends, may masturbate for pleasure
 - 8-12 yrs:** desire for more privacy, may develop “crushes”, interest in relationships, curiosity about sexual feelings and attractions, potentially seeking adult content or trying to see nude bodies, masturbation for pleasure in private



Disruptions to Healthy Development

Disruptions to Development

As humans develop (pre and post birth), there are multiple things that can impact and/or disrupt average healthy development, leading to the different disabilities and disorders, such as:



- Brain Malformations
- Neurochemicals and Hormones
- Genetics / Chromosomes
- Illness, Infection, Inflammation
- Malnutrition
- Inadequate Health Care
- Environmental Poisons
- Substance Use
- Accidents or Injuries
- Abuse, Neglect, and other forms of Trauma

**Sexualized behaviors are a symptom of some disabilities and disorders, often stemming from challenges with impulse control, communication, or sensory regulation.*

Disruptions to Sexual Development



The most common disruptions to healthy sexual development are:

- Differences in brain structures associated with anxiety and survival instincts (potentially caused by violence / abuse)
- Sexual violence or abuse
- Sexualization of the individual or others in the home, witnessing sexual behaviors, being exposed to sexual media beyond casual curiosity or accidental viewing
- Parents who are absent or do not provide adequate supervision, who have or set poor boundaries, or who experience addiction
- Housing instability

The Common Denominator =

TRAUMA

Disruptions to Sexual Development

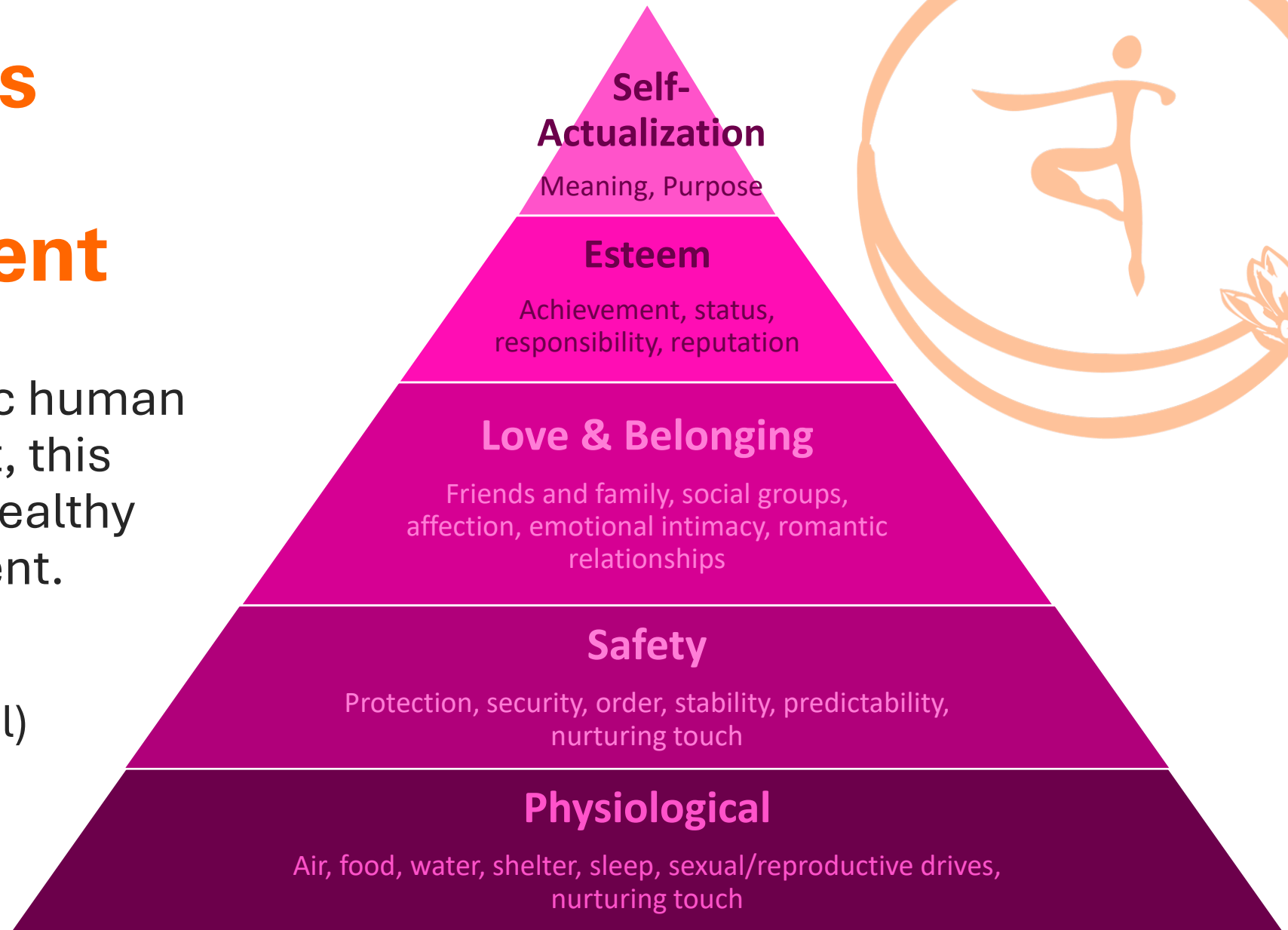
If someone's basic human needs are not met, this can also disrupt healthy sexual development.

Example:

Brittany, 16 (survival)

Example:

Ryan, 19 (touch)





Problematic Sexual Behaviors

What “Problematic Behaviors” Do We See?

Examples:

- **socially problematic** (i.e. sexual comments, questions, and jokes)
- **risky** (i.e. engaging in unprotected sexual activities, posting sexy pictures online, meeting someone from a dating app for a hook-up without a safety plan, giving personal information)
- **dangerous** (i.e. going to a stranger’s house, giving personal information, traveling to another city or state alone to meet a new sweetie they barely know)
- **illegal** (i.e. non-consensual touch, public masturbation or nudity)
- **being exploited** (i.e. targeted for nude videos, sending money)



The Root of “Problem Sexual Behaviors”

We need to understand the cause / function of behaviors.

Remember: sexualized behaviors *are* a symptom of some disabilities / disorders, and for those people even more support for these behaviors will be needed. But these behaviors are not always diagnostic of a disorder; they can also be influenced by a history of abuse, poor education, or environmental factors.

Other common root causes are:

- puberty and sexual drive without adequate / person-centered education and skill building
- wanting to be ‘like everyone else’
- loneliness, isolation, exclusion (wanting connection and to belong)
- wanting to feel wanted, desired, sexy





Sexual Maladaptation

Signs of Potential Sexual Concerns

How do we know when a behavior is more than just a lack of education or support?

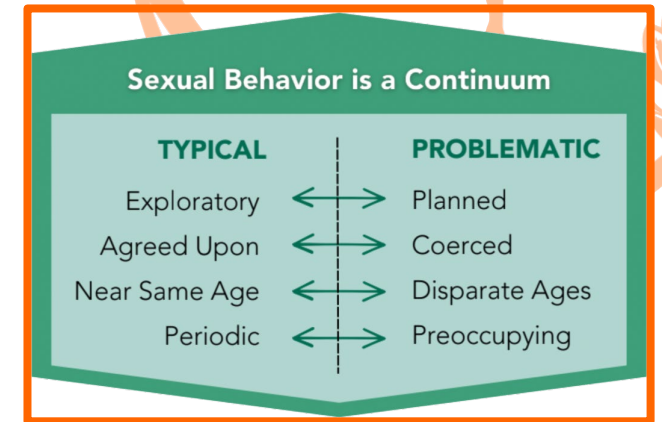
When children and youth (or adults with disabilities or disorders*) display pattern of acting out in sexual manners that are grossly out of proportion to normal development and social norms, they may have sexually maladaptive behaviors. (SMB)

The physical and emotional well-being of the person engaging in SMB is put at risk, and these behaviors can also put the safety of those around them at risk.



Sexually Maladaptive Behaviors

- Not a specific diagnosis; occur across a broad spectrum; classified as a cluster of behaviors that exist outside acceptable social limits
- Can range in severity and in the level of potential harm that threatens others: children, adults, or animals
- Present differently in each person engaging in them
- Generally, not for sexual gratification (vast majority of cases)
- Typically, not corrected with common redirection or consequences and are paired with emotional distress and/or intense self-shaming, self-harm, violence, manipulation, coercion, etc.

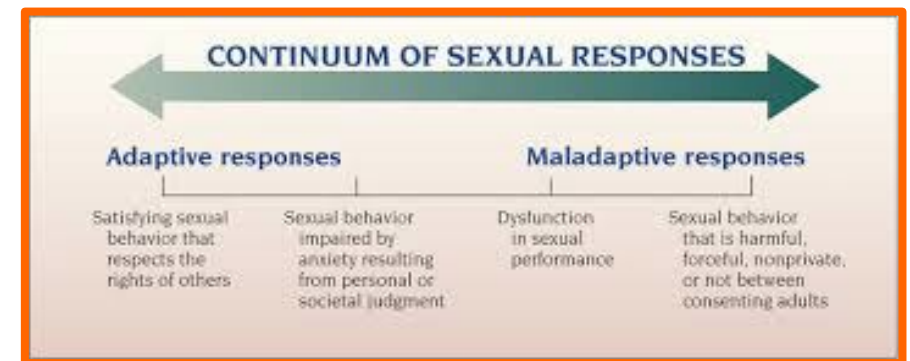


Sexually Maladaptive Behaviors, Cont.

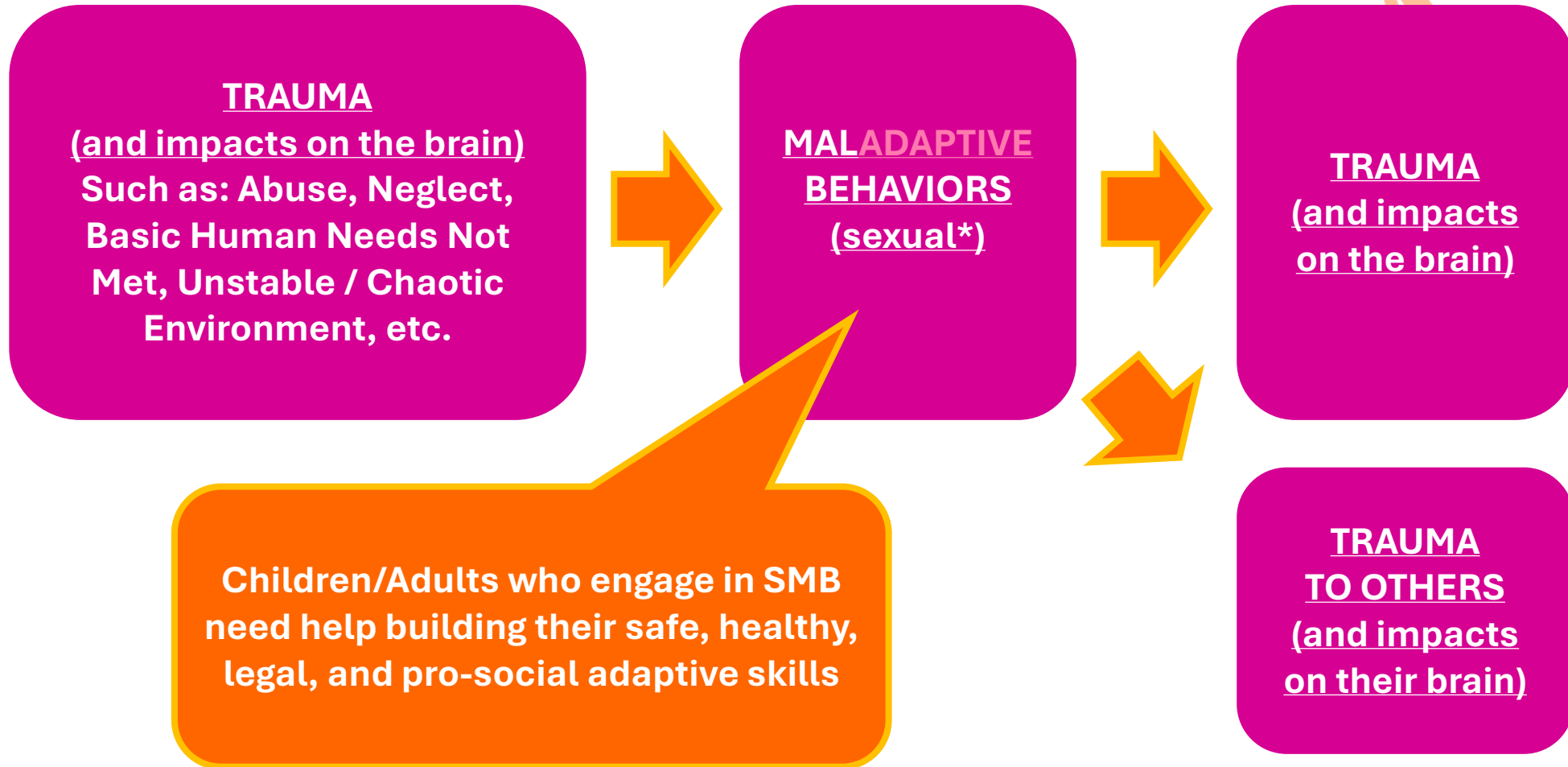
Sexual behaviors that cause **social impairment, disruption in daily functioning,** and **physical and emotional pain and discomfort** to the individual and/or others are also considered maladaptive.

People who participate in such behaviors have likely experienced or are currently experiencing abuse, trauma, or other physical and environmental factors that have caused this maladaptive response. (Remember Brittany?)

Signs of SMB shouldn't be ignored because such behaviors can lead to serious, negative outcomes.



Using A Trauma Informed Lens

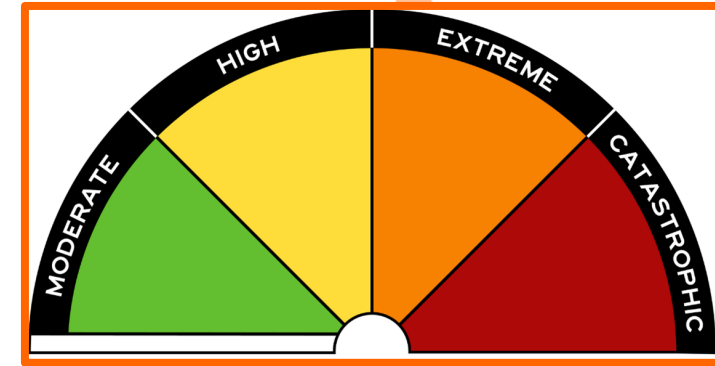




Responding to Sexual Behaviors / Incidents

Responding to Sexual Behavior

Responses to problematic or undesirable sexual behaviors vs. sexually maladaptive behaviors require *very* different strategies.



To Start:

1. Stay calm and de-escalate
2. Evaluate whether the person you support is:
 - A probable victim
 - A potential perpetrator
 - Was engaging in risky or socially problematic (or situationally inappropriate) sexual behavior

We Should Respond Differently

Unlike other challenging behaviors, we cannot simply respond in a way that prevents or impedes a person's sexuality altogether.

Problem / Undesirable Behaviors

- Pay attention, but don't overreact
- Offer education and skill building
- Redirect; Promote safe, healthy, and legal alternatives
- If needed, introduce reasonable consequences to curb behaviors

Sexually Maladaptive Behaviors

- If there are victims, ensure their safety and report to authorities as required
- Don't ignore, but don't shame
- Document frequency, duration, and intensity as you're able
- Seek professional help!

Back to Real Life Stories

Let's talk about these situations and which ones are maladaptive.

Ricky, 14 – made out with classmate

Healthy development; needed education and support



Christine, 17 – sexting

Healthy development; needed education and support;
Perpetrators had to be reported



Jesse, 19 – diapers

Healthy development, but was perceived as maladaptive; just
needed support



Back to Real Life Stories

Let's talk about these situations and which ones are maladaptive.

Chris, 12 – foot fetish & brother

Fetish was part of healthy development, but engaging with the brother was definitely a problem and had potential to become maladaptive; needed education, skill building, and support



Brenna, 16 – talking about sex

Maladaptive – related to her history of trauma and sexualization by adults



Kyle, 9 – “humping” people

Maladaptive, but not sexual; needed education and support



Resources

- You can utilize our [ever-growing list of resources](#). And you can submit resources for it, too!
- You can use the OHSU UCEDD [Resource Hub](#).
- Here is a [list of a few resources](#) specific to this topic.

NEW SOCIAL-SEXUAL ASSESSMENT TOOLS!

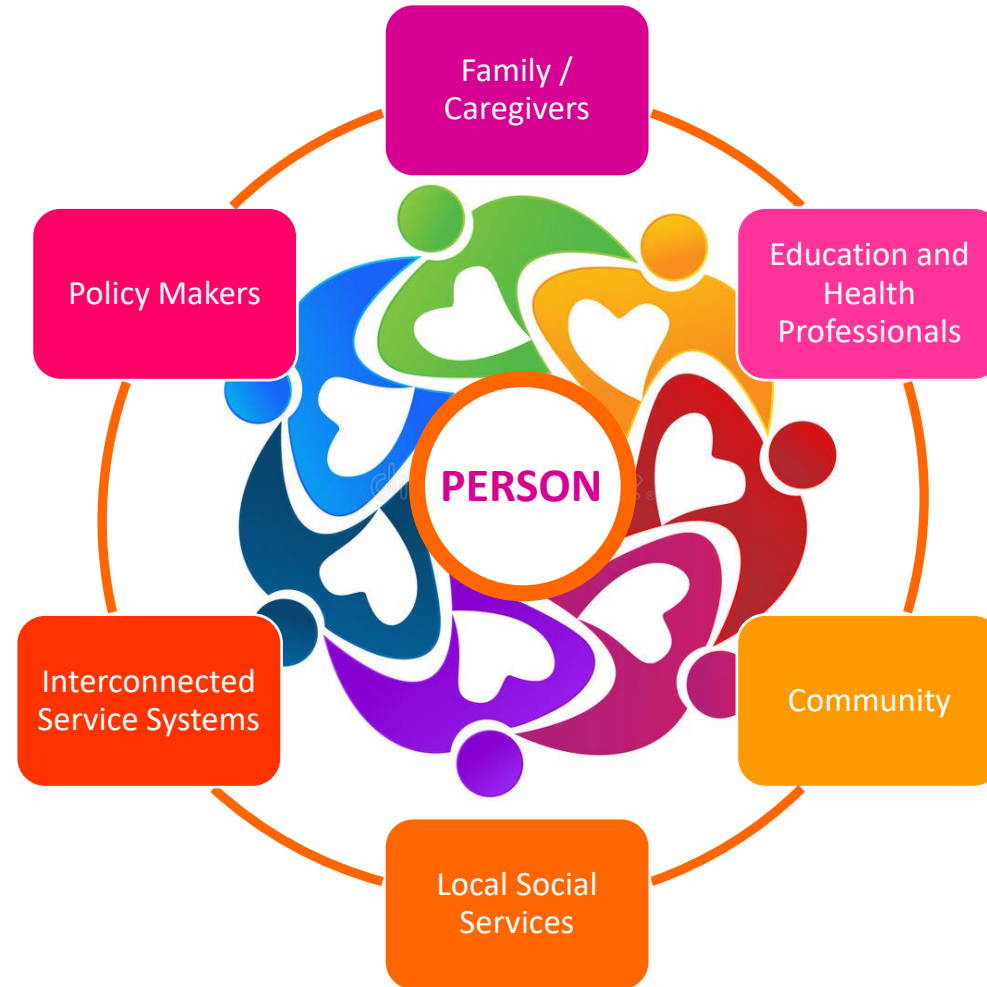
Shanya Luther has developed TWO different social-sexual assessment tools that qualified professionals can [purchase](#) to use with their client(s) or [hire Among Friends to conduct](#) on behalf of their client(s).





Closing

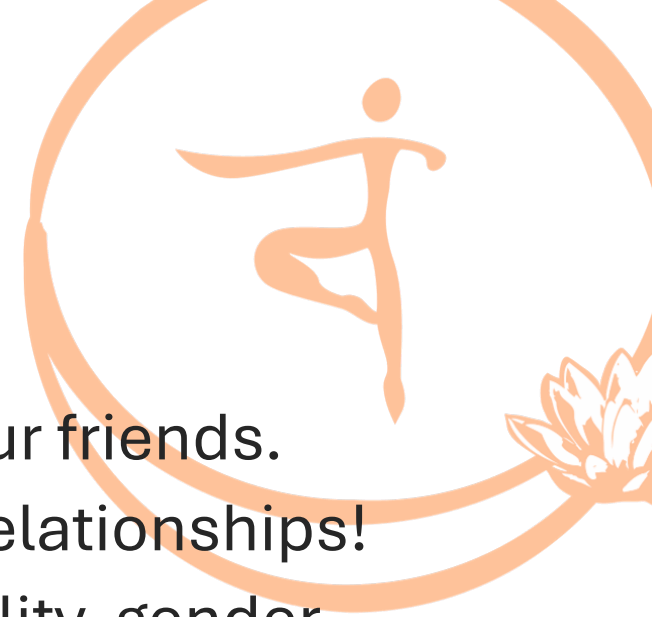
A Village Approach to Healthy Sexuality



Call To Action

Please take this information **and do more with it!**

- Discuss it with your co-workers, your family, and your friends.
- Advocate for peoples' needs around sexuality and relationships!
- Familiarize yourself with key issues related to sexuality, gender, relationships, legal rights, and trauma in your field.
- Ask for more training for your organization!
- Talk about how to change policies and procedures at your work to support sexual self-determination of people you serve.
- Sign up to receive our newsletter.
- Commit to supporting healthy sexuality!



Become a Subject-Matter Specialist!!!



There are not enough people to address the enormous needs related to these topics, so we are looking for people to train! If you feel drawn to supporting people with important issues related to relationships and sexuality, we hope you'll seriously consider becoming a 'point-person' in your agency, community or region.

Join us for our **Sexual Self-Determination Certification Program**.

The first step is signing up for **Tier 1: FOUNDATIONS**. (the next one is in...)

Earn CEU's, and become a subject matter specialist and a valuable resource!!!

Contact Information



Social-Sexual Training and Resources

Trainings & Marketplace trainings@amongfriendsllc.org
Certification Program certification@amongfriendsllc.org
Consultation & Advocacy consultation@amongfriendsllc.org

Social-Sexual Behavior Services

Oregon positivesupports.or@amongfriendsllc.org
Washington positivesupports.wa@amongfriendsllc.org
ALL OTHER AREAS positivesupports.info@amongfriendsllc.org

Training Evaluations and Q&A



We Value Your Feedback!!!

Please complete an evaluation to help us continue to improve our trainings.

[Among Friends Training Evaluation](#)

or use our QR code or web link:

among-friends.org/eval-feedback



And ***Thank You*** for making healthy sexual development a priority!