

TRANSCRIPT: Group discussion (1) Personal care, toileting and puberty

Speaker 1: In primary with new teaching assistants when they come in, they're asked beforehand how they would feel about the personal care issues. We'd never expect them to just go in by themselves and start off, because all the children are different, they've got slightly different needs. So you would provide the training on what that particular child's needs are - what we would actually need to do, making sure the child knew what was happening all the time. The personal care could range from the fact that they are still in pads, so you were having to change them, down to that they are being toilet trained and helping them learn and retain dignity whilst we are helping them being toilet trained.

Speaker2: It's slightly different emphasis when you get the older children 'cause you're more conscious of the fact that they are teenagers. And with the ASD pupils, some of them can't actually get to the toileting area, so you've got to go with them, but then they want you to go out. So it's that fine balance and getting that across to TAs that, you know, they don't want you in the room, but they need you close so that they can call on you, is something that we have to explain at first.

Speaker 1: And I think it's actually for the TAs in primary as well, something that you need to explain is that you have to be there for the children but we do have to encourage as much independence as possible. So again, it's getting that balance between helping them if they need help and encouraging them to do things by themselves. Because if the child can do it, let them do it, and it's a temptation that all of us have sometime to think, 'Oh, we're in a rush,' and 'Let's sort of do it for them'.

Speaker3: I suppose I don't really know what secondary's like, 'cause I haven't worked in secondary, but whenever I take them to the toilet I always let somebody know, just in case you need a hand changing them and things.

Speaker 2: That's right, and when you're using the hygiene room, if you've got a pupil who needs to be being changed on a bed, that's when I think you really, really have to think about dignity. You have to think about other people not coming into the room. And, if they're older pupils, quite often I'll try and get a conversation with them, to sort of take their mind off what's actually going on - about anything - just talk about where they're going that night, or something like that so that they don't—they're not conscious of actually what is happening.

Speaker 1: And, I think, when - 'cause often if they're being changed on the changing bed, there's more than one of you because of the health and safety side and the manual handling - I think it's really important that you don't get carried away at talking to the colleague you're working with, about something else. You know, you need to be talking to the pupil, like Wendy's just said. It can be very easy to forget that you've actually got a person there on the bed with feelings and who needs to be included.

Speaker 2: And the other issue is the girls and periods! Not to put too fine a point on it! Yes it really is - trying to encourage them to do it for themselves, but also making sure they've got everything they need available and they know to go regularly and things like that. Again I would feel uncomfortable if it was a young man doing that. I would prefer that a female does that, very much so.

Speaker 3: Yeah, I would feel uncomfortable because I don't know a lot about that area anyway, so I'd be like, 'What do I do?', so.

Speaker 1: And it, although it's slightly different, I think it's still personal care for them, is actually recognising that when they are having a period they are likely to be...well they are hormonal and their moods are likely to change, so they might not actually want you to be in there helping them. They may not fully understand what's happening and, you know, we struggle with hormones sometimes ourselves, so that's much more difficult for them to deal with.

Speaker 2: And the other issue with boys going through puberty, is they actually do need much more help with showering, encouraging them to take more showers and just be more conscious that things will smell!