

Quarterly Newsletter

April 2026



THE KEY TO SUCCESS FOR ALASKAN EDUCATORS
SERVING STUDENTS WITH LOW INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

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"Sometimes the questions are complicated, and the answers are simple."

-Dr. Seuss

Puberty, Bodily Autonomy, Body Awareness & Body Safety

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Happy Spring! The days are getting longer, and staff and students alike are starting to look forward to the end of the year and the upcoming summer break. Spring is traditionally the time of year when new life and growth are seen. Classrooms may be learning about baby animals and animal interactions, plant life cycles, or seasonal changes.

It is important for students with low-incidence disabilities to learn about their own bodies, the changes their bodies will experience, and the different body boundaries used in different social settings. It can be intimidating to think about how to teach a student with a low-incidence disability about their body, but it is a critical skill for all children. This quarter, the SESA newsletter focuses on books and curricula designed to help teach students with low-incidence disabilities this critical information.

Happy Spring,
Jennifer Schroeder

Health and Sexual Education for Students on the Autism Spectrum

By Robert Sinclair, Autism Specialist

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report lower levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships than their neurotypical counterparts (Yew et al., 2023). Improving how we support students with ASD in their development through puberty to adulthood while respecting autonomy and dignity is an ongoing challenge and often-overlooked aspect of education for these individuals. These issues are too often downplayed, denied, or ignored because of their taboo nature. This prevents individuals from acquiring the skills they need to successfully navigate them (Ginevra et al., 2016).

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Puberty and Social Skills

By Scott Hotaling, Emotional Disabilities Specialist

The changes associated with puberty and corresponding sexual development pose challenges for everyone. For individuals with emotional disabilities, this time of life can be particularly difficult. Emotional regulation issues can become even more challenging due to surging hormones. In this age of social media, with its tendency to expose young people to sexualized material at younger ages than was the case in past eras, it can be difficult to even know when instruction and preparation should begin.

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Paraprofessional Spotlight!



Our paraprofessional spotlight this month goes to Nicole Lewis!

Nicole is an exceptional paraprofessional because:

- She enthusiastically supports her student with dedication, patience, and professionalism.
- She works hard every day to ensure that her student grows socially, emotionally, and academically.
- She works closely with her school team to communicate, update, and implement support for her student.
- She brings a great attitude and positive energy to the classroom and school.

Thanks for all you do, Nicole!

When Students Feel "On Stage": Mindfulness, Acceptance and Commitment Strategies for the Puberty Years

By Lyon C. Johnson, MA, NCSP, BCBA, LBA

Puberty can make ordinary school moments feel public and high stakes. A student who once moved through the day without much self-consciousness may suddenly feel watched, judged, and exposed. For some students, that feeling shows up as shutdown, refusal, arguing, crying, leaving, or getting stuck in shame, fear, or anger. That is one reason this topic matters so much in schools. We often tell students to calm down, be flexible, or use a coping skill. However, many adults have never been taught the small steps that turn those words into reality. This article takes a closer look at those small steps. It focuses on mindfulness and acceptance and commitment strategies that can help students during puberty, but the bigger point is this: these are not just puberty skills. These are life skills. Every one of us has difficult emotions. Every one of us gets hooked by thoughts, memories, bodily feelings, and urges at times.

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Teaching Puberty and Bodily Autonomy to Blind and Visually Impaired Students

By Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS

Every child deserves to understand their body, establish healthy boundaries, and learn how to protect themselves. For students who are blind or visually impaired, this education needs thoughtful adaptation—but it's absolutely possible and critically important.

Why This Matters

Let's start with the facts: according to the World Health Organization, children with disabilities face a 2.9 times higher risk of sexual violence compared to their peers without disabilities. People with visual impairments experience sexual assault or abuse at rates between 11-30% across their lifespan.

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Body Safety for Individuals with Disabilities

By Amy Topmiller, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

The state of Alaska passed "The Alaska Safe Children's Act" in 2015. One of the two pieces of legislation under this act is "Erin's Law," which outlines the responsibility of each school district to provide resources for staff and students in the prevention of sexual abuse and sexual assault in students K-12 (The Alaska Safe Children's Act). Children with disabilities are at a much higher risk of sexual assault compared to their same aged non disabled peers, at least two to four times more frequently (Kebanov, Friedman-Hauser, Lusky-Weisrose, Katz, 2023). This research identifies the following factors placing individuals with disabilities at higher risk:

- Lack of education on sexuality, including knowing what sexual assault is
- Individuals with disabilities are left out of decision-making within their family/voices are not being heard
- Complex communication needs

- Professionals working with individuals with disabilities are not trained to identify and intervene in sexual abuse

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Upcoming Events

AARC Hosts Autism Awareness & Acceptance Walk

April 25th, 2026, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM | Special Olympics Alaska
Registration is open!

SESA Summer Office Closure

June 5, 2026 - July 13, 2026

