



THE HANGOUT UPDATE

FEBRUARY SESSION

2/23/2023



TAISHA MATHIEU

Health & Wellness Coordinator

In February, we completed our monthly session of **“THE HANGOUT - A support group for individuals impacted by Sickle Cell Disease.”** The topic was **“Intimacy and Sexuality”**. Thanks to everyone who joined in! If you were unable to participate in The Hangout this month, please enjoy this summary of the discussion.

GROUP NORMS

We want the Hangouts to be a safe, supportive space for all participants. We reviewed group norms briefly at the start of the session, and as always, if you have any questions or concerns about the norms, feel free to contact Taisha Mathieu at taisha@mythreesicklers.org.

TOPIC

This month’s topic focused on the challenges and insights regarding Intimacy and Sexuality. The participants’ felt the components of intimacy can be completely expressed when there is unconditional love and understanding from their partners, spouses, friends, co-workers, and a strong support system. Additionally, having the ability to listen and hear the thoughts of a person with sickle cell disease shows a true abundance of patience but also empathy.

We had the opportunity to have a guest speaker Ms. Chanta Blue. She is a licensed Sex therapist, author, social worker, and professor in the state of New Jersey. She opened the platform by discussing the vision she has in wanting those of color to feel and know that sexuality and intimacy have no border when it comes to the sake of love and self-love. The cores of sexuality and pleasure were discussed. There are five core values of sexuality which

was highly emphasized within the session, and they were sexualization, sexual health/reproduction, intimacy, sensuality, and sexual identity.

Sexualization is defined as fun flirting, manipulation, and control over others. For example, one demonstrates sexualization by practicing the use of a bargaining chip. "If you do not run the errands on the To-do list, I won't have sex with you for a week". This is a form of consequence that entails getting things done but controlling the behavior of both parties involved. The participants shared their concerns about how society sexualizes everything including TV, commercials, movies, etc. The issue that hand is that when sex is still being treated as a taboo. When sex would be viewed as something normal and part of the everyday way of being a human being, individuals would not be so quick to be tempted by pictures or things that are so minute.

Sexual health/reproduction focuses on the attitudes of people and how that can contribute to sexual behaviors. Moreover, when individuals are careful and communicative there would be lower rates of Sexually transmitted infection, unwanted pregnancies, and domestic violence.

Intimacy pinpoints the degree of wanting to be close to another person to trust and share this is a form of emotional risk-taking. Participants articulated that after having experienced passed trauma opening can be a challenge. The alleviation that was suggested was to open a space in the relationship that is known as a judgment-free zone to express concerns, wishes, desires, and even fears. Emotional risk-taking can be arduous, especially with running the risk of possibly feeling abandoned or rejected by a person who means a lot. Also expressing that one may need to rest due to having episodes of pain and possibly sleepless nights demonstrates a moment of wanting to be heard but also cared for. Participants feel that education is also a key to wanting to be close to a loved one as well. For example, taking the time to learn about the chronic illness that your friend or partner has allows room for dialogue instead of making assumptions. It can be exhausting and baffling dating a person who continues to fear that he or she may "catch" Sickle Cell as if it was a sexually transmitted disease or infection.

Next, sensuality covers the awareness of how one feels about his or her body and how one would want to be seen in the world. For example, if a person feels confident and desired then that is what is going to be projected to others. Meanwhile, if one were to feel the opposite the individual must have the opportunity to practice self-care and love by taking one's medication, having a spa or "My day" to relearn and revisit the needs and wants that you may have but have neglected over some time. Additionally, removing the people or things that cause more harm in one's positive mental health.

Finally, sexual identity is treating those with the identity that they claim. For example, participants wanted to understand the role they play in aiding children who have sickle cell

disease and questions about their identity. It was extrapolated that when it comes to partnering it is up to the parents to open a space that allows their children a chance to voice the pains of their health condition but also about who they are or want to become. When it comes to social acceptance within the schools it solely depends on the rules and regulations of the state but also within the school policies on how to fit the needs of the students and the partners so that the children can have a healthy and safe learning environment.

Pleasure should be intentional and provide a space to engage with others. Every person has the right and the responsibility to find what brings him or her pleasure. Participants have mentioned that caring for oneself is not self-indulgence it is self-self-preservation and that is an act of political welfare. One can choose what brings him or her joy because it is part of one's autonomy.



SPECIAL GUEST

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