



A12 Talking About Sex and Sexuality

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Harbor

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Talking About Sex

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To access the “Prezi” for this workshop go to ***revolutioninstitute.com*** and click on the “presentations” tab

Take Home Points

❖ Sex in Modern Culture

- In modern american culture there is a deeply ingrained set of rules about sexuality very broadly summarized as “it’s bad and dirty except in very specific appropriate circumstances and we don’t talk about it or think about it.”
- However, in strong opposition to the above cultural rule, we are bombarded daily in all forms of media by both subtle and extremely direct sexual imagery.
- Somewhere in the middle is a healthy and balanced attitude towards sexuality which is that it’s an extremely fundamental part of human existence and normal to be on our minds and play a part in many of our interactions
- This presentation theorizes that the cultural pressure to repress sexual thoughts that are natural and normal leads to the hypersexualized aspects of society similar to trying to stop the water coming out of a hose by holding it back with your thumb.

❖ Problems with Treating Issues Involving Sexuality

- Issues involving sexuality are difficult to address in treatment in large part because our society lacks a clear definition of healthy sexuality.
- How do we treat unhealthy sexuality if we don't know what healthy sexuality is?

❖ How Did We Get this Way?

- The societal expectations that still exist were formed in a very different time when they fit more seamlessly into the culture
- Societal developments such as contraception, equality of women and men and changes in the understanding of adulthood and marriage have substantially altered relationships but thinking about sexuality has not entirely caught up
 - For instance, we no longer consider a 13 year old to be an adult who is ready for marriage however a 13 year old may still be biologically ready to have sex.

❖ Other Problems

- Unwanted Pregnancy

- Teens are too uncomfortable to pursue birth control but not enough to say no to sex when available
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
 - Too uncomfortable to prepare protection or get proper medical care until unavoidable
- Discrimination
 - Discomfort with anything outside of "traditional" sexual relationships underlies discrimination towards any form of "alternative" lifestyle
- Infidelity / Divorce / "Dead bedrooms"
 - Too uncomfortable to have healthy sex conversations with partners leads to deterioration of sex life and looking elsewhere
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
 - All prostitution being illegal leaves little difference between activity between fully consenting adults and forcing children to perform sex acts
- Exploitation in Pornography
 - Porn being universally condemned means no clear line between porn depicting healthy consensual relationships and porn depicting abuse and other highly unhealthy interactions

❖ What is Healthy Sexuality?

- **The Golden Rule: Genuine Mutual Consent**
- The Commandments
 - Thou shall maintain GMC throughout the activity
 - Disability, youth, chemical impairments and other factors may prevent GMC
 - GMC shall exist between all involved parties
 - This includes committed partners not present
 - Thou shall manage the possibility of pregnancy
 - Thou shall prevent the transmission of disease
 - Sex shall improve emotional well being, not reduce it
- Sex and Drugs
 - Substance Use *can* impair ability to provide consent but the questions is not as simple as we would like to present
 - Not Okay - Use to get a partner to agree to activity they would not have consented to sober
 - Maybe Okay - Choosing your own level of use to feel more able to do something you want to do but you don't feel you can
 - The grey area is massive but oversimplifying the situation with someone who needs help may lead to being ignored and losing the ability to make a difference

❖ Talking to Families about Sex

- First, explore your own relationship with sexuality and work towards being able to model comfortable, open discussion about sex.
- Use your team and supervision to assess whether it's an appropriate topic for you to address
- Also assess the likelihood that you will be able to produce a positive outcome and the possibility of a negative outcome
- Go to parents first - Much better for them to talk to their kids than for you to try to do it for them
- When Religion is an Issue
 - Develop your understanding of the families beliefs before any consideration of challenging them
 - Validate beliefs as much as possible
 - Seek support from the spiritual community
 - Consider partnering with their place of worship - they may be more open than the family presents
 - If not, seek out clergy that are more experienced in confronting sexual issues - Some LGBTQ centers keep a list of faith communities that support the LGBTQ community
- Normalize the discomfort of the discussion but highlight the massive benefits of open discussion through minimizing many risks

Talking to Your Kid About Sex

They've got questions. You'll need answers. Be prepared!

- 1. Reflect on your own experience speaking with an adult about sex when you were young**
 - What worked for you? What were you able to relate to?
 - What would you like to do differently?
 - What are some of your family's values regarding sex, which you would like to pass along (or not pass along)?
- 2. Start early and stay open**
 - Sexual developmental milestones (see next page)
 - Use anatomically appropriate language from the beginning, to reduce stigmatizing the human body
 - Encourage an ongoing discussion. This should not be a one-time conversation
- 3. Avoid judgement**
 - Remain empathetic and open to avoid your child going elsewhere for their information (most likely a peer or the internet)
 - If this isn't possible, identify an educated adult both you and your child trust to answer questions you aren't comfortable with
- 4. Be comfortable!**
 - Your tone and presentation set the stage for your kids and can impact their perception of sex
 - If you can't be comfortable, at least be honest about why it's important to talk about anyway
 - Collaborate with experienced parents
 - Engage in an activity while having the discussion, to reduce tension (driving, going for a walk, washing dishes)
 - Use observations of media/every day illustrations of sex to open conversation ("When I saw _____, it made me think about _____")
- 5. Education is more powerful than abstinence**
 - Don't rely on outside parties to educate (schools, peers, media)
 - If abstinence is made the only acceptable option, children are likely to feel the need to hide their sexual activity from you and increase the risk of unprotected sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
 - Educating your children does not mean you're encouraging them to have sex. Make sure they have the correct information to make the right choices for them.
 - Have open conversations about the pro's and con's of sex
 - Help them understand how to identify when they feel ready
 - It's ok if you don't have the answer to every question. Acknowledge you're uncertain and seek out the information together.

Sexual Milestones

Timing is Everything! It's enormously helpful to have conversations before your children are gathering information from other sources or making choices without the information you want them to have

Approximate Age	Activity
5-7	Where Did I Come From? At this age children become aware of the existence of sex - talk about what it is and the appropriate ways to learn about it. At this age children have not yet absorbed the societal discomfort with sex and may be much more willing to ask questions and express curiosity
9-12	Onset of Puberty! An open conversation about what will be happening to a child's body as puberty begins and why that is happening will help tremendously in managing an undoubtedly awkward and difficult time.
12-14	Choices About Sex Talk about the wonders and dangers of sex and how to know when a situation is right. Educate them on the critical details about contraception methods (there are a lot more than there used to be) and infection prevention. Include a broader discussion about relationships and how to decide when the time is right for them.
14 -	More than Just Safe! Keep up the conversation. Don't rely on a teenager to ask questions. Seek them out, break the tension with humor. Consider all the things that you wish you would have known sooner. Guide teens to resources that give more realistic expectations than internet pornography. Consider ways to help your child have not just safe sex, but a good, healthy and fulfilling sex life!