

A Tool to Help Parents Raise Sexually Safe and Healthy Children

Dr. Janet Rosenzweig

A presentation for

The families of
Har Shalom Congregation
Warren, NJ
Sunday, October 28, 2012



My Perspective

- Started in 1978, in East Tennessee
- Sexuality issues were incorporated into all of our staff training, and community presentations to parents, teachers and others.
- Authored a chapter in a text book entitled: *Human sexuality issues in the treatment of child sexual abuse* (Flanzer, J *The Many Faces of Family Violence*. Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd ,August 1982)

Perspectives from Judiasm

- Reform: the Reform movement developed a new curriculum, called “Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics” for use by congregational schools and youth groups as well as camps “to teach sexual ethics to teens.”
(<http://www.urj.org/youth/sacredchoices>).

Perspectives from Judiasm

- Orthodox: National Council of Synagogue Youth of the **Orthodox Union** has a Website that addresses teen sexual behavior. Located at <http://www.negiah.org>, it is entitled "NCSY says kNOw: The First Abstinence Website for Jewish Teens." Negiah, a Hebrew term for touching, refers to the prohibition against men touching women who are not ritually pure. Any touching, even casual contact such as a handshake, would be forbidden between unrelated men and women. The OU Website explains, "[H]alacha (Jewish law) does not permit any intimate or affectionate contact between men and women who are not married to one another (or close relatives)." A person who is "shomer negiah" will strictly observe the prohibition.

Conservative Judaism

- **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**
“...supports comprehensive sex education...”

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Comprehensive Sex Education (2007)

- **WHEREAS**, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism believes in educating both adults and children to encourage them to live their lives and make their decisions in the context of halakhah and the tenets of Conservative Judaism;
- **WHEREAS, United Synagogue encourages abstinence before marriage, United Synagogue also recognizes that a large number of teens and adults do not abstain from sex before marriage;**
- **WHEREAS**, Conservative Judaism speaks to other issues related to sexuality and intimacy besides abstinence;
- **WHEREAS**, the content of comprehensive sex education can include a discussion of sexual attitudes, developing interpersonal skills, and creating personal responsibility regarding sexual relationships;

Resolution, continues

- **WHEREAS**, current models for comprehensive sex education encourage adolescents to make healthy choices about when to have sex and also teach about risk reduction behaviors;
- **WHEREAS**, Conservative Judaism encourages life choices to be made in the context of Conservative Jewish values;
- **WHEREAS**, abstinence only education has been receiving expanded U.S. Federal government support (\$1.5 billion since 1996) and has been replacing comprehensive sex education;
- **WHEREAS**, there are concerns about the informational content (see the Waxman report indicating these programs contain medically inaccurate information) as well as ethical concerns about abstinence only programs;
- **WHEREAS**, a recently released U.S. congressionally mandated evaluation of abstinence only programs found that these programs have no beneficial impact on behavior;

Resultion continues

- **WHEREAS**, rigorous evaluations of comprehensive sex education programs indicate positive impact including the delay of onset of sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraceptive use;
- **WHEREAS**, **adolescents in our synagogues are increasingly unlikely to receive comprehensive sex education through the public school system** (the most recent National Survey of Family Growth found that fewer teens are receiving any information about contraception in school-based sex education, while many more are receiving only information about abstinence); and
- **WHEREAS**, “This is My Beloved, This is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations” by Rabbi Elliot Dorff, states the importance of addressing the major concepts of human sexuality and intimacy in the context of Jewish law, ethics, and theology to show how our tradition can affect not only our public and professional lives but also our personal lives.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

- that United Synagogue supports comprehensive sex education;
- **Encourages parents to talk to their children about sexuality and sexual health in a Conservative Jewish context;**
- Calls upon the U.S. Congress to cease funding of abstinence only education;
- Opposes funding of abstinence only education on federal, state, provincial and local levels;
- Encourages the support of the inclusion of components of age appropriate comprehensive sex education in public schools; and
- Encourages components of age appropriate comprehensive sex education in Solomon Schechter schools, Camps Ramah, Kadima, USY and Koach.
- **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that United Synagogue will develop age-appropriate educational materials to be used in day schools, synagogue schools, youth groups and homes.**

My favorite Jewish perspective: Healing the World!

“Helping people with sexual questions is “a matter of *tikkun olam* -- of helping to heal the world” (201), particularly, of helping to heal the “pain and misery” sometimes caused by sex (195).

- Blank, Hanne. “The ‘Big O’ Also Means ‘Olam.’” In *Yentl’s Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*. Ed. Danya Ruttenberg. Seattle: Seal Press, 2001, 194-205.

In all denominations....

- The home and family are the center of Jewish life

The neutered 90's

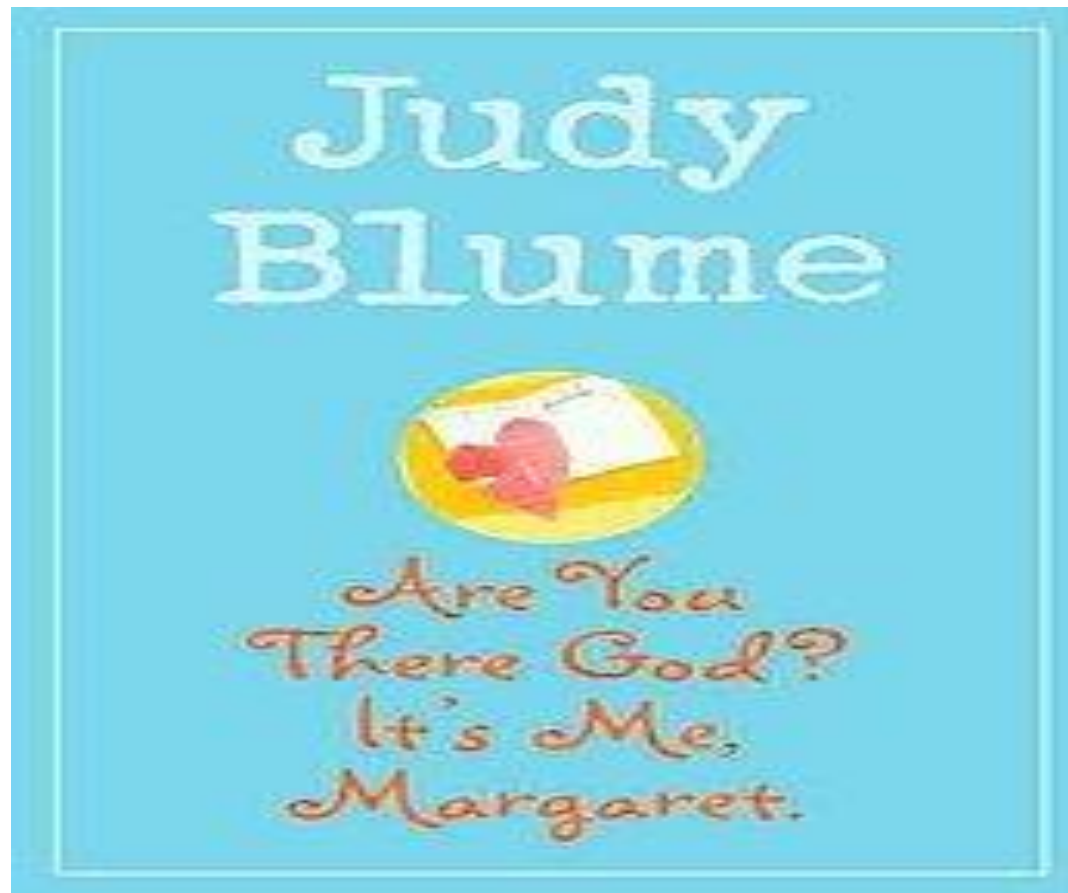
- Megan's Laws NJ, 1994 (first) federal 1996
 - Sex abuse prevention became checking registries
 - Adults were concerned about being falsely accused by a child or parent
- Abstinence only education funding 1996
 - Limited topics to be presented in classes
- Jocelyn Elders 1994

Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the highly qualified US Surgeon General was forced to resign after replying to a specific question at a World Aids Day conference asking if she "thought that masturbation could serve as a useful tool to help discourage school children from becoming sexually active too early" by saying: "With regard to masturbation, I think that is something that is part of human sexuality and a part of something that perhaps should be taught".

Megan's Laws

- First passed in states, 1994 (NJ) feds 1996
- Consequences of being labeled a sex offender now much more serious, including life time registration
- Public became over-reliant on Megan's Law registries for 'prevention'

Judy Blume...



Judy Blume, children's author

“When I began to write, thirty years ago, I didn't know if anyone would publish my books, but I wasn't afraid to write them. I was lucky. I found an editor and publisher who were willing to take a chance. They encouraged me. I was never told what I couldn't write. I felt only that I had to write the most honest books I could.

Judy Blume.....

- There were few challenges to my books then, although I remember the night a woman phoned, asking if I had written *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. When I replied that I had, she called me a Communist and slammed down the phone. I never did figure out if she equated Communism with menstruation or religion, the two major concerns in 12 year old Margaret's life.
- But in 1980, the censors crawled out of the woodwork, seemingly overnight, organized and determined. Not only would they decide what their children could read, but what all children could read. Challenges to books quadrupled within months, and we'll never know how many teachers, school librarians and principals quietly removed books to avoid trouble.
- [Read Judy Blume on censorship](#)

One Result??

- Adults, even well-intentioned ones
STOPPED TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT SEX!



People stopped talking to kids about sex

■ Information about healthy sexuality is a critical component of any comprehensive initiative to promote sexual health and safety

Debating who should be teaching kids about sex changes the subject

PARENTS are key and need support!

We must support parents...

- ... to become the primary sexuality educators of their children.
- ... to consciously decide on the sexual climate they will set in their home.
- To monitor the sexual climate of the organizations and institutions serving their children.

Promoting Sexual Health and Safety

Borrowing ideas from public health

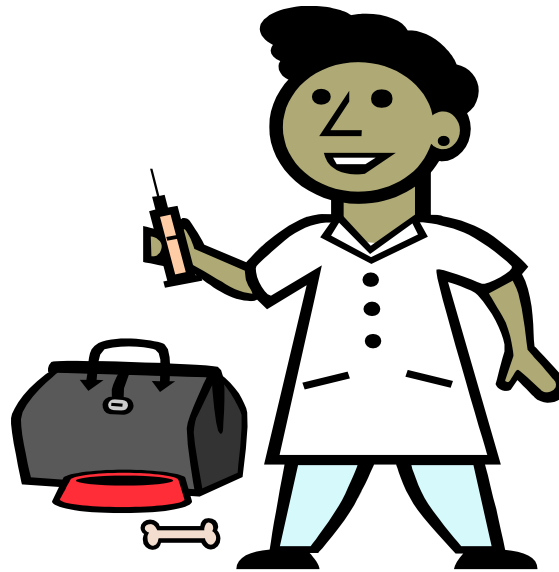
Types of Prevention

- General information or services directed to ALL parents, such as.....
 - How to calm a crying baby
 - Understanding a child's capabilities at each age
 - 'Normalizing' stress reaction to parenting.

WE CALL THIS PRIMARY PREVENTION

Medical equivalent

- Flu shots for all!



Types of Prevention

- Targeting services to people with factors known to increase the risk of child maltreatment:
 - Poverty
 - Lack of social supports
 - Unrealistic expectations of children
 - Unintended parenthood
 - The 'big 3' – addiction, mental illness, domestic violence

We call this secondary prevention

Medical equivalent

- Targeting exercise programs to people with high cholesterol (risk factor!) to avoid heart disease.



Secondary prevention of sexual abuse

- **The easiest risk to remove is ignorance.**
- Remove the risk factors of lack of knowledge and language about sexuality!

When you think about it, it's simple...

- Pedophiles prefer victims who do not have language about sexuality – they can't describe what happened !



The neutered 90's

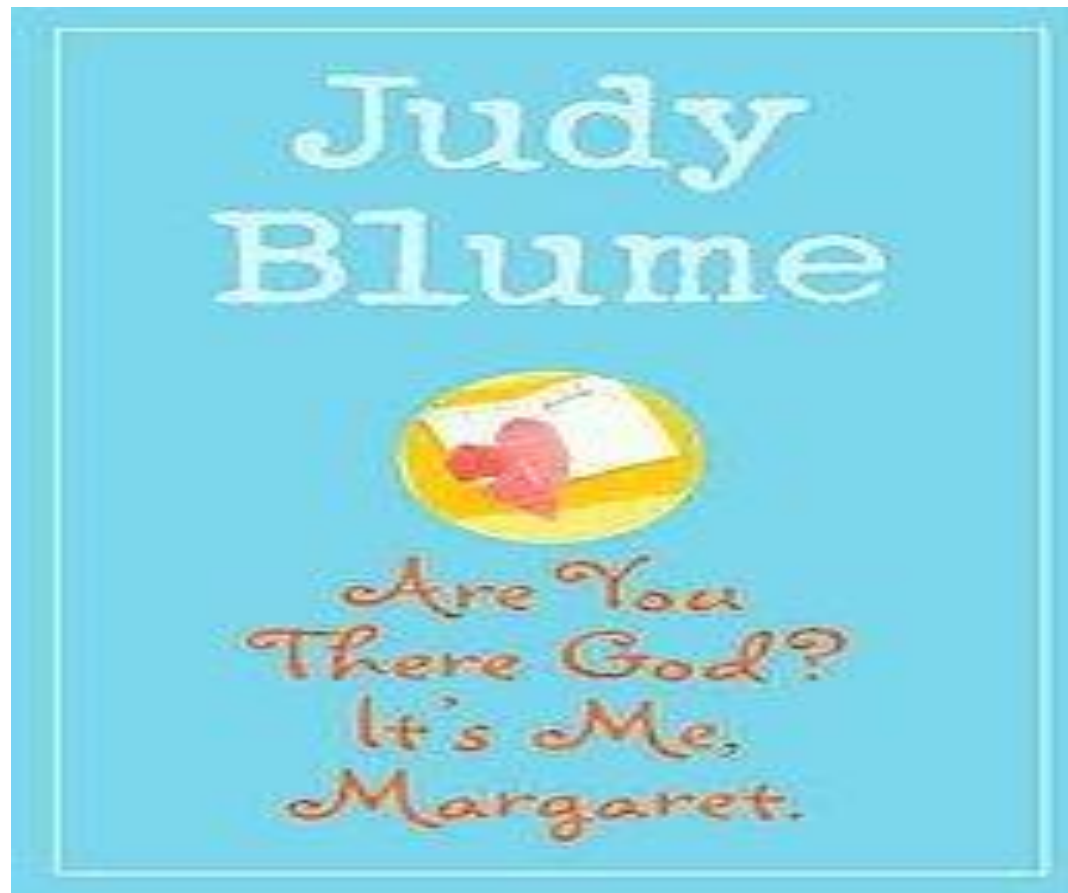
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“PLISSIT”

- A tool we can offer parents!
- Professionals can role model the “permission” and “limited information” aspects with colleagues and clients

We can support parents...

- ... to become the primary sexuality educators of their children.
- ... to consciously decide on the sexual climate they will set in their home.
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“Permission”

- Articulating Family Norms

Assessing family values about

What do we mean by NORMS?

“Adults come to relationships with **expectations** or norms about every aspect of sexuality and sexual behavior and it would be very rare for two people to have exactly the same norms when entering a relationship. Part of building a strong foundation for a relationship includes working to clarify and articulate these expectations, then agreeing on a compromise when differences are discovered.”

Norms about Language

- What words will we use for all body parts
- What words we will use for urination and defecation
- Caution not to refer to the genitals as the 'dirty parts'
- If you choose to go with 'private parts', teach your kids the name for each of the parts

Goal:

parents who can tell kids

- Names for all body parts
- The difference between privacy and secrecy
- It's always O.K. to ask questions
- Sexual arousal is NORMAL
- What behavior is acceptable at home
- What behavior is acceptable outside the home
- That it's always OK to bring ANY concern to them

Quotes to “borrow”

- From a Dad on Glee, whose son was balking at having a sex conversation:
“I’m uncomfortable too, but we’ll both be better men for having this conversation.”
- From a minister and his wife to their 7 year old son after a discussion about sex and reproduction:
“We hope you realize how special this information is. It’s about love and families and that makes it a parents special privilege to tell their kids in their own way. So keep this in our family; you need to let your friends’ parents explain things to them in their family’s way.”

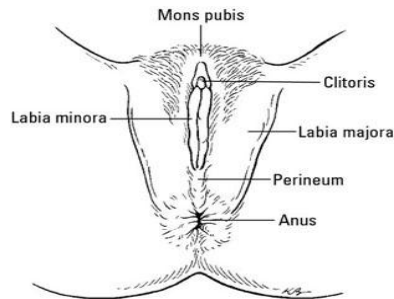
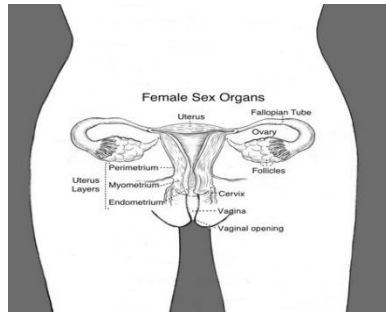
'Limited Information'

- Everything parents should have learned in high school but probably didn't:

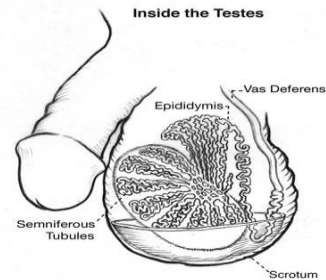
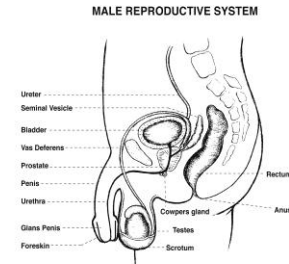
Basic sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology

Anatomy: What parts are where inside and outside

FEMALE



MALE



Physiology: How things work

- Key to this discussion is a clear understanding the sexual response is an autonomic response
- People experience arousal at least from birth
- Pedophiles prey on the fact that they can induce a physically pleasurable sensation in a child to convince them that they were a willing participant in a sexualized act.

Other important topics

- Stages of psychosexual development
- How children acquire language
- Sexual archetypes -- associations and arousal

Thank you!

"Dr. Rosenzweig's work will reduce trauma, save lives, and help families."
—James Hmurovich, president and CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America

THE SEX-WISE PARENT

*The Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Child, Strengthening
Your Family, and Talking to Kids about
Sex, Abuse, and Bullying*



JANET ROSENZWEIG, MS, PHD, MPA

[Dr. Janet Rosenzweig](http://Dr.JanetRosenzweig.com)

www.SexWiseParent.com

Rosenzweig's Rules...

for raising sexually safe and healthy kids

- Never forget that sexual arousal is an autonomic, reflexive response.
- Pavlov taught us that feelings and responses can become 'stuck together' in ways that have no real meaning. Your reaction to your child can cause feelings that become contiguous with sexuality. Be thoughtful and careful to avoid instilling fear, guilt, or shame associated with an autonomic response

- Remember that a parent's job is to provide the tools to alleviate fear and obliterate ignorance, not to add to them.
- Sometimes really good people do really stupid things and bad things can happen in any family. Know your community's resources in case this happens to you or someone you love
- Never forget that young children are developmentally incapable of protecting themselves from a skilled pedophile

- Children will rise—or sink—to your level of expectations, even if you don't articulate them.
- Understand that a criminal background check on someone seeking to work with children is necessary but not at all sufficient
- Keep the lines of communication wide open, including ensuring that your child is comfortable using understandable language about every part of his or her body

- Modern American communities have many more resources in place to respond to a victim than to help prevent victimization. Let's hope you never need the former and learn how to take a stand and change the latter.
- Bear in mind that adolescence is, by definition, a time of contradictions. Sociologists tell us adolescence is now lasting longer than ever before, but it will eventually end. Your goal as a parent is to ensure that when it does, the result of your efforts is a healthy, productive adult who will eventually produce your grandchildren who become adolescents and pay your children back for the way they behaved.

That can't happen without sex. 😊