

*Supporting parents in....*

# Promoting Sexual Safety and Health for Kids

Dr. Janet Rosenzweig

# This seminar made possible by:


- Straight Talk Task Force including members from
  - The Jana Marie Foundation
  - Youth Services Bureau
  - Communities That Care Partnership
- State College Area School District administration, faculty, staff and SUMMIT project.

Special Thanks to:

**Connie Schulz, C.F.L.E.**

Family Outreach Specialist, Student Services  
State College Area School District

# Perspective

- Developmental perspective on individuals & families
- Health and sex educator (with degrees from Penn State!) 
- Sex abuse help-line counselor, therapist and staff trainer
- Public official working in child welfare
- Researcher and author
- Prevention specialist
- Mom!

# What we'll cover

- Techniques to move beyond the discomfort faced by so many adults at the thought of discussing sexual issues with children: We'll cover basic anatomy and physiology in simple terms infused into a discussion of what children can understand at different ages. Parents will be provided with tools they can use at home to help the adults clarify their own family values about sexuality, and tips to help them share that with their children.
- Focus on the community: From the sexual climate in school to the safety of people and places, we'll provide tools and tips to help parents tune in to the external factors influencing their child's sexual safety.

# Defining sexual health and safety

- Physical
- Social
- Emotional

“Sexual Abuse” is not one single phenomena! The acts we seek to prevent range from violent rape to a quick fondle to ‘romantic’ seduction with many steps in between!

Solution is to promote open discussion of your family’s values and to ensure that youth have accurate information about anatomy and physiology.

# Context

- Chilling effect of political and social climate of the 1990's had an unintended consequence:

Abstinence only education:

limited finding 1982; massive infusion, 1996

Surgeon general fired for answering a question about masturbation, 1994

Megan's laws States 1994; Federal 1996

Reliance on offenders registries

Focus on on-line safety

Upsurge in 'stranger danger' prevention strategies

# One Result??

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



# We must support parents to fill that gap!

- Parents consistently underestimate the influence they have on the children's decisions about sex
- Parents generally overestimate the amount of information their children get from health education classes

- Source: Albert, B. (2010). *With One Voice 2010: America's Adults and Teens sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

[http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/wov\\_2010.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/wov_2010.pdf)



# Core beliefs

- Sexuality permeates every aspect of our lives
- People are sexual from the time they are born, if not before
- Parents need to identify and articulate their own family values about sex and sexuality
- Parents need support in learning how to share these values, along with accurate information with their kids
- A healthy environment allows positive feelings to become associated with sexual thoughts and feelings

# Part 1

# The Family

# Group Exercise

- 3 questions with a partner:
  - Where did you get your first sex education?
  - What did you learn?
  - Was it accurate?

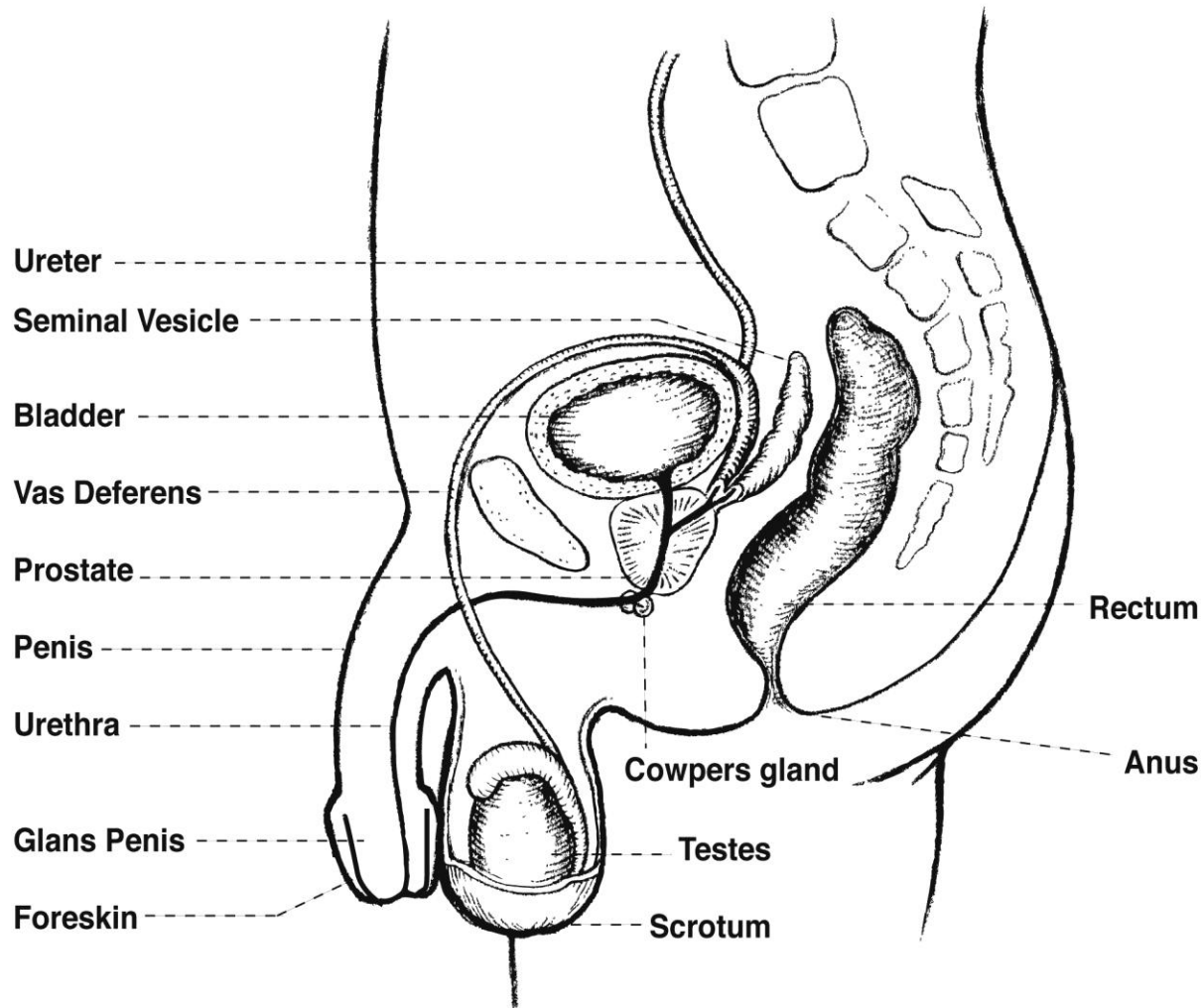
# Recap

- What we learned about sex was most likely related to reproduction
- Kids often remember the affect as well as the content
- There's a lot of misinformation waiting
- If kids only get a partial answer, they fill in the blanks and are usually wrong

# Anatomy and Physiology for Grownups

The next slides  
are anatomical  
line drawings  
of male and female  
sexual and reproductive organs

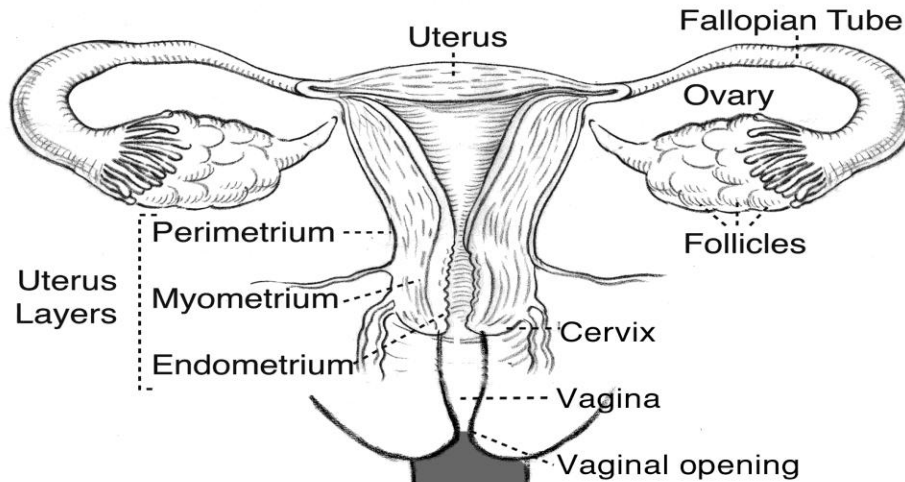
# MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



# Important concepts for kids

- School aged and younger
  - Testicles are located inside of scrotum
  - Scrotum tighten up when they're cold
  - Penis' get big when they feel certain things – like getting goose bumps from being tickled, it happens and it means things are working
- School aged/young adolescent
  - Sperm or Dad's seeds are produced in the testicles and follow the tube around to come out the tip of his penis

## Female Reproductive System





# Homologous Organs

Male	Female
Testes <-----	-----> Ovaries
Penis <-----	-----> Clitoris
Scrotum <-----	-----> Labia Majora
Cowpers Glands <-----	-----> Bartholins Glands

Homologous organs start from the same pre-natal tissue called the gonadal ridge in a developing fetus. If the fetus has a male chromosome, male hormones will be produced starting in the third month of development and the 'gonadal ridge' will develop into the male organs. Without the male hormones, the gonadal ridge will develop into female organs.

# Important concepts for kids

- School aged and younger
  - A baby grows in a Mom's uterus (*using 'belly' can confuse pre-school-ers with digestion*)
  - Girls have one opening to pee (urethra) and one that's connected to the uterus (vagina)
- School aged/young adolescent
  - Eggs are produced in the ovaries
  - The uterus prepares to nourish an egg each month for about 25 - 35 years. In the month there is no sperm meeting the egg, meaning no baby, the material that would have nourished a baby is released through the vagina

# Important concepts for teens

- Arousal is normal, autonomic and private
- Arousal happens to both boys and girls
- Sexual health and safety include preventing STI's and unwanted pregnancy
- Girls and boys developing brains process relationships very differently
- See David Walsh's book "Why do they Act that Way?"

# Dr. Walsh told me....

*"When developing a relationship, adolescent boys and girls are interested in both the relational and physical components, but the balance is completely different. The developing brain of the adolescent male is wired to emphasize the physical side, with the interpersonal relationship secondary. Girls brains are wired to emphasize the interpersonal relationship, with the physical relationship secondary."*

# Physiology

- 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.

# Who's going to explain this to the kids?

## Parents!

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# Great summary.....

## AROUSAL $\neq$ LOVE

**W**hen talking about sex, parents usually focus on the reproductive process and physical changes that occur during puberty, often skipping over the subject of autonomic sexual arousal.


- “Adolescent boys aren’t raised to understand that getting erections is autonomic. It is not something they can control,” says Rosenzweig. “And they may end up feeling bad and guilty, ashamed and like they’re malfunctioning, when their body is doing what human bodies do.”

- Girls may also misinterpret their body’s sexual response.

“Their genitals get all warm, and no one’s taught them that it doesn’t mean anything more than getting goose bumps when you feel a cold breeze. And they mistake warm genitals for being madly in love with the cute 32-year-old chemistry teacher,” he says.

- When kids understand and anticipate their body’s natural responses, they may make more clear-headed decisions, especially as they begin to develop romantic relationships.

- “Healthy human beings cannot control their reflexive arousal in response to a sight, sound, smell, or memory,” says Rosenzweig. “But one lesson kids need to learn is that they certainly can and must be responsible for what they do with it.”

And that’s a lesson every parent can teach. 

Interview with Dr. Janet Rosenzweig, author of the Sex-Wise Parent, MASK Magazine, Summer 2013. [www.Maskmatters.org](http://www.Maskmatters.org)

# Quotes to 'borrow'

- From a Dad on TV show Glee, whose son was trying to get out of having a sex conversation

*"I'm uncomfortable too, but we'll both be better men for having this conversation."*

- From 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."*



# The Golden Rule!

An absolutely critical lesson to teach our children is that **their behavior has an effect on others**. They won't really be able to grasp this until they're well into toddlerhood, but parents must start this lesson early and maintain it throughout a child's upbringing.

Many experts believe that **empathy** is the most important protective factor to keep a child from becoming an aggressor such as a bully or someone who chooses to use another person to relieve their sexual arousal or curiosity.

# Assessing your 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 be 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

# Language

- Sexual safety and health is enhanced when we raise kids with an appropriate level of language about each of their body parts, having integrated the values of their family which can transform as the child develops and the family dynamics change.

# Norms about dress

- Be very clear about who sees whom in underwear (or less); this becomes a particularly important question in two circumstances—
  - when a child approaches puberty and
  - when new members are entering the household, such as the blending of families.

It's not uncommon for both of these things to happen around the same time.

# Norms about privacy

- Bathroom and bedroom doors opened or closed?
- How will we handle visitors used to different rules?  
How will we handle visiting homes with different rules?
  - *Friends and family willing to host your kids for an overnight visit are a GIFT, but make sure you know their norms and discuss them with your kids*



# Before we leave families -- A word about siblings

- Older siblings are an important source of information about the 'facts' of sex and the family values.
  - Some parents engage an older child as a partner in sharing information with the younger ones
- Older siblings can also be terrifying bullies
  - **When kids fight (which is normal) determine if the younger/smaller one is mad or terrified.**
  - One widely cited study found 13% of a college population reported sibling incest. <sup>(1)</sup>
  - Adolescents between the ages of @ 12 and 15 appear to be the highest risk for impulse-driven sexual acts with younger kids <sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Finkelhor. "Sex Among Siblings: A survey on prevalence, variety and effects." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (9), 1980: 171-194.

(2) Maia Christopher, Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) <http://www.safetocompete.org/Watch> NCMEC conference



# Part 2: The Community

# Link to bullying

- Sex abuse is bullying taken to a grotesque extreme.
- The perpetrator cares only for their own satisfaction with absolutely no regard for the impact their behavior has on others.
- Bullying prevention programs, when done well are an important component to community sexual health and safety.

# Children and Youth Serving Agencies

- Pre-employment evaluation:
  - Background checks necessary but not sufficient
  - Uninterrupted work history critical
  - Check 4 – 6 personal and professional references
  - This applies to all staff (e.g custodial, kitchen) who have access to kids

**AGENCIES TAKE SHORT CUTS IN  
CHECKING REFERENCES!!**

# Youth serving agencies.....

- Check policies for who can access building and grounds.
- Check policies for allowing children to move unsupervised through the building and grounds.
- Parents should be able to visit at any time, being required to check in at a central location.
- Trend towards on-site web cams gives a false sense of security .

# Youth serving agencies.....

- For little kids who still nap, learn their policy for 'hand in the pants'. Ideally, child should be left alone.
- For programs where kids change clothes, particularly to swim, learn the policies for the locker room.
- Teen staff can be great, but they need pre-service training and supervision; their ability to make good judgments is not fully developed!

# What is sexual climate?

*Based on research on education:*

- School culture is the written set of rules and policies.
- School climate is how it actually FEELS to be in a school building.
- School climate has been shown to be related to academic achievement, incidents of violence and other important.

# Difficult to grasp

- Most of us have spent time in very few schools, the one we went to and the one our child attends
- It can be difficult to realize exactly how much the climate in a school building can vary!
- Here's some questions to start the discussion

# Sexual Climate in Schools

- **Is the school's physical environment welcoming and conducive to learning?**
- **What are the school's policies and track record around bullying and sexual harassment?**
- **What is the school's policy and track record regarding teacher-student contact?**
- **Are administrators consistently visible on campus?**
- **What is the policy on dress code and how is it enforced?**
- **How are sexuality related issues handled in the classroom?**



# Prevention initiatives

- Are best delivered in a healthy sexual climate
- Are best delivered as part of an on-going process
- “dosage matters --- one shot assemblies have little or no long term effect”

quote from Evaluator, CDC&P, EMPOWER Rape Prevention Education Project

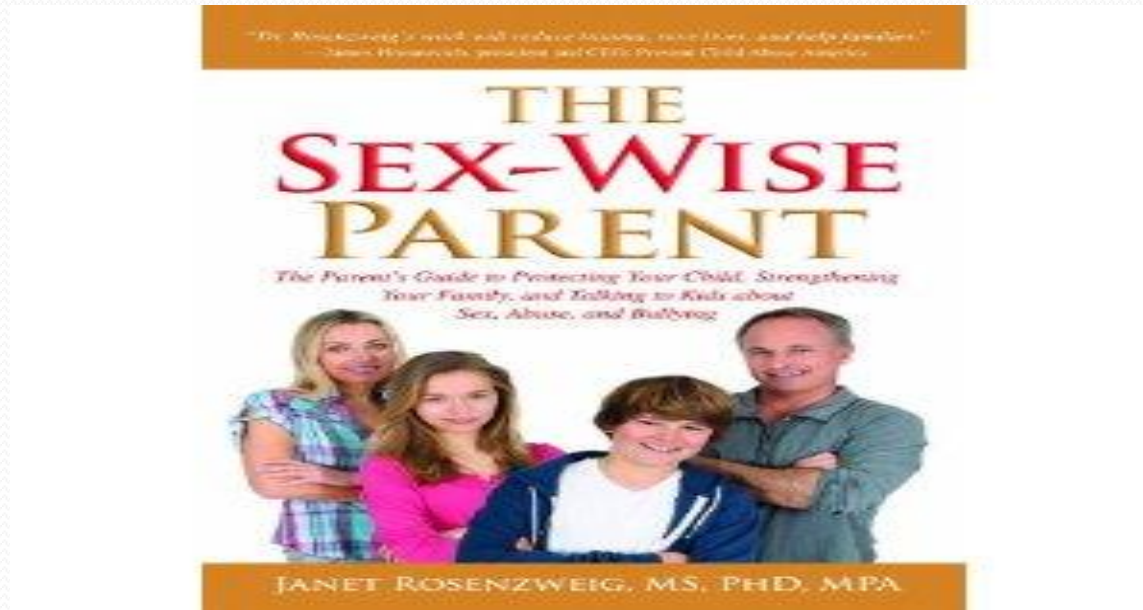
# Important Issues in Prevention

- Do prevention programs move beyond targeting children to involve the entire community?
- Do your educational, faith-based or other community institutions offer support for parents to become both skilled and comfortable speaking with their children about sexuality?

# Closing thoughts for parents

- YOU are the community – help set and keep norms that promote sexual health and safety.
- You have more influence on your child's values about sexuality than you think.
- Keep talking even when they seem to stop listening
- Have a families values update annually – make it a valentines day tradition!

# Thank you!



**Dr. Janet Rosenzweig, Author, The Sex Wise Parent**

**Please "like" [Facebook.com/SexWiseParent](https://www.facebook.com/SexWiseParent)**

**National Consultant for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs,**

**Prevent Child Abuse America**

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

# THE SEX-WISE PARENT

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