

The Sex-Wise Parent presents

Dr. Rosenzweig's Rules for

Parents to Raise Sexually Safe and Healthy Children

- 1) Never forget that sexual arousal is an autonomic, reflexive response. Healthy human beings cannot control their reflexive arousal in response to a sight, sound, smell, or memory but they certainly can and must be responsible for what they do with it.
- 2) Learn Pavlov's lesson; the good doctor and his dogs have a valuable message for us. When Dr. Pavlov's canine experimental subjects completed a task correctly, a bell rang and they were rewarded with food. Soon, they began salivating at the sound of a bell with no food in sight. The sound of a bell became *contiguous*, or "stuck together," with eating. 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 (see Rule #1).
- 3) Remember that a parent's job is to provide the tools to alleviate fear and obliterate ignorance, not to add to them. Everyone has fears and questions about his or her sexuality at some point. Your pediatrician, other professionals, and books like Sex Wise Parent are great tools.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Never forget that young children are developmentally incapable of protecting themselves from a skilled pedophile. Even the best classroom-based prevention programs in the world are useless unless adults in the community recognize the dynamics of sexual abuse of children in general and pedophiles in particular.
- 6) Children will rise—or sink—to your level of expectations, even if you don't articulate them.
- 7) Understand that a criminal background check on someone seeking to work with children is necessary but not at all sufficient to ensure that the prospective person is a safe caretaker for your children.
- 8) 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. Kids without sexual language are much more attractive to pedophiles, who traffic in shame and secrecy.
- 9) 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.
- 10) 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 sexual health.

