



# No More Birds and Bees: Talking to Teens and Young Adults about Body Safety and Healthy

## Relationships

Ages 11 – 21 years



Dr. M. Colleen McDaniel, LAWS Violence Prevention Specialist

Questions? Contact us: 703-771-4265 | [colleen.mcdaniel@lcsj.org](mailto:colleen.mcdaniel@lcsj.org)

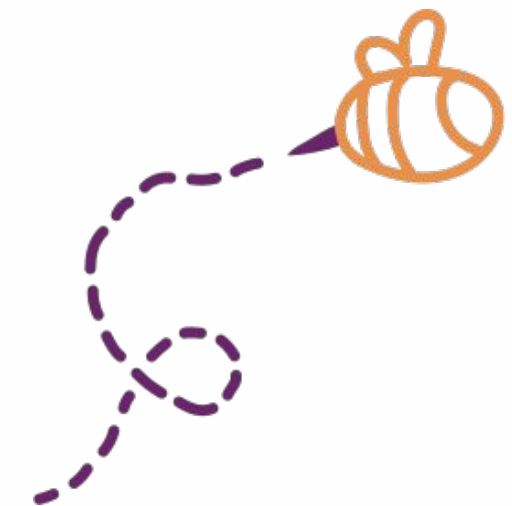


# **M. Colleen McDaniel, Ph.D.**

Violence Prevention Specialist at LAWS

# **Emily Gruessing**

Junior, Rockridge High School





# Why does it matter?

- Victimization in childhood is common (Vagi et al., 2015)
  - Childhood Sexual Abuse: 1 in 10 before age 18
  - Teen Dating Violence: 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 8 boys
- Risk of violence later in life (Foshee, et al., 2012)
- Starting earlier makes conversations easier later!
- Resources are great, prevention is better!





## **Myth:**

This topic is inappropriate for my teen.

## **Fact:**

There are developmentally appropriate ways to teach your teen tools that they will use in relationships.

(Foshee, 2021; Pop & Rusu, 2015)



## Myth:

My teen doesn't want to hear this from me.

## Fact:

Adolescents who receive education from their parents about sexual abuse are less likely to experience it.

Teens who did experience it also showed reduced  
shame, stigma, and self-blame.

(Manyike et al., 2015)





## **Myth:**

I'm not an expert, I don't know what to say.

## **Fact:**

You're can be an expert on your own child. It's ok to say, "I don't know" and come back to the conversation later.

You have resources for learning more!



## **Myth:**

The schools teach them, isn't that enough?

## **Fact:**

Decades of research suggests that parent/caregiver involvement is crucial for preventing risk behaviors.

(Bauman et al., 2002; Kumpfer et al., 2003; Velleman et al., 2005).





## **Myth:**

My teenager isn't dating or having sex, so this doesn't apply to them.

## **Fact:**

Sexual health is a part of our health from birth. Adulthood is too late to learn about relationships and sexuality because at that point we have to do unlearning. Starting young can help teens learn about having healthy relationships gradually before the risk of violence. (Pop & Russo, 2015; World Health Organization, 2010)







# Agenda

- What knowledge and skills does my teen/young adult need?
- How can I teach these skills?
- Practicing teachable moments



# What skills does my teen need?

- Social-emotional intelligence



# Brain Development in Teens

- Cognitive ability to use hypothetical reasoning
- **Egocentrism** = Noticing others' flaws leads to awareness and self consciousness about their own flaws (Elkin, 1967; 1978)
  - **Imaginary audience** = feeling that everyone is watching (Galanaki, 2012)
  - **Personal fable** = their own experiences are unique
- Frontal lobe development ("thinking center" or brain) leads to the "risky behavior storm" (Alberts, Elkind, & Ginsberg, 2007)



# Social-Emotional Intelligence

- **Emotional regulation:** why, when, and how they experience emotions (Lougheed & Hollenstein, 2012; Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003)
- **Self-awareness:** recognizing emotions, what they care about, how they view themselves (Gallagher, Hudepohl, & Parrott, 2010).
- **Self-esteem:** How we value or perceive ourselves (Schuster, Tomaszewska, & Krahé, 2022)



# Five steps for Emotion Regulation

(Kehoe, Havighurst, & Harley, 2020)

- Notice and identify the emotion.
- Name and connect the emotion.
- Pause and say nothing.
- Support your teen while they calm down.
- Address the issue.

Note: Try your best to stay calm and avoid being reactive.

# Practice

You pick up your teen from an after school activity (like rehearsal for the school play or practice for a sport). They express to you that they aren't sure if they want to continue with the activity, but you let them know that it is important they stick to their commitments.

Upon hearing your response, they become overwhelmed by (a) raising their voice, (b) crying, or (c) completely shutting down. How would you respond to each of these reactions or responses?

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# What skills does my teen need?

- Social-emotional intelligence
- Boundary-setting and respecting





# Boundary Setting and Respecting

“Boundaries are about **understanding** and **respecting** our **own needs**, and being respectful and understanding of **the needs of others**,” (Dowd, 2021 as cited in Jacobson, 2021)

**\*\* Boundaries are not rules for others**

- Helps teens learn how to advocate for themselves
- Teaches healthy communication skills
- Teaches teens how to treat others with kindness and dignity







# Ways to Practice Boundaries

- Talk to them about how to set boundaries in their relationships.
  - Respect your teen's privacy.
  - Set boundaries around communication with each other.
- Practice with siblings or close family/friends.
  - Help them identify and label peer pressure or norms among their friends.
  - Ask them how they feel about norms at their school or in media.
- Remind them that if someone does not respect their boundaries, they may not be a safe person.





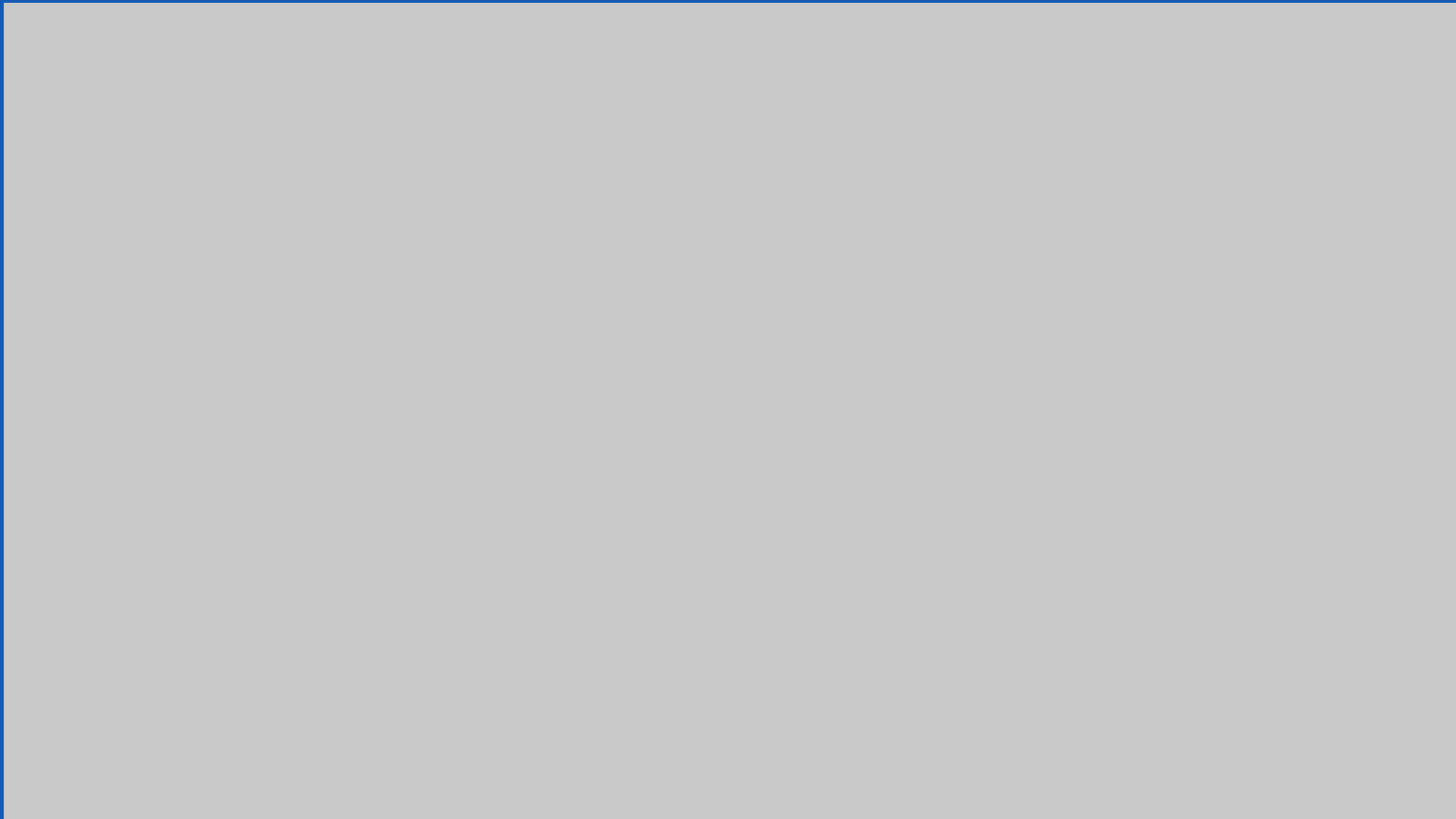
# What skills does my teen need?

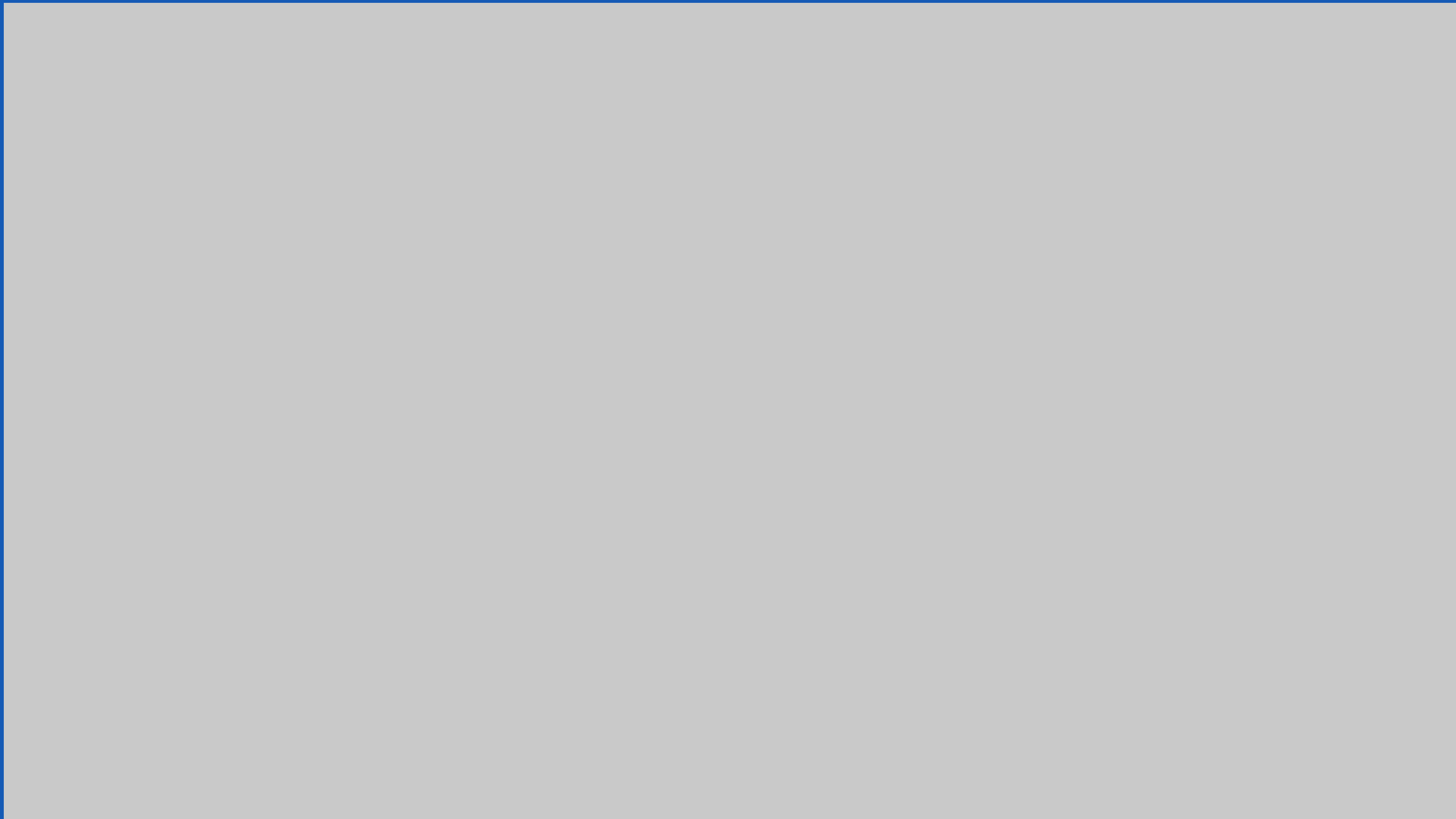
- Social-emotional intelligence
- Boundary-setting and respecting
- Healthy sexuality



# Healthy Sexuality: Gender Norms

- Conformity to **traditional masculine norms** leads to an increased likelihood of committing sexual assault.
- Traditional **sexual scripts** teach girls to be gatekeepers of sex and boys to be initiators of sex.
- Boys incorrectly believe that their friends approve of **sexist attitudes** more than their friends actually do.









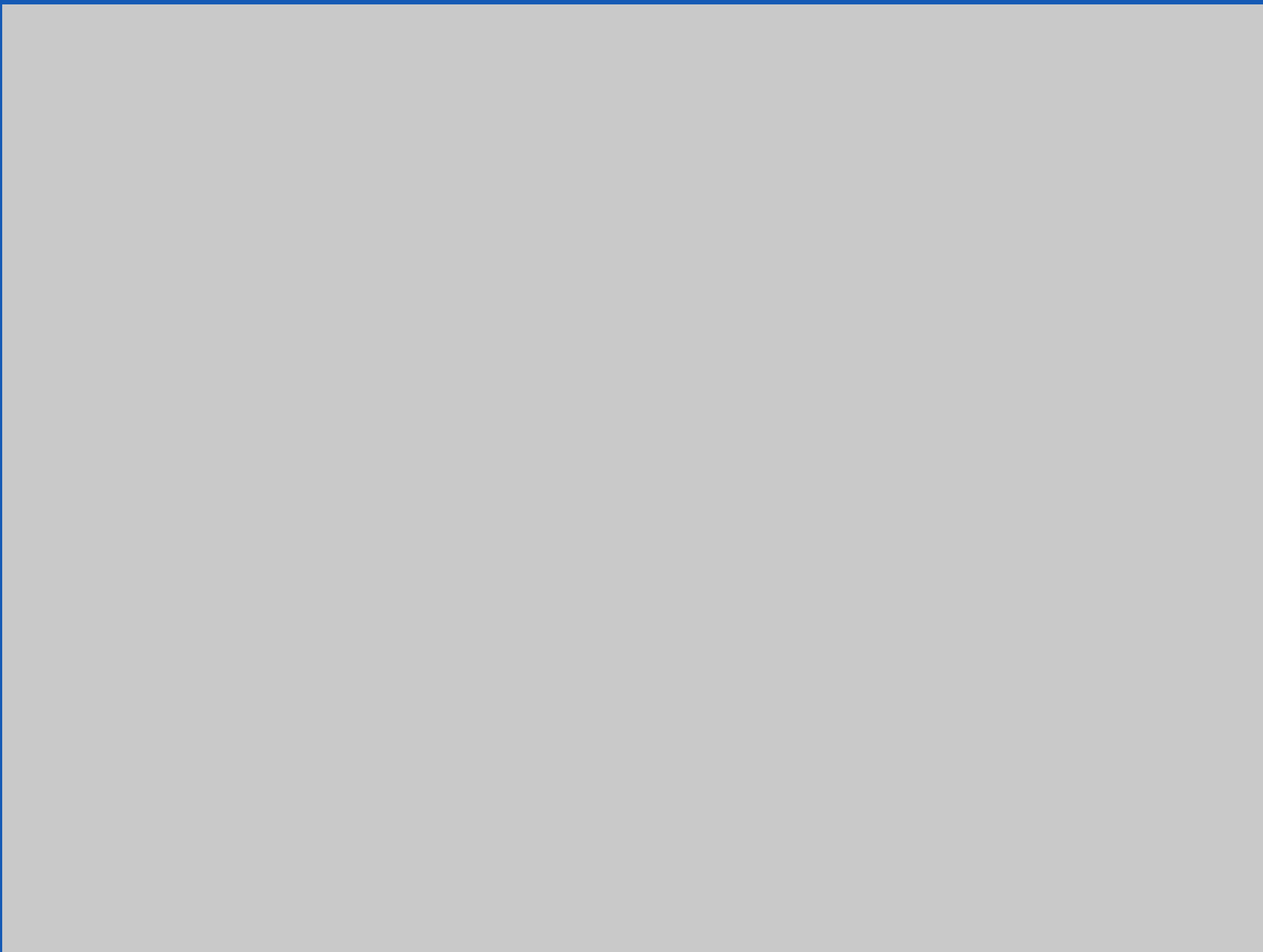
**How would you start the conversation?**



# Healthy Sexuality: Pleasure & Willingness

- Be direct about why clearly stating and respecting others' "Yes" and "No" is important.
- Sex and relationships involve complicated decisions. Help them weigh the pros and cons.
- Normalize teens' feelings about sexuality.
  - Most teens are not having sexual intercourse (only about 38%; National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019)









# Healthy Sexuality: Alcohol

- **50% of all sexual assaults** involve alcohol.

(Abbey et al., 2001;1998; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Abbey et al., 1996)

- Boys/men who commit abuse may use **drunkenness as an excuse** for their behavior—but alcohol lowers inhibitions, it doesn't change personality.  
(Abbey, 2002)

- Boys/men who commit sexual assault incorrectly believe that alcohol increases libido and tend to feel **high hostility** towards girls/women.  
(Abbey, 2022; Abbey et al., 2001)



# How else can I teach these skills?



# Skip "The Talk"

Identify teachable moments.

- Model the behavior yourself.
- Ask their thoughts.
- Listen without judgement or assumptions.
- Make the conversation ongoing = check in.
- Answer questions as they come up.





# Tips for talking with teens

- Answer simply and honestly.
- Rely on resources (like LAWS).
- Be aware of your own reactions.
- Avoid using harmful gender stereotypes.





# Communication Blockers (Foshee, 2021)

- Giving too much advice and lecturing
- Acting like you know all the answers
- Forcing your opinions on the other person
- Being critical, judgmental, or sarcastic
- Putting down the other person's opinions, preferences, choices, and feelings
- Using body language that suggests you're not interested in what the other person has to say



# Practicing Myth Busting

- Name behaviors/modeling for busting this myth.
- How would you start a conversation about it?

## Right side:

- If someone dresses in tight clothing for a date, it means that they want to have sex.
- Someone who talks about sex a lot is having sex.
- When someone goes into a bedroom alone with another person, it means they want to have sex.

## Left side:

- Boys always want to have sex, so they can't really be sexually abused or raped by a dating partner.
- When someone freezes or is very still, it means they want to have sex and are okay with their partner proceeding.
- If someone's had sex with a previous dating partner, they definitely want to have sex with their current dating partner.





# Media Suggestions to Start Conversations



## Big Mouth (2017-), Netflix

"Teenage friends find their lives upended by the wonders and horrors of puberty in this edgy comedy from real-life pals Nick Kroll and Andrew Goldberg."

Rated 17+, raunchy humor but comprehensive;  
and can be lewd/offensive



## Never Have I Ever (2020-), Netflix

"The story centers around Devi Vishwakumar (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan), a 15-year-old girl from Sherman Oaks, California. After a trauma occurs in her freshman year, Devi wants to change her social status, but friends, family, and feelings do not make it easy for her."



## Heartstopper (2022-), Netflix

Teens Charlie and Nick discover their unlikely friendship might be something more as they navigate school and young love in this coming-of-age series.



**HELP US LEARN ABOUT OUR IMPACT BY  
ANSWERING JUST A FEW QUESTIONS!  
IT SHOULD ONLY TAKE ABOUT 3 MINUTES!**

