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No More Birds & Bees: Talking to Teens & Young Adults About Healthy Relationships & Body Safety



Katherine Parker, MSW — LAWS Violence Prevention Specialist



Why Is It Important?

- Victimization in childhood is common
 - Childhood Sexual Abuse: **1 in 10**
 - Teen Dating Violence: **1 in 4 girls & 1 in 8 boys**
- Starting earlier makes conversations easier later
- Primary Prevention: Stopping violence before it happens!



Myth:

These topics are inappropriate for my teen.

Fact:

There are developmentally appropriate ways to teach your teen tools that they can use while navigating relationships.



Myth:

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

Fact:

Teens whose parents have conversations with them show reduced shame, stigma, & self-blame, and feelings of embarrassment around sex and relationships.



Myth:

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

Fact:

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

You have resources for learning more!



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. Starting young can help teens learn about having healthy relationships gradually before the risk of violence.

If you're not having these conversations, they will learn elsewhere!



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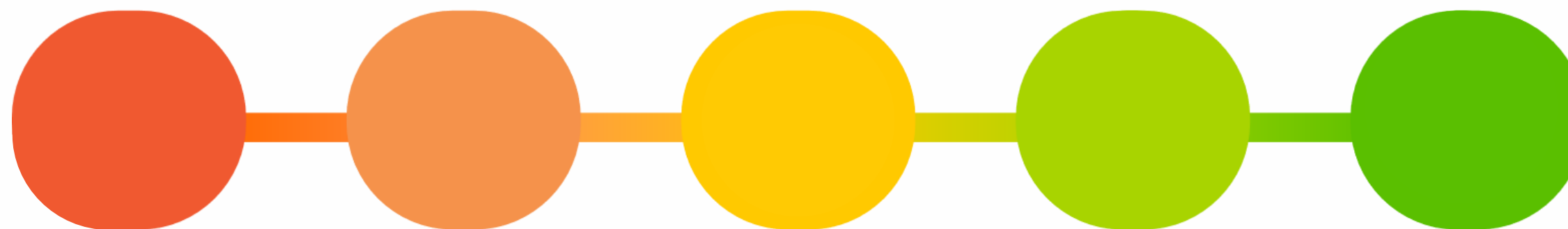
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SEXUAL VIOLENCE & INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



Relationship Spectrum



Abusive

- Accusations
- Blame shifting
- Isolation / Pressure
- Manipulation
- Control

Unhealthy

- Pressure
- Breaks in communication
- Dishonesty
- Struggles for control
- Inconsiderate behavior

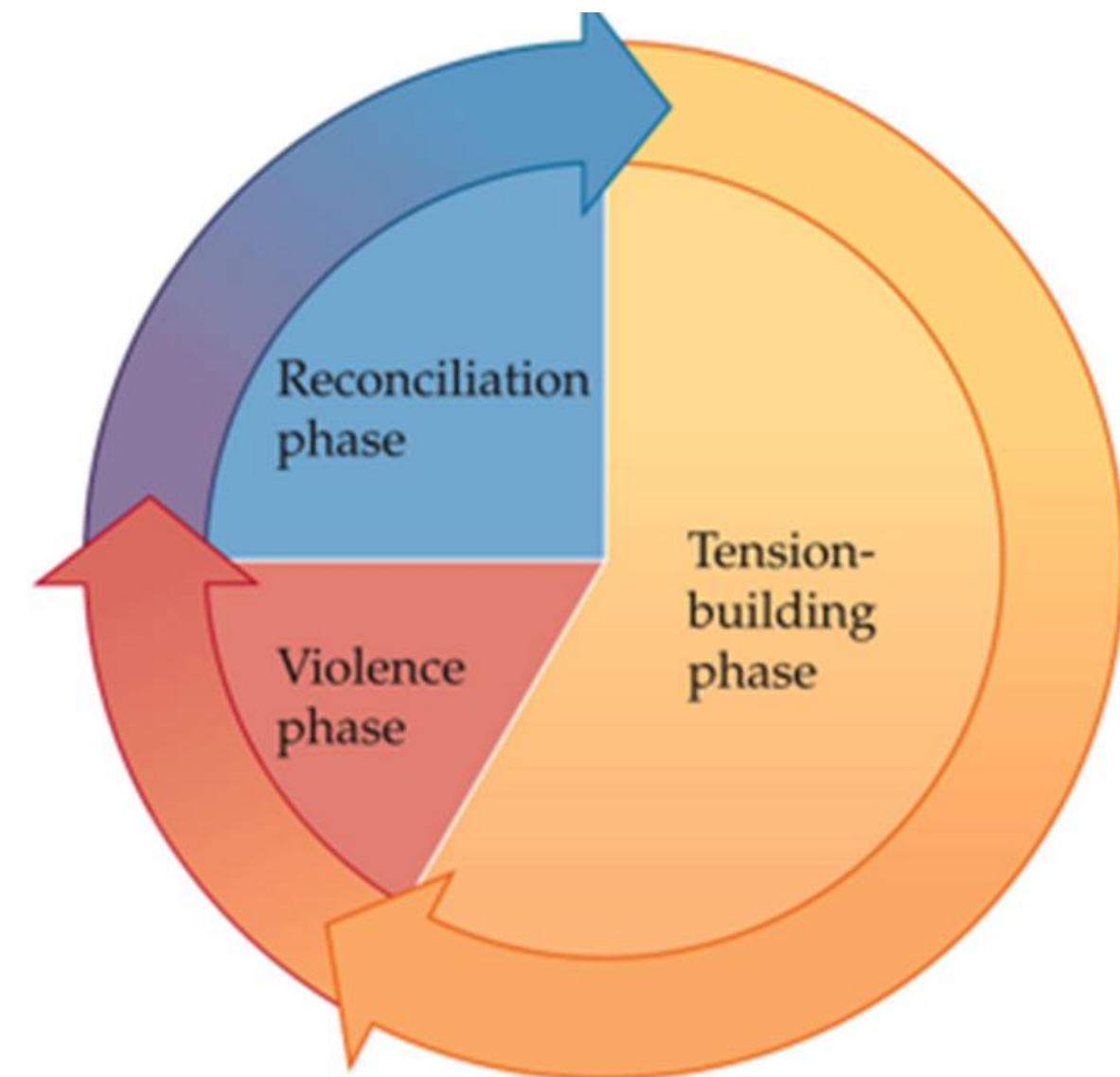
Healthy

- Respect
- Good communication
- Trust
- Honesty
- Equality



Intimate Partner Violence

Willful intimidation, physical assault/battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviors as part of a systematic pattern of power & control perpetrated by one intimate partner* against the other





Escalation of Violence

Extreme Actions

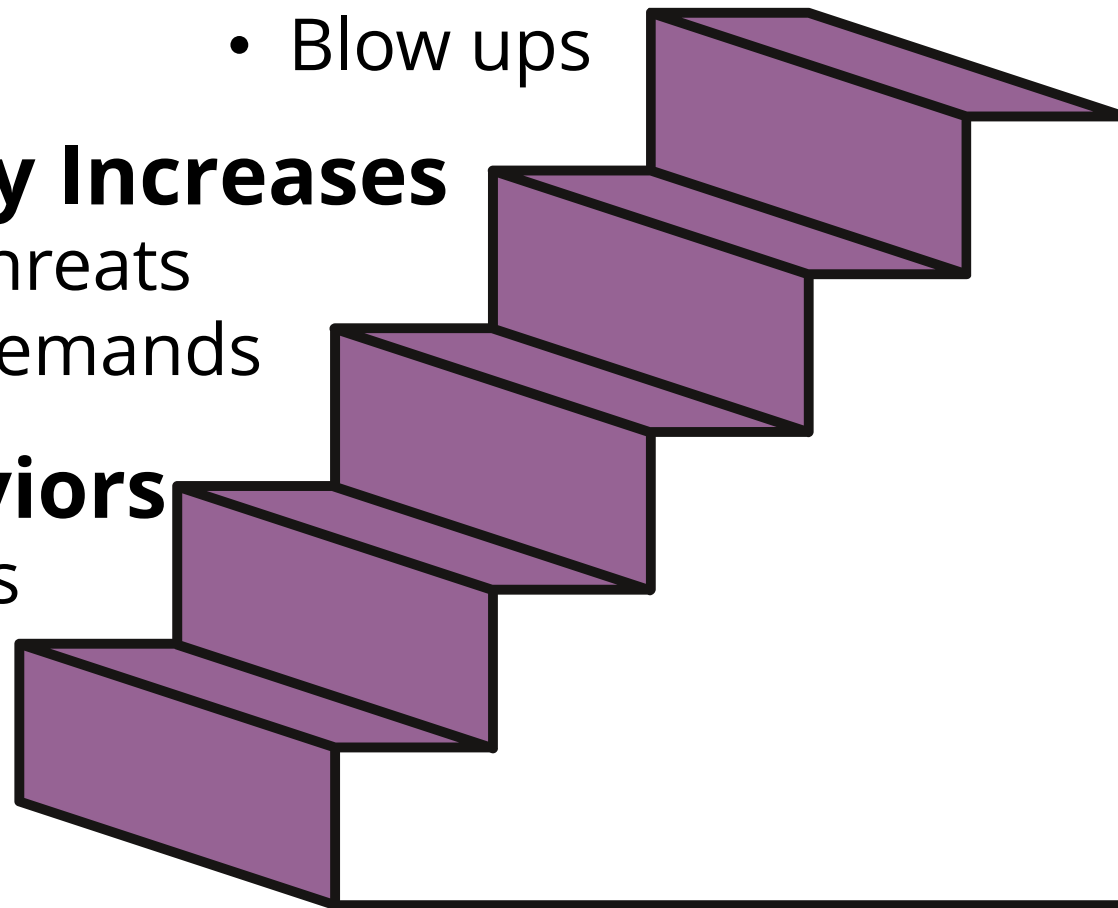
- Violation
- Blow ups

Intensity Increases

- Threats
- Demands

Subtle Behaviors

- Minor insults
- Requests



**Relationships that become
abusive don't start out with
violence. They escalate.**



Sexual Violence

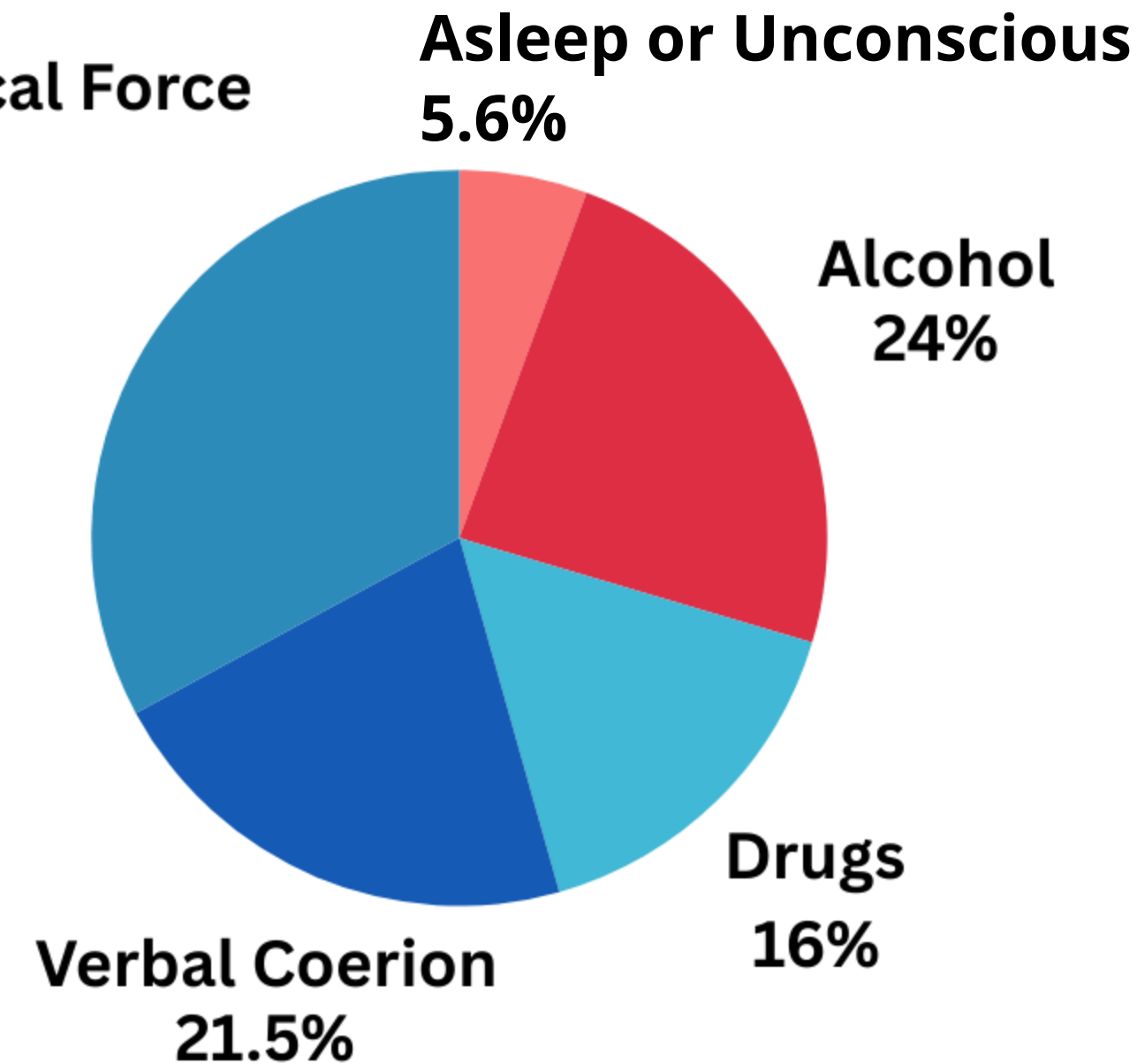
Sexual Assault: Attempted or completed unwanted sexual contact or bodily penetration

- Achieved using aggression tactics, i.e. verbal coercion, drugs, alcohol, physical force, etc.

Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, & other verbal/physical harassment of a sexual nature

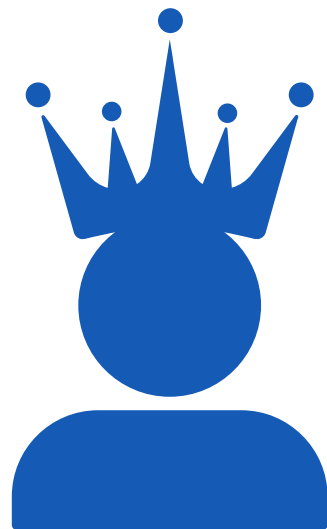
- Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature

**Threaten or Use Physical Force
32.9%**



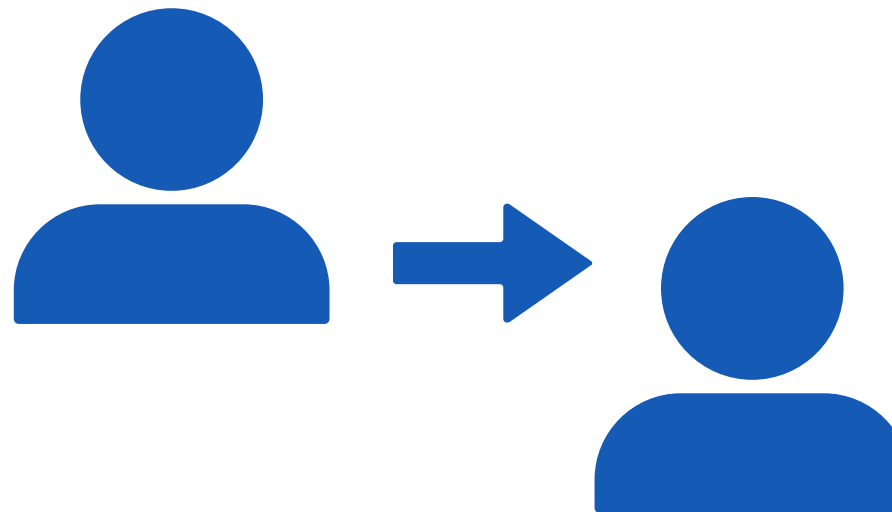


Reasons for Perpetration



Power

To assert one's societal or personal power



Dominance

To position oneself over another person



Control

To control another person or situation



WHAT KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS DOES MY TEEN NEED?



What Skills Does My Teen Need?

- **Emotional Awareness**





The Teenage Brain

- Ability to use hypothetical reasoning
- Noticing others' flaws — leads to awareness & self-consciousness about their own flaws
 - **Imaginary audience:** Feeling that everyone is watching
 - **Personal Fable:** Their own experiences are unique





Emotional Awareness

- **Emotional Regulation:** Why, when, & how they experience emotions
- **Self-Awareness:** Recognizing emotions, what they care about, & how they view themselves
- **Self-Esteem:** How we value or perceive ourselves





5 Steps for Emotion Regulation

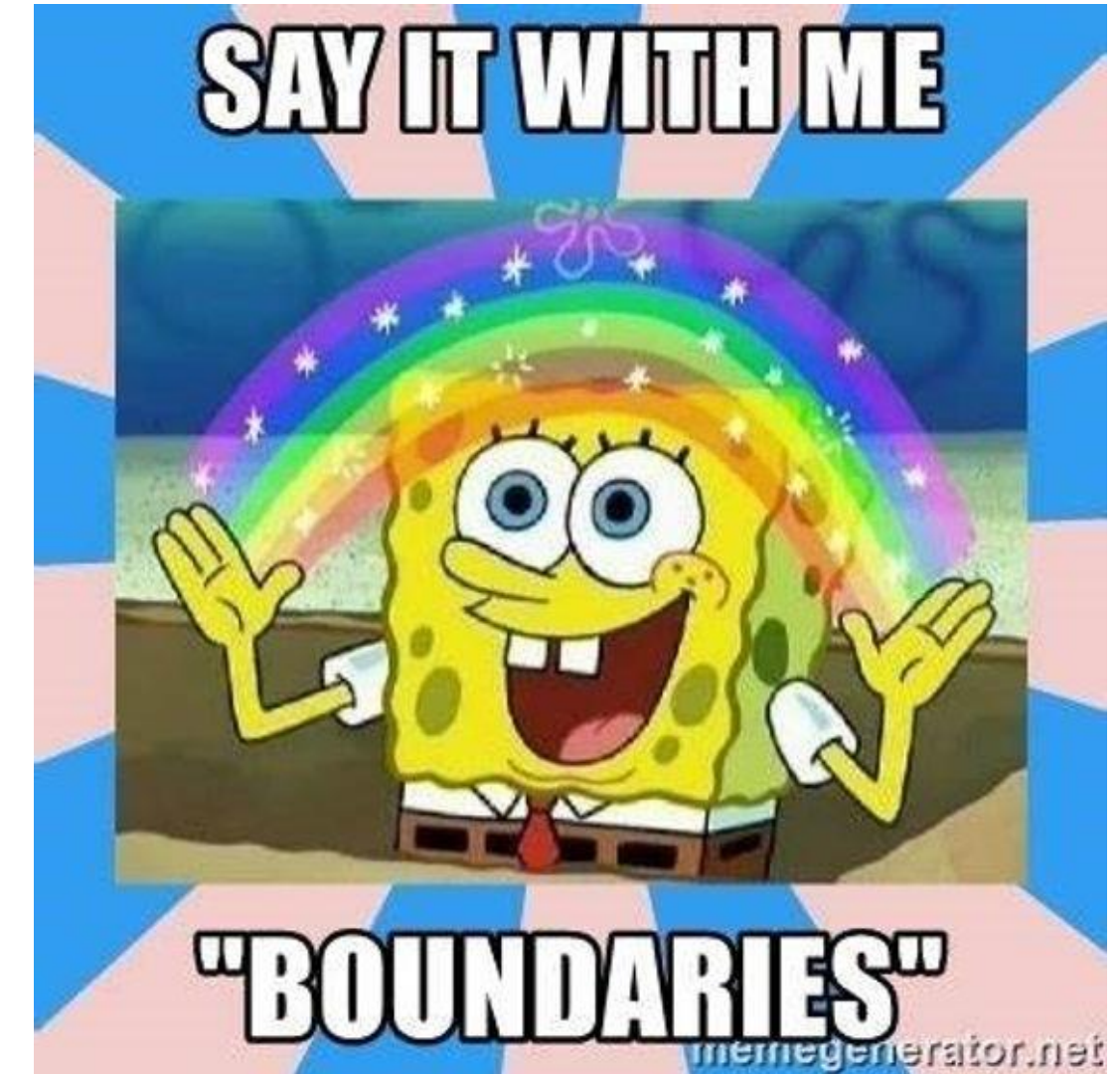
1. Notice & identify the emotion
2. Name & connect the emotion
3. Pause & say nothing
4. Support your teen while they calm down
5. Address the issue

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



What Skills Does My Teen Need?

- Emotional Awareness
- **Boundary-Setting**





Boundary-Setting

*Boundaries are about **understanding & respecting our own needs**, &
being understanding & respectful of **the needs of others***

Boundaries are not rules for others

- Help teens learn how to advocate for themselves
- A part of healthy communication skills
- Teach teens how to treat others with kindness and dignity



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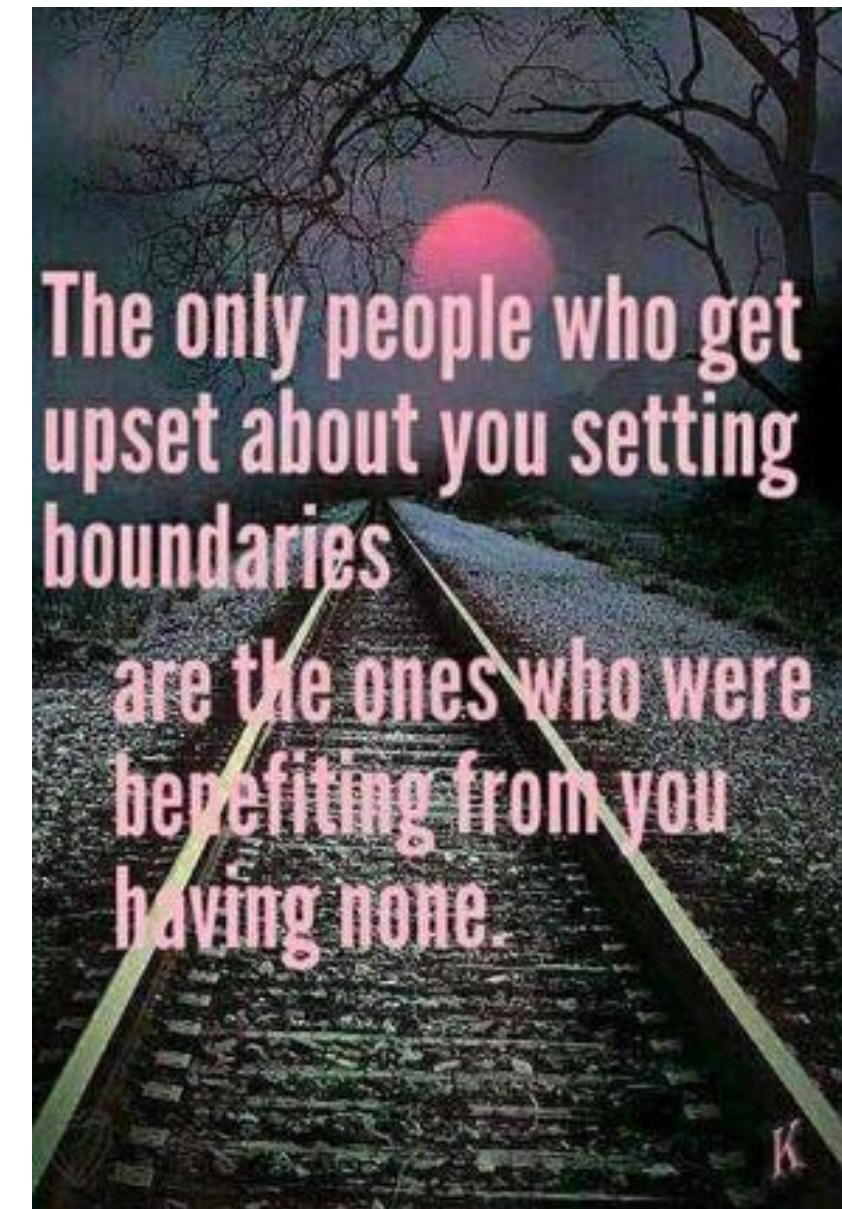
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Boundary-Setting

- **Talk about how to set boundaries in relationships**
 - Respect each other's privacy
 - Set boundaries around communication with each other
- **Practice with siblings or close family/friends**
 - No judgment, don't force advice- listen & ask questions!

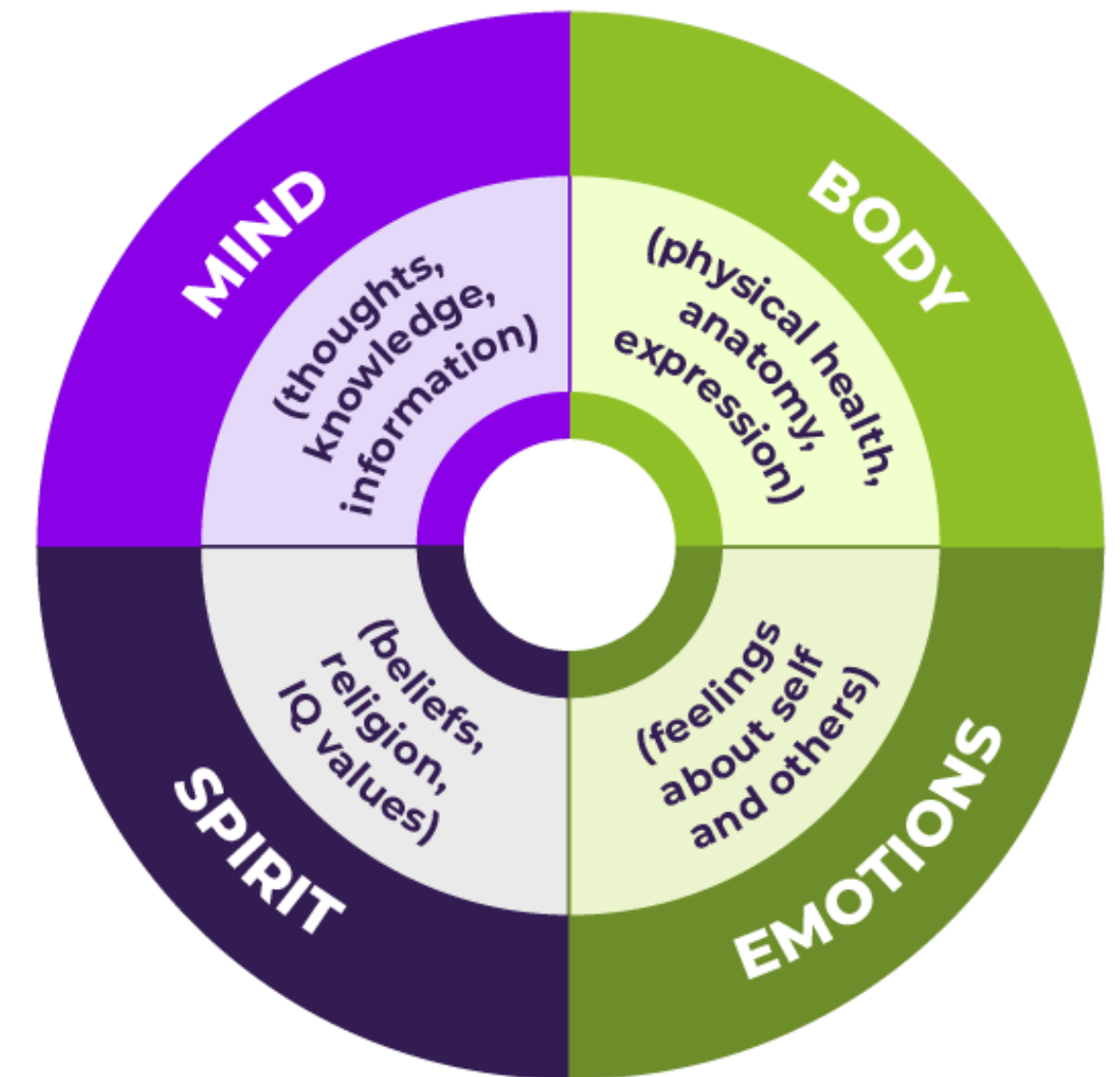
**Remember: If someone doesn't respect your boundaries,
they may not be a safe person**





What Skills Does My Teen Need?

- Emotional Awareness
- Boundary-Setting
- **Healthy Sexuality**



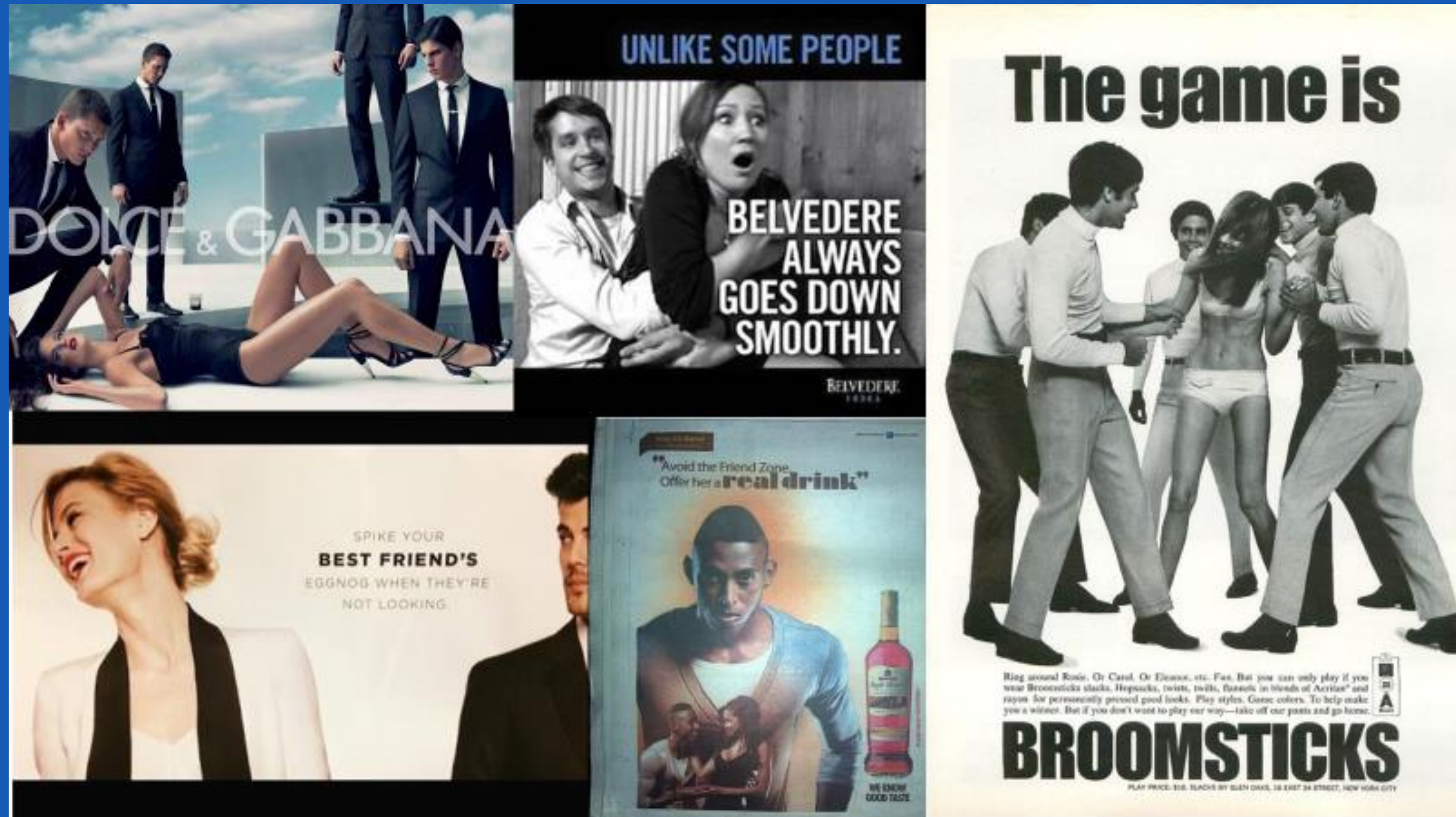


Healthy Sexuality: Gender Norms

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

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ptHMxo?si=2nbnKt_H4jJCVu0g](https://youtu.be/hc45-ptHMxo?si=2nbnKt_H4jJCVu0g)

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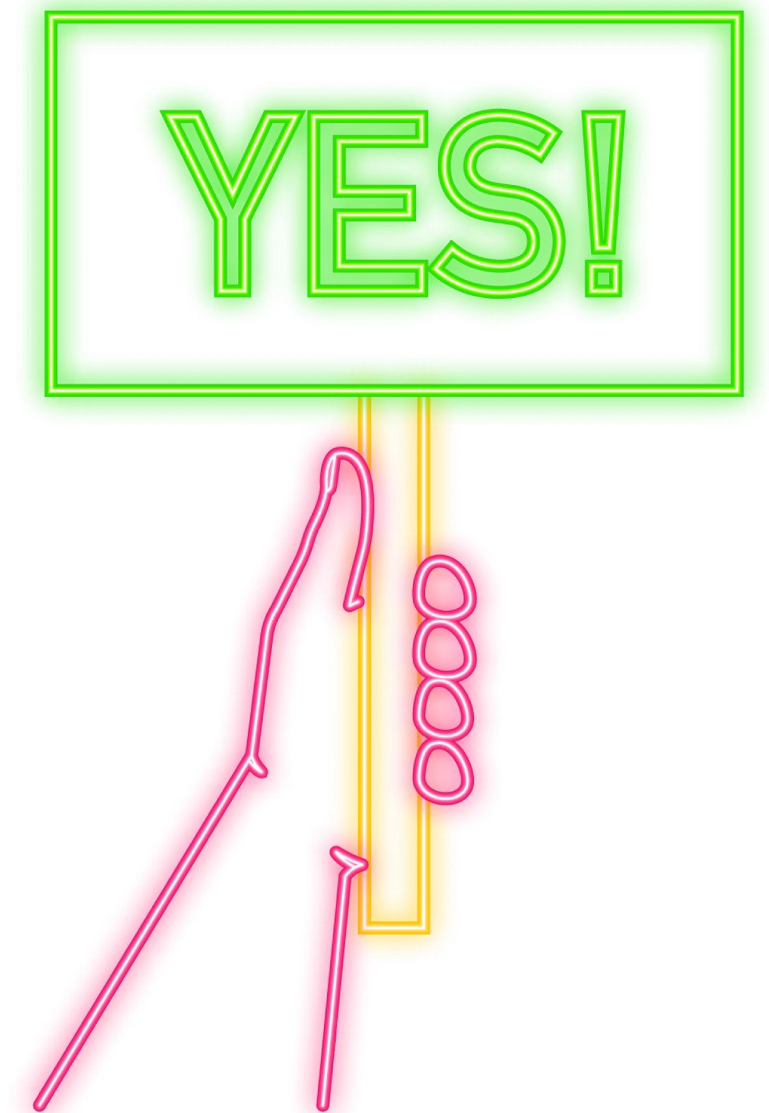


How would you start the conversation?



Healthy Sexuality: Pleasure & Willingness

- **Be direct about the importance of clearly stating & respecting others' "Yes" & "No"**
- **Sex & relationships involve complicated decisions — weigh the pros & cons together**
- **Normalize teens' feelings about sexuality**
 - Most teens are not having sex (only about 38%)







Healthy Sexuality: Alcohol

- **50% of all sexual assaults** involve alcohol
- Boys/men who commit abuse may use **drunkenness as an excuse** for their behavior — alcohol lowers inhibitions, it doesn't change personality
- Boys/men who commit sexual assault incorrectly believe that alcohol increases libido & tend to feel **high hostility** towards girls/women



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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 Your Kids About Sex & Relationships

- 1. Be prepared**
- 2. Relax & answer simply & honestly**
- 3. Start now**
- 4. Listen to your child**
- 5. Talk about relationships & sex again and again... and again**
- 6. Use the Facts + Values Formula**





Tips for Talking with Your Parents About Sex & Relationships

- 1. Ask about them**
- 2. Eye contact is not necessary**
- 3. Try using a TV show or video to get the conversation started**
- 4. Keep things calm**





Communication Blockers

- Giving too much advice & 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, & feelings
- Using body language that suggests you're not interested in what the other person has to say



Discussing Boundaries

Activity



Media Suggestions to Start Conversations



Big Mouth (2017-), Netflix

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

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



Never Have I Ever (2020-), Netflix

"The story centers around Devi (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, & feelings don't make it easy for her."



Heartstopper (2022-), Netflix

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



HELP US LEARN ABOUT OUR IMPACT! ANSWER JUST A FEW QUESTIONS!

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