

Parents and Caregivers as

Sexuality Educators

Small Group Ministry Sessions

By Robin Slaw



Susan Dana Lawrence, Developmental Editor

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Based on a field-tested program written by Karen Rayne and edited by Melanie Davis

Introduction

Welcome to a program for Unitarian Universalist parents and caregivers who seek support and skills to be effective sexuality educators of their children. This program invites adults to ask themselves: How can I embody my role as my child's primary sexuality educator in a way that expresses my UU values and faith?

Of course, children pick up information and attitudes from sources beyond the home: peers, popular culture, social media, other adults. Many Unitarian Universalist children will participate in [Our Whole Lives \(OWL\)](#), the lifespan, holistic, values-based sexuality education program provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ, and they may also receive sexuality education in school. However, OWL encourages, and this program aims to nurture, parents and caregivers in their role as their children's primary sexuality educators. Trusted adults carry extraordinary power to influence their children's attitudes and values around sexuality. Many adults struggle to wield that power with intentionality, grace, and confidence. These sessions invite parents and caregivers to find support, insight, and courage with one another.

While the small group ministry format provides a spiritually grounded space, the program's approach to sexuality is secular and grounded in science, in tune with the OWL lifespan sexuality education programs on which it is based. A facilitator can bring this program to a secular setting by omitting references to Unitarian Universalist Principles and values.

Purpose of the Program

The sessions are designed to meet the needs of adults raising children of a wide age range, from elementary through high school. Like OWL workshops, these sessions build comfort in talking about sexuality-related topics and offer skill-building activities. The sessions address topics also provided in OWL sexuality education for youth ages 12-14 (grades 7-9), but these sessions focus on these participants' needs as parents and caregivers. Participants are invited to engage deeply with their hopes and fears, their values and practices. Where the OWL junior high program delivers a great deal of important knowledge, this program emphasizes the adult's ongoing adult responsibility to share accurate, current information, as needed, with their child or youth.

Like OWL programs, this program conveys a holistic view of sex and sexuality (mapped out as Circles of Sexuality in Session 2), encompassing sensuality, intimacy, sexual health and reproduction, sexual identity, and societal sexualization. Participants identify their hopes, examine their concerns, and frame both in the context of their children's lives, acknowledging that their children face different circumstances and pressures than did earlier generations.

These sessions also help adults build skills for healthy family communication. Communication is the foundation of this program, just as it is the foundation of healthy relationships within and beyond families.

Scheduling a Series of Meetings

The program provides ten 90-minute sessions that invite participants into learning, reflection, sharing, and skill building. Plan a series of at least four sessions to establish the group as a supportive container for discussion and exploration. After Sessions 1 and 2, the group may explore any of the remaining topics; although sessions are numbered, they may be done in any order. Session 1 invites participants to choose future topics.

UU congregations might provide this program for parents and caregivers whose children are meeting for Our Whole Lives sessions at the same time. Others may offer the program to engage community interest in a children's or youth OWL program. A congregation whose family ministry already includes covenant groups of parents and caregivers might incorporate these sessions into an ongoing series.

In 2019, the UUA produced [Faithful Consent](#), a short video featuring interviews with adults of all ages from a variety of faith traditions. A discussion guide accompanies the video. Groups that do Session 8, Consent: Building Healthy Boundaries, may wish to add an extra meeting to watch the video and engage in guided discussion of it.

Note that many of the sessions ask the group to go online to view a video or listen to an audio recording. Make sure your meeting space has a computer with Internet access, a large monitor or a projector and screen, and good speakers.

The Facilitator's Role

The facilitator will need both experience leading a small, covenanted group and comfort and confidence presenting sexuality-related information. They need not be an approved Our Whole Lives facilitator. An ideal facilitator might be a religious educator or a minister. A lay leader can fill the role, perhaps someone raising children who have done an OWL program, or perhaps someone with experience in sexuality education, adult education, or social work.

An adult's personal sexual history shapes their attitudes, feelings, and communication about their children's sexual lives. This program invites self-reflection. It guides adults to separate their own stories from the lives of their children and, at the same time, to develop empathy with their children's explorations and challenges as they grow into

sexual beings. The facilitator helps by modeling ease with sensitive topics, frank and challenging questions, and factual information. The facilitator will calmly normalize a range of sexuality-related situations and stories. By creating a relaxed, matter-of-fact atmosphere devoid of assumptions and judgment, the facilitator helps participants build comfort and confidence in their role as their children's primary sexuality educators.

A participant may make a personal disclosure that involves threat or harm and meets a state or congregational standard for mandatory reporting. Facilitators need to know their state and congregational mandatory reporting guidelines.

Sessions include quiet intervals for reflection and journaling. Facilitators must be able to hold a friendly silence. Before the first session, facilitators can suggest that participants bring a journal. In any case, facilitators must ensure there are paper and writing implements at every session.

Each session has a Resources handout that facilitators may email or distribute to the group. Before each session, the facilitator must confirm that the suggested resources are current (the URLs still work, the websites indeed include relevant, worthwhile information) and enhance the list with current local resources relevant to the session topic—for example, contact information for the nearest Planned Parenthood facility, a local chapter of PFLAG (an organization of and for LGBTQ individuals, family members, and allies), or local programs for youth leadership, self-esteem-building, or identity affinity. You might provide each Resources handout by email with a reminder of the next meeting's day, time, and place.

Today's knowledge and trends differ from what participants will remember from their own childhood and youth. Encourage parents and caregivers to continue learning, after this program concludes, about the world their children live in. Keeping up with current information relevant to a child's real-life experiences will strengthen communication between an adult and their child.

Format for Each 90-Minute Session

Opening: introduces the topic and welcomes the group

Focused Check-in: invites everyone to consider a question and share brief responses

Spotlight: further introduces the topic and sparks thoughts and feelings about it

Perspectives: expands understanding by providing sexuality facts, youth perspectives, and/or discussion of cultural trends

Reflection: offers a few questions to consider in silence and then optionally respond to while others listen deeply, without comment or question

Taking It Home: asks participants to reflect on the session as a whole, identify an important experience or piece of information they have gained, and think of an action or practice to do on their own or with their child

Closing: includes a reading with a message to take away from the session

Sessions

1. (mandatory) Hopes and Concerns for Kids' Sexual Health
2. (mandatory) Communication: How Do We Talk about Sex?
3. Gender Identity: Exploring Emotions around Gender
4. Sexual Orientation: Supporting Self-Discovery
5. Relationships: Guiding with Wisdom
6. Sexual Health: Be a Trusted Source
7. Decision Making: Ready, Set, Let Go!
8. Consent: Building Healthy Boundaries
9. Social Media: Integrity in a Changing World
10. Pornography: It's Not Sex Ed

PREFACE

Our children absorb messages from every second of their awake lives. Our culture often sends a message to children and adolescents that doesn't reflect our family and personal values. In this world, failing to talk to our children can have just as much impact as parent-initiated communication. Adults who never experienced their own adolescent conversations with important adults lack a model for life-changing discussions. Feeling ready to talk about challenging topics gives parents and caregivers the confidence to broach ideas and conversations that might never come up in regular discussions with adolescents. These sessions aim to help parents and caregivers feel ready.

Keeping communication open between children and parents or caregivers requires exceptional acceptance, openness, and love. As children journey through childhood into adolescence, parents and caregivers may feel like their children are suddenly foreign and distant; yet it is important to try to maintain a strong connection with them. Feeling loved and accepted by their parents and caregivers can be literally lifesaving for adolescents.

Our children step along the path from childhood, where friendships are primarily platonic, into the world of adolescence, where the push and pull of romance and sexuality can be simultaneously confusing, alluring, off-putting, all-consuming, and more. Navigating this course can be difficult for youth and for the adults who love them. No easy answers exist; rather, nuances and shades of gray can shift as quickly and dramatically as the seasons or weather.

Parents and caregivers may not feel prepared to talk to children or adolescents about sexuality-related ideas or information. Youth may be uncertain about the reception they might receive from parents or caregivers if they share their feelings and open up about how they are evolving as sexual beings. But the effort to communicate is worth it. Research shows us that parents and caregivers can still have a powerful impact on their children right through adolescence, when they keep lines of communication open (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/campaigns/lets-talk-month>). Teens who talk to their parents about sex are more likely to wait longer to have partnered sexual activity, and when they do, they are more likely to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infection and unintended pregnancy.

Studies show differences in parents' and teens' recall of conversations about sex. This may indicate that important messages are not making an impact. For this reason, it's important for parents to communicate regularly, directly, and specifically.. By

responding effectively, parents can open the door for future conversations about sex and sexuality.

Our Unitarian Universalist values, especially our first Principle—that we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person—guide us to affirm our youth in a way that allows them to grow into adulthood in a healthy and positive way, including their sexuality. Exploring our values with other parents allows us to open ourselves to new ideas and lose some of the negative scripts we might be carrying from our upbringing and past experiences. Talking through the ways we might approach challenging topics **before** we begin conversations with our youth gives us a chance to practice finding the right words, the most positive outlooks, ensuring that our conversations have a chance to be open and helpful to our children and youth.

Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators is an opportunity and an invitation to begin conversations with a sex-positive foundation and a curiosity to learn more about our children's values and ideas, as well as to transmit our own values in a positive and healthy way.

Robin Slaw, MBA, MAT

Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia, MD

Our Whole Lives Trainer and Facilitator

Credentialed Unitarian Universalist Religious Educator

Session 1

Hopes and Concerns for Kids' Sexual Health

This session creates a welcoming space that invites parents and caregivers to engage with one another and form a commitment to this series of group meetings. Participants begin to share hopes for and concerns about the sexual health of their children and youth. They learn about the small group ministry format and choose topics for future sessions.

Worries related to sex and sexuality are often at the forefront of a parent's or caregiver's consciousness—perhaps based on behavior they have observed in their children or other children, perhaps because of remembering their own experiences. However, adult unease around a sexuality-related topic can cause children to pull away rather than confide. Adults' communication of a fear or an expectation—whether explicit or indirect—can indicate to children that there are rules to be followed or broken. This session guides adults to recognize their own hopes and fears in order to play an affirming role in their child's developing sexuality.

Small group ministry works by encouraging deep thought, deep reflection, and deep listening. The Spotlight activity in this session introduces this format and leads the group to agree on behavior norms to guide them through the series. Take care in guiding the group to build a covenant, which should include a plan for what to do if the covenant is broken.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 1.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources
- Handout 1.2, Session Topics Ballot

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan for the group to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute during the session.

- If you will not offer all ten sessions, copy Handout 1.2, Session Topics Ballot, for all participants. If you know already that you will definitely offer certain sessions, indicate this on the handout so participants know they need not vote for these. If your schedule and/or topics are set, adapt the handout to function as a schedule and copy for participants.
- Preview the video of Julia Sweeney’s TED Talk, [It’s Time for “The Talk”](#) (5:10), which humorously recounts a first parent-child conversation about human reproduction.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- List the session elements—Opening, Focused Check-in, Spotlight, Perspectives, Reflection, Taking It Home, and Closing—on a sheet of newsprint and post it.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. Offer an introduction practice suitable for Unitarian Universalist small group ministry, such as the [Mutual Invitation model](#). You may use these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces themselves, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce themselves and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. In your introduction today please include your name and what pronoun—“he,” “she,” or something else—you would like people to use when talking about you. Also tell us how many children you are raising, their ages, and a sentence about why you decided to attend this series.

After introductions, invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from Zen teacher [Karen Maezen Miller](#), used with permission, or invite someone else to read:

*First, be quiet.
Give away your ideas, self-certainty
judgments, and opinions
Let go of defenses and offenses
Face your critics
They will always outnumber you
Lose all wars*

*All wars are lost to begin with.
Abandon your authority and entitlements
Release your self-image
Status, power, whatever you think gives you clout
It doesn't, not really . . .
Give up your seat
Be what you are: unguarded . . .
A victim of no one and nothing . . .
Now that you are free
See where you are. Observe what is needed.
Do good. Quietly.
If it's not done quietly, it's not good.
Start over
Always start over.*

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

10 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then offer a minute for everyone to reflect on how they might complete this sentence: "The most challenging sex or sexuality conversation that I anticipate having with my child or children will be about _____."

After a minute, invite participants, if they wish, to share their response as they are ready, and without interruption. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question. Make sure each person has an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT: INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

15 minutes

Affirm that this program is small group ministry, not a sexuality education class, using these words or your own:

Our Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators meetings will follow a "small group ministry" or "chalice circle" format used by many Unitarian Universalist groups. You will learn helpful information here and practice talking about sex and sexuality with your children. This experience may lead your family into the Our Whole Lives lifespan sexuality education program, if you are not already involved with OWL. But this is a ministry experience, not an OWL class. We are here to bring our hearts and spirits together. As participants, you will support one another, each on your own journey of raising sexually healthy children and youth.

Explain that each session will encourage participants to expand their understanding and clarify their feelings about a topic in sexuality. Building our confidence and comfort

in discussing sexuality topics is a way of ministering to ourselves, as parents and caregivers. Growing in knowledge and self-awareness will help adults interact positively and supportively with their children.

Say that each session offers time to journal about feelings and concerns that arise. Indicate or distribute the paper and writing implements participants may use. Say that they are welcome to bring and use their own journals.

Emphasize that in these sessions, and also when parents or caregivers are speaking with their own children and youth, personal disclosures are never required. Anytime there is sharing or discussion in this group, it is always fine to “pass” rather than speak. Also tell them that if an exercise or reflection makes them extremely uncomfortable, they may remove themselves from the exercise or from the room entirely, whatever they need for self-care.

If you do not plan to offer all ten sessions, tell the group that at the end of this session they will have a chance to choose future session topics. Say they will receive a handout where they can rank their choices.

Indicate the newsprint you have posted with the list of session elements. Describe the elements of this and future sessions:

Opening: introduces the topic and welcomes the group

Focused Check-in: invites everyone to consider a question and share brief responses

Spotlight: further introduces the topic and sparks thoughts and feelings about it

Perspectives: expands understanding by providing sexuality facts, youth perspectives, and/or discussion of cultural trends

Reflection: offers a few questions to consider in silence and then optionally respond to while others listen deeply, without comment or question

Taking It Home: asks participants to reflect on the session as a whole, identify an important experience or piece of information they have gained, and think of an action or practice to do on their own or with their child

Closing: includes a reading with a message to take away from the session

Invite the group to create a covenant of norms for behavior that will help each session welcome and fully include everyone. Post a blank sheet of newsprint and ask, “What are some ways we want to be in relationship with one another?” Record participants’ contributions on newsprint. Suggest these points, if others do not:

- Speak from your own perspective. Avoid assumptions and generalizations about other people and groups.

- Expect that others in the group will bring cultural backgrounds or attitudes about sexuality that differ from yours.
- Help make space for all to have a chance to share and to listen.
- It is OK to share information you learn here. Do not share personal stories outside the group that participants may share during the session.
- Own the impact of your words and actions, regardless of your intent.
- Take responsibility for your own emotional and physical comfort.
- Everyone has the right to “pass” rather than speak.

Say that if someone discloses danger to, or harm done to, themselves or others, you may be mandated to report this disclosure to the religious educator, the minister, or legal authorities. Share your state’s and congregation’s policies on mandatory reporting. Also tell participants that, regardless of law and official policy, your own ethical responsibility may guide you to voice concerns when necessary.

PERSPECTIVES

10 minutes

Tell participants that you will all watch a video together. Invite them to notice thoughts and feelings that come up as they watch. Tell them that they can journal about such thoughts and feelings during the video and will also have time to do so afterward. Show the video of Julia Sweeney’s TED Talk.

When the video concludes, invite participants to gather their thoughts. Offer them one or two minutes to journal, as they are moved, about the video and their responses to it.

Say that parents and caregivers have a role in the sexuality education of their children whether or not they embrace the role. Say that children and youth will integrate their parents’ and caregivers’ messages and behaviors, whether explicitly related to sex or sexuality or not, into their own attitudes and choices.

Read aloud the following paragraph from the textbook *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*, 8th ed., by William L. Yarber, Barbara W. Sayad, and Bryan Strong (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012):

The largest influence that parents and caregivers have is helping to shape their children’s most basic relationship skills during childhood through clear communication and appropriate levels of discipline. This influence carries on through adolescence and into adulthood. By middle to late adolescence, this primary influencing factor transfers to the peers. However, parents and caregivers remain in the top three influencers—the third is the media. Middle school–age youth are in a transition between parents and caregivers as the largest influencers, and peers as the largest influencers.

Tell participants that you will now share two quotes from the discussion boards on [Scarleteen](#), a sex education website for teens. Read the quotes:

My parents have said I'm too young to be interested, but I don't think they'd forbid me from dating. I've never dated and only talked about guys I think are attractive, so they haven't had anything to really complain about yet. I'm definitely not allowed to have sex though. — 14-year-old female

Luckily, my mom let me go on the pill. She knows my boyfriend and I are sexually active, but if she suspects sex is happening in her house, she'll run in to break it up. When it comes to sex itself, I feel pretty much supported, because she is not shaming me, but she's still trying to protect my virtue. — teen female

REFLECTION

30 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the Julia Sweeney video, the Miller poem you used as a chalice lighting, the reading from the human sexuality textbook, and the two quotes from Scarleteen. Post the Reflection questions. Say that you will read them aloud and that, when you finish, you will invite participants to respond, one at a time, as they are moved, to any question or questions that speak deeply to them.

- What worries you about talking with your child or youth about sexuality?
- What expectations related to sex or sexuality are you communicating now in words? What expectations are you communicating by your behavior or actions?
- What support do you need to be a sex and sexuality guide and role model for your child or youth?
- What support will help you keep perspective on your hopes and fears?
- What would you wish for your child's first partnered sexual experience, and how might you foster those positive outcomes?

After you read the questions aloud, allow a little silence. Then tell participants how much time each may have to speak without interruption. Ask who would like to begin.

Once everyone who wishes to has spoken, invite participants to respond, one at a time, as they are moved, to anything another participant has said. Watch the time so that every participant will have a chance to speak for a second time. If time remains after the second round, invite participants to speak again.

TAKING IT HOME

10 minutes

Invite the group to appreciate one another and this time together. Ask participants to think about all that was shared during the meeting. Invite them to, as they are moved, briefly lift up one comment or experience for which they are particularly grateful.

When all who wish to have spoken, say you would like to invite participants to shape their “take home” learning into one action they can commit to. Ask:

- What can you do, between now and our next meeting, to open healthy, supportive communication about sexuality with your child?

Make sure everyone has a journal or paper and a writing implement. Say that this writing will not be shared. If you wish, offer these additional prompts:

- What is one sexuality topic that you might be ready to honestly discuss with your child?
- What conversation seems important to have at this time?
- What information or support do you need to take the action you choose? (For example, you might prepare for a conversation by talking with a partner or supportive adult, by researching a topic online, or by obtaining condoms to offer a youth who may be sexually active.)

Give participants at least five minutes to write.

CLOSING

10 minutes

Share this reading from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran (used with permission):

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even
in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice.

If you will not offer all ten sessions, distribute Handout 1.2, Session Topics Ballot. Tell them that the next session will be Session 2 and remind them how many more sessions they will have together after that. If you have chosen any topics already, tell the group which they are. Ask participants to indicate their interest in possible future

session topics and hand their ballot back to you. Say that you will share results with the group at the next meeting.

Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 1.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources for participants to take home, or make sure you have everyone's email address so you can send it to them. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 1.1: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- Unhushed, the website of sexuality educator Dr. Karen Rayne, whose mission is to break “through the social silence and stigma surrounding sexuality and [invite] parents and youth to engage in self-reflection, conversation, and dialogue.”
<https://unhushed.org/index/home.php>
- Parent resources from Advocates for Youth.
Search keyword “parents.” <https://advocatesforyouth.org/>
- The Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its local chapters offer wonderful guidance and resources for parents and caregivers at every age and stage of a child’s life. Browse or search here:
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents>

On talking with children or youth about sexuality:

- *For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Teens about Sexuality, Values, and Health*, by Al Vernacchio (New York: HarperCollins, 2014)
- *From Diapers to Dating: A Parent’s Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children*, by Debra W. Haffner (New York: Newmarket Press, 2008)
- *Talk to Me First: Everything You Need to Know to Become Your Kids’ “Go-To” Person about Sex*, by Deborah Roffman (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2012)

Today’s video:

Julia Sweeney’s TED Talk, “It’s Time for ‘The Talk’” (5:10), is an entertaining and relatable story of a first parent-child conversation about human reproduction.

https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_sweeney_has_the_talk

HANDOUT 1.2: SESSION TOPICS BALLOT

Please indicate which sessions you most wish to include in our series.

Session Name

1. Hopes and Concerns for Kids' Sexual Health	We will do these two sessions first, followed by a selection of the others.			
2. Communication: How Do We Talk about Sex?				
Indicate how important you consider these session topics:	Very important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Skip It
3. Gender Identity: Exploring Emotions around Gender				
4. Sexual Orientation: Supporting Self-Discovery				
5. Relationships: Guiding with Wisdom				
6. Sexual Health: Be a Trusted Source				
7. Decision Making: Ready, Set, Let Go!				
8. Consent: Building Healthy Boundaries				
9. Social Media: Integrity in a Changing World				
10. Pornography: It's Not Sex Ed				

Session 2

Communication: How Do We Talk about Sex?

Many parents and caregivers avoid talking about sex and sexuality for fear of doing it wrong. Yet even imperfect conversations can build an adult's comfort and skill, a child's trust, and positive, healthy communication around sexuality-related matters. In this session, participants recall both positive and negative instances of sexuality-related communication with adults from when they were young. They explore the holistic Circles of Sexuality model that anchors Our Whole Lives sexuality education programs and consider how our values guide us in physical, personal, and social aspects of sexuality. Participants support one another by sharing and listening. They discover ways to create positive interactions in their families using verbal and nonverbal communication.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 2.1, Circles of Sexuality
- Handout 2.2, Parent Power
- Handout 2.3, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Copy Handout 2.1, Circles of Sexuality, and Handout 2.2, Parent Power.
- Preview the video [The Birds and the Bees](#) (4:45), part of a series called Parents Explain.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Spotlight questions on newsprint and set them aside.

- Decide which Reflection questions you will use. Write them on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. Tell the group that communication is the focus for this session. Say that, although it can be awkward or difficult, communicating about sex is necessary for adults who wish to play a positive, healthy role as their child's primary sexuality educator. Say that many parents and caregivers avoid communication about sex because they fear they will make a mistake. Explain that while perfection cannot exist and comfort cannot be promised, communication can still be effective and can always be improved.

Do a quick round of name introductions. Refer to the group covenant. Review its points quickly. Ask for and answer any questions.

Say that people of all ages have times or places where they feel more relaxed and able to hold a potentially challenging conversation. Some people prefer to face someone while talking, others prefer to be side by side, and some may prefer to converse by text, email, or phone. Some people have an easier time talking while doing an activity together, such as cooking, building, gardening, or cleaning, or maybe riding in a car.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read the following passage from *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning, Healing Our Families, Our Communities, and Our World*, by Riane Eisler and David Loye (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990):

In face-to-face personal communication, the role of the listener is critical. If we look at personal communication as a partnership where two or more people take turns talking and listening, we see that to build good relationships the listener's part is just as important as the speaker's. And if we recognize that good relationships are based on mutual trust, we also see that good listening skills are an essential ingredient.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

10 minutes

Ask the group to sit in silence to take in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask everyone to reflect on and, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: "For a conversation with my child that may be difficult for me, I would most prefer a time, place, and situation such as _____."

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants consider the question. Offer each one an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

10 minutes

Say you will show a five-minute video, "Parents Explain the Birds and the Bees." Post the Spotlight questions, read them aloud, and invite participants to keep them in mind while watching:

- What emotional reactions do you have to the video?
- When do you notice an adult explaining just what a child wanted to know? Explaining too much? Not enough?
- What do the adults seem to say with nonverbal communication, such as tone of voice, facial expressions, or body language?
- What memories do you have from childhood or adolescence of being on the receiving end of adult communication about sex? How did your parent or caregiver's communication influence your understanding or acceptance of your own sexuality? Your sexual decision making?

Show the video.

When the video concludes, offer a minute or two of silence for participants to gather their responses to the video. You might reread the prompt questions. Invite people to journal, as they are moved, with any thoughts, feelings, or issues that have come up.

Ask participants to take a moment to consider how they would like their children to feel about the communication they share around sex and sexuality. Allow brief answers. Ask participants to consider situations where an uncomfortable conversation would be better (or worse) than no conversation at all.

PERSPECTIVES

15 minutes

Distribute Handout 2.1, Circles of Sexuality. Explain that the Our Whole Lives sexuality education programs provided by the UUA and the United Church of Christ are grounded in a holistic view of sex and sexuality, graphically illustrated as Circles of Sexuality. Ask the group what they notice, agree with, or wonder about in the Circles of Sexuality chart. Allow some conversation; there is no need to try to answer every question.

Make the following points if no participants do:

- All five outer circles of sexuality are part of what makes us sexual human beings.

- Sexuality and sexual intimacy are not limited to genital sexual behavior. Sexual intercourse is only one behavior in one of the five circles.
- Emotional intimacy—sharing love and caring in a relationship—can happen in many types of relationships, such as those of family members, friends, and romantic partners. Emotional intimacy with a partner can happen with or without sexual intimacy.
- All five aspects are affected by personal values, which is why *Values* is placed in the center, touching all components.

Tell participants you will read a post from a young woman on the Scarleteen website about the kind of relationship she wished she could have with her parents. Read the following quote:

I wish my parents understood that my sexuality is valid, that I am not gay nor straight, but have a fluid sexuality and like people of all gender identities. I wish my parents would have been open to my sexuality and learning about all the different kinds and shapes that sexualities and gender identities come in, instead of labeling people based on the prejudices they learned when they were kids. I wish my parents would be more open, and not as entrenched in their prejudiced beliefs about sexuality that harm my relationship and my trust in them.

I also wish my parents would act more like guides and facilitators to life than authoritarian figures I must figure a way around. I wish I could seriously talk to them about sex, about birth control, about sexuality. I wish they understood I am a sexual person. I wish they respected my choices and treated me more like a person who is beginning to have autonomy over my life, take responsibility for my choices, and dictating the values I will [live] by. I wish that through this phase of my life, the phase where I am figuring out who I am, that they would guide me through it by using their own life experience, instead of saying only their life experience is valid/good.

I desperately want guidance, acceptance, support and love in navigating my sexual life (something i will live with until i die). I wish I could have received it from them instead of Tumblr, Scarleteen and feminist websites. Instead I receive fear and threats about not having sex and not being queer, which has turned me into a highly anxious and paranoid person in relation to pregnancy, because i fear my parents would not let me have an abortion if my birth control were to fail. I wish I did not have to sneak around to have sex, because I hate lying and sneaking around has been more than humiliating and tiring.

Distribute Handout 2.2, Parent Power. Tell participants that this handout presents results from a survey of teenagers about the influence parents have on them and their decisions about sex. Give the group a few minutes to look over the research findings.

REFLECTION

30 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the “Parents Explain the Birds and the Bees” video, the reading from *Scarleteen*, the *Circles of Sexuality*, and the Parent Power handout. You may offer all the following questions for reflection, or choose one or more you think speak especially to the group and will encourage deep reflection and sharing. Post the newsprint with the questions you have chosen and read them aloud.

- How has your view of the “sex talk” expanded with today’s session? Do you have new ideas? New concerns?
- How do the stories shared today relate to communication between you and your parents or caregivers when you were young?
- How might you prepare yourself for a conversation? For what do you need the most preparation: knowing what to say, saying it, or listening to your child?
- How can your effective communication with your child help prepare them for making autonomous decisions about sex and sexuality?

Invite participants to speak one at a time, as they are moved, without interruption. After everyone who wishes to has had a chance to respond to a question and speak uninterrupted, invite participants to respond to one another. Facilitate as needed to support participants in honoring the covenant’s guidelines. You may wish to indicate the posted covenant or read its guidelines aloud.

TAKING IT HOME

15 minutes

Invite the group to engage with one or more of the scenarios below, either by brainstorming together or by having some volunteers act it out. Say the goal is to practice a variety of communication skills in each situation presented. Start with the scenario that seems most relevant to the participants; do more if you have time.

Explain that good communication has both verbal and nonverbal aspects. Ask for examples of each. Offer these if others do not mention them: the words that someone chooses; the tone with which those words are expressed; the ways someone holds their body while speaking and while listening (for example, relaxed or tense, attentive or turned away); the time and place someone chooses for a conversation.

If the group is willing, combine acting and brainstorming: Ask two volunteers to begin acting out a scenario. Say the actors may raise their hand if they would like another

participant to “tap in” and take over for them, and that any participant may also ask to “tap in” to take over a role if they have an idea for getting an interaction unstuck.

- **Scenario 1:** You and your 9-year-old are in the car together. You really want to ask about a conversation you overheard between your child and a friend, since you noticed your child seems to have significant misinformation about sexuality or reproduction.
- **Scenario 2:** An hour ago, you received a phone call from your 14-year-old’s school principal, who tells you that your youth was disciplined at school today for kissing and heavy petting in the hallway. The youth has just arrived home.
- **Scenario 3:** Your 11-year-old has just asked to have a friend over to watch a movie that you’ve heard contains substantial sexual content. You try to defer a decision until later, but the youth is insistent on discussing it immediately.

Leave several minutes for participants to recap any insights gained from working with the scenarios and to contribute any skills and strategies for good communication about sex and sexuality that they will take home.

CLOSING

5 minutes

Invite participants to share thoughts, feelings, or issues that came up for them during this session. Why, when, and how do they anticipate a need for a new conversation with their child? How can they prepare themselves for both speaking and listening?

Share the closing reading, [The First Pair of Underpants](#), by Robin Tanner, which is posted on the UUA’s [WorshipWeb](#):

*I wonder
Did God’s heart (I mean the love-mushy, endearing part of God)
That part
The heart that I don’t really believe in as a thing,
With pulses . . .*

ANYWAY

*Did that heart
Did it
Break just a little;*

When God realized

*“Oh no --
They have made leaves into underpants!”*

If God says things like “underpants”?

And then the weight hit God

*Like the first time you watch your child feel self-conscious
Hold back the loud belly laugh
Or worse yet bring down their eyes
Because the shoes you bought
Aren't good
Enough.*

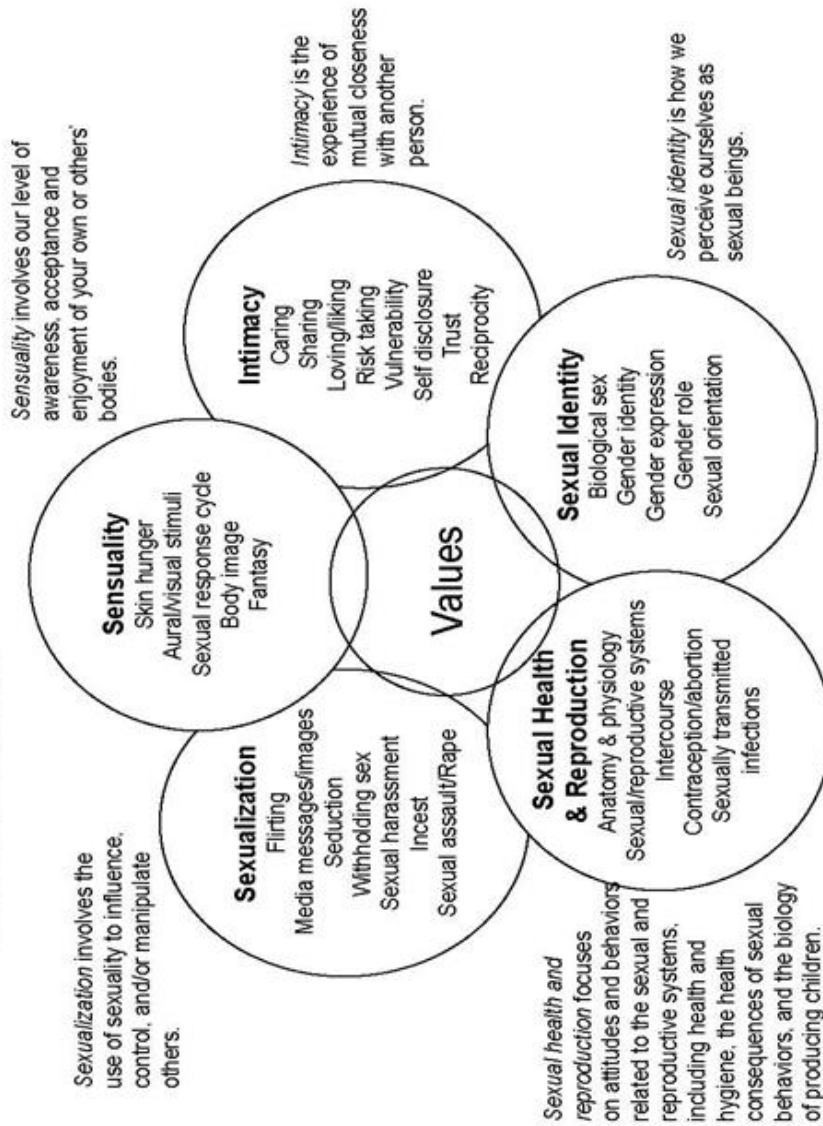
*Did God's heart
Break just a little
to see the beauty of freedom slip from their hearts
As the heat and heaviness of shame washed over
The two in that garden
Who now knew
Not enough
No more naked
No more belly laugh
And for the first time wondered
Am I good enough?*

*Did God cry a little,
Maybe even turn away so they wouldn't see the tears?*

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 2.3, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

The Circles of Sexuality

Sexuality encompasses nearly every aspect of our being, from attitudes and values to feelings and experiences. It is influenced by the individual, family, culture, religion/spirituality, laws, professions, institutions, science and politics.



"Circles of Sexuality," adapted from *Life Planning Education*, 1995, Advocates for Youth, Washington DC advocatesforyouth.org, based on the original work of Dennis M. Dailey, Professor Emeritus, University of Kansas.

—adapted from D. Dailey, "Sexual Expression and Aging," in F. Berghorn & D. Schafer, eds., *The Dynamics of Aging* (Westview Press, 1981).

HANDOUT 2.2: PARENT POWER

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<https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/resource-library/survey-says-parent-power-october-2016>

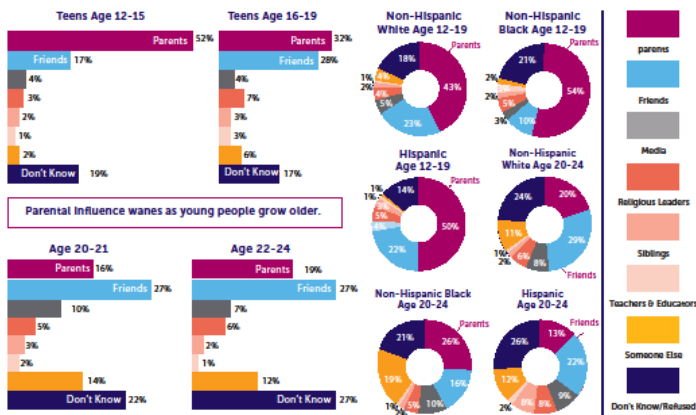
SURVEY SAYS

POWER TO DECIDE, THE CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

Parent Power

Power to Decide has been assessing public sentiment on a number of topics for two decades. One of the most consistent findings over the years has been the power of parental influence. Specifically, in survey after survey, teens say parents most influence their decisions about sex. Our findings this year paint a similar picture: Parents matter. For the first time we have also asked centennials (age 12-19) and millennials (age 18-24) about who influences their decisions about sex. As the following make clear, parental influence wanes as young people grow older.

Who most influences your decisions about sex?



The following data are from the TRU Youth Monitor 2016, a survey of 3,038 individuals age 12-24 and fielded online in November and December 2015. The sample is representative of the U.S. population, including non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic Blacks. Hispanic respondents were able to take the survey in either English or Spanish. The margin of error is +/- 1.78% at the 95% confidence level.



PowerToDecide.org

Bedsider.org
StayTeen.org

#TalkingIsPower

HANDOUT 2.3: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

The Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its local chapters offer wonderful guidance and resources for parents and caregivers at every age and stage of a child's life. Browse or search here: <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents>

Online resources:

- Resources for Parents, a list of books and websites with information for parents and youth offered by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents/resources-parents>
- Tips for Talking, discussion about how to talk to your children about sex and sexuality offered by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents/tips-talking>
- "Sex Ed: Teens' Advice for Parents" (12:17), "an interview with teens discussing how parents can communicate better with their children on the topic of sex education," offered by Planned Parenthood of Montana. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRM6WzFonjk>
- Parenting Tips: A Tool for Talking about Sex, offered by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, links to several videos on talking with your teens about sex. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKyhsARetVs>

Books:

- *Talk to Me First: Everything You Need to Know to Become Your Kids' "Go-To" Person about Sex*, by Deborah Roffman (New York: Da Capo Press 2012)
- *Breaking the Hush Factor: Ten Rules for Talking with Teenagers about Sex*, by Karen Rayne (Austin, TX: Impetus Books, 2015)

Today's video:

- "The Birds and the Bees" (4:45). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3MyLt6l5n0>

Session 3

Gender Identity: Exploring Emotions around Gender

Parents and caregivers help to shape a child's healthy understanding of both their own gender and the gender diversity out in the world. This session calls participants to explore their ideas and feelings about gender and the values about gender they are teaching their children, explicitly or implicitly. The session introduces cultural and biological issues at play in gender identity and gender expression. Participants will find spiritual grounding for becoming comfortable with gender topics and integrating gender into conversations with their children.

Expect the group to have a range of experience with gender diversity. Some may understand gender as a simple dichotomy (i.e., a person can be either male or female). Others may be aware of a range of gender identities. Some may have family members, possibly their children, engaged with questions about gender; some participants may themselves be nonbinary, genderfluid, or transgender. Handout 3.1, The Gender Unicorn, clarifies distinctions among sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Before the session, take the time to explore the handout so that you will be comfortable helping others understand this model of sexuality-related identities.

Two words that arise in the Spotlight discussion are particularly important:

- **Transgender (adjective):** describes a person whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth
- **Cisgender (adjective):** describes a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth

These concepts can be confusing to people learning about them for the first time. Be prepared to spend some time talking about them if participants have questions.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 3.1, The Gender Unicorn
- Handout 3.2, Gender Unicorn Questions

- Handout 3.3, Recommended Multimedia Resources
- Handout 3.4, Scarleteen Reading

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Preview the video of Lee Mokobe's TED Talk, [A Powerful Poem about What It Feels Like to Be Transgender](#) (4:22).
- Download from the UUA website, print, and copy for all participants:
 - [Queer 101: Identity, Inclusion, and Resources](#) (PDF)
 - [Basic Definitions: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#) (PDF)
- Copy Handout 3.1, The Gender Unicorn, and Handout 3.2, Gender Unicorn Questions, for all participants. Review the Gender Unicorn model so that you will be comfortable helping others understand it.
- Make four copies of Handout 3.4, Scarleteen Reading.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- Write these definitions on separate sheets of newsprint and post them. Add a second blank sheet of newsprint adjacent to or below each one, for brainstorming.
 - **Gender:** a person's sense of themselves as a man, a woman, another gender, or no gender (agender). Gender is often shaped by societal expectations of gender expression.
 - **Sex:** the biological aspects of a person's body, including sexual and reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, and hormonal balances. These are typically used to categorize a person at birth as male, female, or intersex.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Spotlight questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the first three Taking It Home questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any participants are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Say that this session's topic is gender identity. Say that gender is an aspect of self that everyone has, no matter what gender they identify as, including agender.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read the following poem, "[Undefined]—(A poem about gender identity)," published on Reddit by REXXIECAT and used with permission:

*Mister or Misses is not me
Will not answer to He or She
Do not address me as Sir or Ma'am
Even if I ask you don't give a damn*

*Pink and Blue I cannot stand
Do not define me I don't need a brand
Boy or Girl its all the same
The corrupt world's mind game*

*Judge me for what I am inside
Do not expect me to swallow my pride
I am not sorry for who I am
Not a Sir nor a Ma'am*

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Tell participants you will ask them to say their name and then complete the following sentence: "I identify my gender as _____, and I use the pronouns _____." Go first to model this introduction, then invite someone else. Continue until everyone has answered.

SPOTLIGHT

15 minutes

Say that this session invites parents and caregivers to expand their understanding of gender identity. More knowledge will help participants be open to what a child may show or tell them as their sense of gender emerges. Suggest that a starting point is to clarify the difference between *gender* and *biological sex*.

Direct participants' attention to the two posted definitions and read them aloud. Ask for examples of possible indicators of someone's gender and write responses on the newsprint. Then ask for examples of biological sex indicators and write those responses.

Note: Gender indicators may include clothing, hairstyle, job, hobby, or the genders of a person's friends; examples must be choices people

make or actions they do. However, gender identity is an internal characteristic, not always outwardly expressed. Biological sex indicators may include chromosomes, genitalia, reproductive organs, hormonal balance, and secondary sexual characteristics such as breast development, hip width, facial and body hair, voice pitch, and musculature. If a participant offers an example that belongs in the other category, explain why it fits where it does and write the suggestion on the correct newsprint.

Make clear that, while these examples are possible indicators that may hold true for many or even most people, they are not invariable and they are not “proof” of anybody’s sex or gender. Male people may wear skirts, female people may have facial hair, people with clitorises and vaginas may have XY chromosomes, and so on.

Explain that a label of *male* or *female* is usually assigned at birth, based on the appearance of an infant’s genitals; however, those labels may later prove incorrect. *Cisgender* (an adjective) describes a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. *Transgender* (also an adjective; sometimes shortened to *trans*) describes a person whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Some people are medically diagnosed, at birth or later, as *intersex* or as having *differences of sexual development*. These terms describe conditions affecting chromosomes and/or reproductive and genitourinary development in utero that challenge the associations we usually make between a person’s genitals and their biological sex. Note that biological sex can be understood as a continuum, with male, intersex, and female being only three of countless possible variations in physical makeup.

Ask for examples of transgender or intersex people in public life or the media.

Note: Examples at this writing include trans actress Laverne Cox, who played a trans woman on *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix); trans actor Elliot Fletcher, who played trans men on *The Fosters* (Freeform) and *Shameless* (Showtime); trans woman Caitlyn Jenner, who was a 1976 Olympic gold medalist in men’s track; and Andrea Jenkins, a transgender woman elected to the Minneapolis City Council in 2017. An [article on the website “them”](#) lists more trans actors. *Middlesex*, by Jeffrey Eugenides, is a contemporary novel with an intersex protagonist.

Say that there are many ways people might identify their gender. Say:

A majority of people identify as male or female. Someone who feels their gender doesn’t fit the sex assigned to them at birth might identify as transgender. Yet

the poet of the opening reading doesn't claim either a male or female gender. People who do not identify as transgender or cisgender might identify as gender nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or gender nonconforming.

Mention well-known people who have identified as gender nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or gender nonconforming. Examples include author Kate Bornstein, actor Asia Kate Dillon, rapper Angel Haze, country/pop singer Sam Smith, LGBTQ activist Jacob Tobia, *Queer Eye* host Jonathan Van Ness, actor Amandla Stenberg, and actor Lachlan Watson.

Say that you will show a video of a young transgender person speaking about his experience growing up. Post these Spotlight questions. Read them aloud and ask the group to consider them as they view the video:

- What emotions arise for you?
- How have you reacted, or might you react, to your child dressing and behaving outside of society's norms for their sex?

Show the video of Lee Mokobe's TED Talk. Then invite the group to journal, as they are moved, with any thoughts, feelings, or issues that have come up.

PERSPECTIVES

20 minutes

Ask for four volunteers to read aloud so the group can witness a conversation that took place on a *Scarleteen* discussion board. Give copies of Handout 3.4, *Scarleteen Reading*, to volunteers for the roles of Narrator, Youth, Volunteer, and Mother. Explain that the discussion boards are moderated closely by adult volunteers and that this exchange took place over several days between a teenager and a series of volunteers whose responses are offered here as one voice, for simplicity. Note that at one point the youth posts a conversation they had by text with their mother.

After the reading, distribute Handout 3.1, *The Gender Unicorn*, and Handout 3.2, *Gender Unicorn Questions*. Say that a model like the Gender Unicorn can help people to explore their own gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual attraction. Using Handout 3.1, *The Gender Unicorn*, name and explain the five categories listed on the graphic, inviting the group to quickly note two or three attributes that fall into each category. Explain that the discussion can go broader than is represented by the handout. Give examples of attributes as needed:

- Gender identity (female, male, gender queer, agender, etc.)
- Gender expression (feminine, masculine, androgynous, etc.)
- Sex assigned at birth (female, male, intersex)

- Physically attracted to (same gender, another gender, more than one gender, not experiencing sexual attraction)
- Emotionally attracted to (same gender, another gender, more than one gender, not experiencing sexual attraction)

Each colored arrow indicates a range, from “not at all” at the left end (the empty circle) to “very much” or “completely” at the right end (the arrowhead); the circles in the “Sex Assigned at Birth” category are like checkboxes. Ask participants to consider themselves as they were in middle school, as well as their memory allows, and to mark the arrows and check a circle in the ways that best describe how they felt then. For instance, if they usually wore dresses but sometimes liked to put on a suit jacket and tie, they might mark the “feminine” gender expression arrow at the far right end and the “masculine” arrow somewhat to the right of the left end. Tell them that they will have about five minutes to complete the Gender Unicorn Handout as their younger selves and to consider the questions on Handout 3.2, Gender Unicorn Questions.

REFLECTION

30 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the chalice lighting words, the Lee Mokobe video, the dialogue from *Scarleteen*, and the Gender Unicorn handouts. Say you will suggest some guiding questions, then offer five minutes of quiet for private reflection and journaling. After this, there will be a time for sharing.

Post the Reflection questions. Read all the questions aloud and invite participants to focus on the ones that speak most deeply to them.

- How do you feel the mother handled the revelation in the *Scarleteen* reading?
- What do think might be going through the mother’s mind when she asks questions about self-harm? What do you make of her choice to ask about that?
- Suppose your child reveals to you that they have discovered something important about themselves. What would you hope your reaction would be? What would your actual reaction depend on?
- Recall a time you may have crossed a gender-related boundary and an adult disapproved. How did that feel?
- What was gender like for your 12-year-old self? What do you wish could have been different? What do you wish you could have told the adults who raised you?
- Why is it important to discuss gender in a family, whether or not everyone appears to be cisgender?

Invite the group to hold silence for a few minutes while they reflect and respond in their journals. Then invite participants to share one at a time as they are moved, without

interruption or discussion. As needed, remind participants of the agreed-upon norms listed on the covenant and of the amount of time each person may speak.

TAKING IT HOME

10 minutes

Say that Unitarian Universalism's first Principle calls parents and caregivers to honor their children's gender and support them toward a positive expression of whatever that gender is, because we honor the inherent worth and dignity of everyone. Invite the group to shape their learning, thoughts, and feelings from this session into an action they will commit to trying at home.

Invite participants to form triads or pairs to consider the following questions together.

Post the questions:

- How will you establish a healthy and open atmosphere around gender in your family?
- How can you come to better understand your own attitudes and behaviors regarding gender?
- How can you begin to engage your children in conversations about gender?

Invite participants to answer this next question privately on paper:

- What promise can you make now for something you will do, between now and our next meeting, to foster healthy, supportive communication about gender identity and gender expression with your child?

CLOSING

5 minutes

Share the closing reading from *Everybody's In* by Lori Walke:

Gracious God,

Is it the glitter? Some people think it's the glitter that makes the Pride parade like heaven. Pearly gates and streets of gold—surely heaven has as much glitter as a Pride parade. There's definitely enough glitter there to make a person believe that the Pride parade is like heaven.

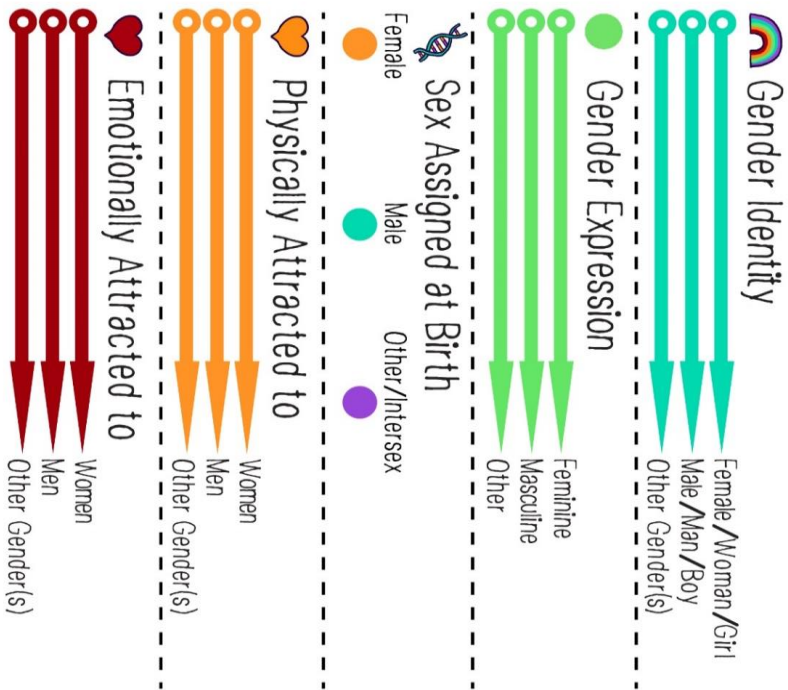
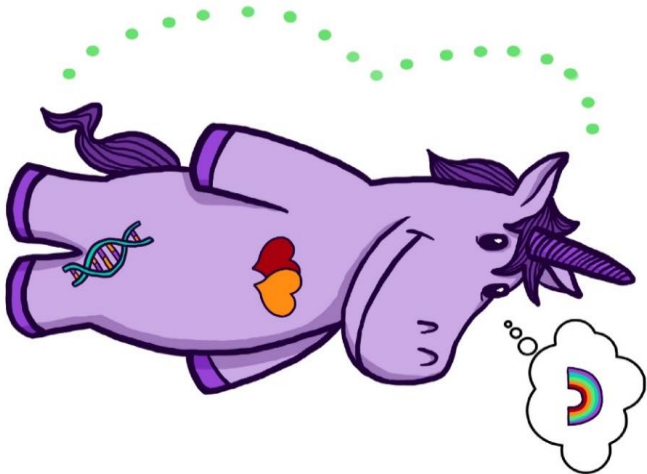
Some people, of course, do not think the Pride parade is like heaven. After all, who would let all these people in? Surely there's some kind of form to fill out, one must be given clearance, and at least abide by the dress code.

Speaking of, what is the dress code for heaven? What documentation is required? Of course, this is the strongest argument that the kingdom of heaven is like the Pride Parade: all are welcome. We don't get to decide who is in and who is out. Everybody's in. Everybody.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 3.3, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

HANDOUT 3.1: THE GENDER UNICORN

HANDOUT 3.2: GENDER UNICORN QUESTIONS

Imagine that the Gender Unicorn represents a younger you, perhaps age 11 or 12. Or, if you are currently raising a child, you might try to remember yourself at the age your child is now.

Consider the following questions:

- Do you think your younger self identified as a cisgender boy or girl, or in another way, such as transgender, gender nonconforming, or genderqueer?
- Did you know these various terms for gender identities as a young person? If so, was that knowledge helpful to you? If not, how might it have been helpful to you?
- What were your gender identity, expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation at the age you are remembering? What parental affirmation or support did your younger self receive? What else might you have needed?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to imagine what it might feel like to be a young person who identifies their gender differently than you identify yours?

HANDOUT 3.3: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more gender identity information:

- Many readings and resources are available in the LGBTQ Welcome & Equality section of the UUA website (<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq>). In particular, see:
 - Queer 101: Identity, Inclusion, and Resources
<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity/queer>
 - Basic Definitions: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity>
 - “10 Ways to Be More Welcoming and Inclusive of Transgender People”
<https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity/transgender>
- *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals*, by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2008)
- *The Transgender Teen: A Handbook for Parents and Professionals Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Teens*, by Stephanie Brill and Lisa Kenney (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2016)
- “How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender,” by Robin Marantz Henig, *National Geographic*, January 2017.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/01/how-science-helps-us-understand-gender-identity/>
- Gender Spectrum, whose mission is “to help create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens,” has a website with a section focusing on parenting and family. <https://www.genderspectrum.org/child-family/parenting>
- Members of TRUUsT, an organization of transgender and nonbinary UU religious professionals, share their stories in the summer 2019 issue of *UU World*. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/trans-right-here>

To share with children:

- The Families section of the summer 2016 issue of *UU World* has stories, activities, and conversation starters on the theme “Gender on the Agenda.”
https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/2016_summer_families_all4.pdf (PDF)
- *The Gender Identity Workbook for Kids: A Guide to Exploring Who You Are*, by Kelly Storck (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2018)
- “Growing Up Transgender: Malisa’s Story” (4:37), an NBC Nightly News segment, April 23, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGPRNbxON8g>
- “My Friend Is Transgender” (4:25), an animated short film from Amaze.org.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DO7wSU1tCA>

Today's video:

- Lee Mokobe's TED Talk, "A Powerful Poem about What It Feels Like to Be Transgender" (4:22).

https://www.ted.com/talks/lee_mokobe_a_powerful_poem_about_what_it_feels_like_to_be_transgender

HANDOUT 3.4: SCARLETEEN READING

Note: This reading is adapted, with permission, from a conversation that took place on a Scarleteen discussion board between a youth who was questioning their gender identity and Scarleteen volunteers. Full conversation:

http://www.scarleteen.com/forum/ultimatebb.php?ubb/get_topic/f/25/t/000537.html

NARRATOR: A young teen posted that they wanted to tell their parents—particularly their mother—that they were questioning their gender identity. They were worried. They wrote, “I think one of my biggest concerns is suddenly I’m a big deal, and a point of attention. Once they know, they know, and even if they don’t say anything they will think things. . . . I don’t know if I could live like that. And what if they disown me . . . or kick me out or something?”

The Scarleteen volunteers offered the teenager support, acknowledged their feelings, and encouraged them to consider both hardships and benefits that coming out as transgender might bring. What follows are pieces of the discussion board conversation.

YOUTH: So . . . um . . . I decided to email her.
Because I got too scared she might try and text me back.
And then I spent the rest of the day scared in my room.
She came home and acts like nothing happened.
But she kinda also acted like she wanted to talk to me.
I have no idea if she saw it or not . . . I guess I’ll know tomorrow.

YOUTH: SHE SAW!
“Don’t know if your phone is on but, I just wanted to say that what you sent me today was INCREDIBLY brave and to say that I love you! No MATTER WHAT!”
I’m freaking out
I guess it’s good but . . . oh god . . . deep breaths

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: That’s a pretty positive response to get! I realize that sharing anything this huge and personal with someone, especially a parent, might feel really overwhelming right now, but I’m glad your mom was so supportive. =)
Thanks for the update. And keep breathing!

YOUTH: I . . . don’t really know what to do.
This is so weird.
I keep trying to avoid her, I don’t want to look at her.
I think she is getting mad.

I want to like . . . start making progress.
But . . . I feel weird talking about this.
I have been her “son” for so long . . . I don’t know :/

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: What are you afraid will happen if you stop avoiding her and start talking to her?

YOUTH: I don’t know.
It’s just awkward

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: I can understand how it would feel awkward.
I guess I’m just wondering if you expect something bad to happen.
You know, it isn’t going to get any less awkward the longer you avoid her, and will probably feel more awkward if anything. Know what I mean?

NARRATOR: The teenager and the volunteer continued talking, with the teenager unwilling to talk with their mother and the volunteer providing additional resources and support. The teenager eventually reached out to their mother again and posted their conversation to the discussion board.

YOUTH: . . . ok . . . we are texting now :/

MOTHER: how long have you felt this way

YOUTH: awhile

MOTHER: forever . . . weeks . . . months?

YOUTH: I don’t know

MOTHER: a long time, or recently?

YOUTH: both? . . . I don’t know

MOTHER: have you talked to anyone else?

YOUTH: kinda

MOTHER: kinda who?

YOUTH: internet people

MOTHER: what internet people . . . how did you find them?

YOUTH: like . . . professionals . . . health class

MOTHER: so tell me why you think you are

YOUTH: what?

MOTHER: what have you told the professionals

YOUTH: **silence**

MOTHER: hello?

YOUTH: **silence**

MOTHER: have you tried to hurt yourself?

YOUTH: what?

MOTHER: why do you keep saying what? . . . have you tried cutting yourself or considered suicide?

YOUTH: I haven't said anything since then

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: How about you answer those last questions?

YOUTH: . . . (sigh)

I don't know what to say

I don't want to say anything

This whole thing is making me feel awkward and weird and uncomfortable

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: I can understand that, but what I'm hearing is that you have a parent who cares about you, and wants to know what's going on. That's very lucky for you, and also sounds like what you really need right now. So, I'd advise to push through the discomfort you're feeling and take advantage of that caring parent. Not everyone has access to that kind of help, and it's great for you that you do when you obviously need it.

YOUTH: I don't know
I'm kinda just waiting for her to say something
But she keeps saying stuff I don't know how to respond to

NARRATOR: The teen and the volunteer continued to talk, trying to work through some of the internal strife that the teen was feeling. The volunteer said, "It might help to bear in mind that while you have probably known about your feelings for awhile, they're probably brand new to her, right? If so, she's not likely to understand them or feel at home in them any more quickly than you have. . . . Since they aren't her own feelings, it's bound to take her far longer." While the teen was able to acknowledge this, they still felt stuck and unable to reach out for help or accept it when offered. In the end, the teen was able to access mental health services but wasn't able to be honest with their provider about their feelings or concerns.

Session 4

Sexual Orientation: Supporting Self-Discovery

In a liberal religious community, parents and caregivers may be reluctant to share any discomfort they may feel about a child's emerging sexual orientation. This session opens a nonjudgmental space for adults to be honest with themselves about feelings, questions, and concerns. Participants explore their assumptions about and knowledge of sexual orientation and prepare themselves to accompany their child's process of self-discovery. They anticipate how they will manage their emotions around a child's emerging sexual orientation in order to clearly convey love and acceptance.

This session invites participants to:

- Address underlying or subconscious assumptions or objections they may hold concerning their own child's emerging sexual orientation
- Acknowledge the sense of loss they may feel if their child's emerging sexual orientation does not fit their expectations
- Grow in self-knowledge and openness so that they can support their child's sexual orientation journey

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 4.1, Sexual Orientations
- Handout 4.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Copy Handout 4.1, Sexual Orientations, and Handout 4.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources.
- Preview the video of Denice Frohman performing her poem [Dear Straight People](#) (3:19).

- Preview the video of Melisa Chamorro telling her story [How Do You Know You're a Lesbian?](#) (6:32) at a Moth StorySLAM.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the first video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the last set of Spotlight questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Taking It Home questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any participants are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Say that this session's topic is sexual orientation.

Say that every person has a sexual orientation. The most common sexual orientation is heterosexual, meaning that a person is attracted to people of a different sex or gender than their own. Other sexual orientations include gay, bisexual, and asexual, and there are more. Some people's sexual orientation changes over the course of their life. Say that the session will give participants space to focus on the role they play as a parent or caregiver in relation to their child's sexual orientation.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read a passage from a TEDxBoulder (Colorado) talk by equality advocate Ash Beckham:

I'm going to talk to you tonight about coming out of the closet, and not in the traditional sense, not just the gay closet. I think we all have closets. . . . All a closet is is a hard conversation, and although our topics may vary tremendously, the experience of being in and coming out of the closet is universal. It is scary, and we hate it, and it needs to be done.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask everyone to reflect on and, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: "When I think about the fact that my child has, or will have, a sexual orientation, a question or a concern that comes to mind is _____."

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question. Make sure each one has an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

20 minutes

Make sure everyone has a journal or paper and a writing implement. Invite the group to watch the video of Denise Frohman performing her poem “Dear Straight People.” Ask them to notice thoughts and feelings that come up, and to consider these questions:

- How does Denise Frohman feel about her sexual orientation?
- How does she believe others feel about her sexual orientation?

When the video concludes, invite participants to take a moment to respond in their journals to this new question:

- Have you ever defended your sexual orientation, or any other aspect of yourself, with ferocity or anger? If not, have you ever wanted to? What stopped you?

Offer no more than two minutes for participants to write.

Next, ask participants to get ready to watch another young adult, Melissa Chamorro, who describes coming out as a lesbian. Say that this performance is from a public storytelling event (The Moth). Invite them to notice their thoughts and feelings as they watch it.

Play the video. When it concludes, post this set of final Spotlight questions. Read them aloud and encourage participants to use their journals to respond:

- When have you experienced self-discovery like Melissa Chamorro describes? Yours might be a discovery of sexual orientation or of something else.
- How smooth or rough was your self-discovery process?
- Can you imagine telling or even thinking of your story in a warmly humorous way, as Chamorro does?
- How would you want to support your child in their self-discovery, whether it is of sexual orientation or another aspect of themselves?

PERSPECTIVES

30 minutes

Post a blank sheet of newsprint. Ask participants to list all the sexual orientations they can think of. Write their responses on the newsprint. It’s okay if your group lists only a few orientations.

Say you would like to offer a definition of *sexual orientation*:

Sexual orientation refers to a person's pattern of attraction to other people, including physical, emotional, sexual, and romantic attraction. It can also include a person's sense of personal and social identity based on these attractions.

Distribute Handout 4.1, Sexual Orientations. If you have time, invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud each sexual orientation and its definition. (Remind them that they may pass.) If you lack time, list the sexual orientations aloud, skipping the definitions, and give the group a minute to scan the handout.

Say that the abbreviations LGBTQ and LGBTQIA come up often in discourse about sexual orientation. Point out that they contain terms referring to sexual orientation, to sex, and to gender identity. Explain that while the abbreviations have important cultural and political purposes, it's important to remember that sexual orientation, sex, and gender are separate aspects of a person.

Read this explanation from the website of the American Psychological Association:

According to current scientific and professional understanding, the core attractions that form the basis for adult sexual orientation typically emerge between middle childhood and early adolescence. These patterns of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction may arise without any prior sexual experience. People can be celibate and still know their sexual orientation. . . . Different lesbian, gay and bisexual people have very different experiences regarding their sexual orientation. Some people know that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual for a long time before they actually pursue relationships with other people. Some people engage in sexual activity (with same-sex and/or other-sex partners) before assigning a clear label to their sexual orientation. Prejudice and discrimination make it difficult for many people to come to terms with their sexual orientation identities, so claiming a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity may be a slow process.

Say that while, of course, same-sex attraction, love, and commitment are as old as human society, our contemporary dominant culture uses understandings and language that emerged in Europe and the U.S. in the 19th century. The terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* were coined in 1869 in Germany. The word *bisexual* was first published in 1892 and became better known through the sex research of Alfred Kinsey in the 1950s.

Invite the group to listen to words from "Our Children: Questions and Answers for Families of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender-Expansive, and Queer Youth

and Adults.” It is a free publication of PFLAG (a national organization supporting and advocating for families, allies, and people who are LGBTQ). Read aloud:

Everyone has a vision or dream for their child’s future, born of many things including personal experiences, family history, cultural or societal expectations, and more. When presented with your child’s disclosure or coming out, it may be an adjustment to understand and realize that this future might now differ from that vision or dream.

Say that you would like to share one young person’s story related to parental expectations that are not aligned with a child’s sexual orientation. Read, or invite a volunteer to read, the story below, which was posted to Scarleteen and is used by permission:

I’m 19, female and asexual. I’m Asian Indian, and tradition says I must marry in the next decade, meaning my parents will look for available grooms starting next year. I will also be expected to have a child within a year or two of marriage. I’ve tried to come out multiple times, but I’ve been taken seriously exactly once, by my cousin who is four years my junior. Her reaction was a solemn nod and the words: “Yeah, I knew you were something like that.”

I’d assumed my parents would understand when I explained it to them . . . but now I’m scared. . . . And what are the chances that my future husband will be as asexual as I am? And my family wants a flippin’ legacy. I can’t have sex or be pregnant! It’s not even a little plausible for me!

I tried to break this gently to my dad, who is open-minded and usually very understanding. He listened quietly, and when I’d finished, asked me with a heart-broken look if I was never going to give him grandchildren, and then what would become of our bloodline? I didn’t know what to tell him! My dad is one person I’ve always been able to count on. He’s always had my back in any disagreements in the family, and he’s the second most practical person I know. It will already be a battle with the rest of my family to be accepted for who I am, and I’m crushed to think that I’ll be doing this alone.

REFLECTION

15 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the video and the session readings, responding one at a time as they are moved, without interruption. Say you will offer a set of prompt questions, and invite the participants to respond to the question or questions that speak most deeply to them. Then post the Reflection questions and read them aloud:

- *Implicit teaching* means the unstated, often subconscious ways you demonstrate your beliefs. What might you be implicitly teaching your children

about sexual orientation, including asexuality? What do you hope to teach them, implicitly or directly? Is there anything you want to change?

- What might your children learn about orientation from norms of behavior and conversation in your family? From the way their peers talk about sexual orientation? From the media?
- As a young person explores or discovers their sexual orientation, how evident would their thoughts and feelings be to a parent or caregiver? What might be your role, as a parent or caregiver, to invite their confidence? To offer them privacy? What is a healthy balance?
- What assumptions might you have about your own child's sexual orientation? What investment do you have in your assumptions?

You may wish to remind participants of the amount of time each person will be able to speak.

TAKING IT HOME

10 minutes

Thank participants for being together, listening, and sharing. Remind them that justice and love are motivating forces in Unitarian Universalist faith. Say that children are likely to “come out” about something, whether it is sexual orientation or another aspect of themselves that emerges as they mature. Suggest that supporting a child to embrace an emerging sexual orientation can be a faith practice for parents and caregivers.

Invite participants to begin to shape this faith practice by developing one immediate action or commitment, through considering the following questions with a partner or privately in their journals. Say you will allow five minutes for sharing or reflecting; partners should work together to fairly divide speaking and listening time.

Post the Taking It Home questions. Then read them aloud.

- How have you discussed sexual orientation with your children so far in their lives? How might you change the way you talk to them in the future?
- What actions can you take, beyond discussing sexual orientation, to show that you will love your child and accept their life path? In other words, how can you build a foundation of love and acceptance for a possible future “coming out”?

Regather the group. Invite participants, one at a time as they are moved, to share an action or commitment they have chosen. As always, it is also all right to pass.

CLOSING

5 minutes

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you share these closing words, which are text messages that a 16-year-old sent to a friend and then posted to social media:

I may have just accidentally came out to my entire family in the worst way possible.

My grandma was saying how gays are going to hell and I didn't want to deal with it so I started to leave.

My cousin asked where I was going.

"Hell, apparently."

What have I done.

Then give this blessing:

May we, in our homes and families, create spaces that love and support our young people as they grow into themselves.

If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 4.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 4.1: SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

Adapted with permission from the UUA website. Find more at www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity.

This handout provides a non-comprehensive list of ways that people identify their sexual orientation.

A comprehensive list would need to be updated frequently with emerging thought on sexual orientation. If you come across terminology that is not included here, look it up online. There are always new things to learn about sexual orientation!

Even though many people associate the abbreviation LGBTQIA with sexual orientation, it also includes terms related to gender identity. The last four letters stand for *transgender*, *queer* and/or *questioning*, *intersex*, and *ally* and/or *asexual*.

Asexual (adjective): Not sexually attracted to anyone and/or having no desire to act on sexual attraction to anyone. Does not necessarily mean *sex/less*. Asexual people may experience affectional (romantic) attraction and may engage in sexual activity. Sometimes shortened to *ace*.

Bisexual (adjective): Attracted to people of one's own gender and people of other genders. Two common misconceptions are that bisexual people are attracted to everyone and anyone, and that they just haven't "decided what they really are." Often shortened to *bi*. See also *pansexual* and *queer*.

Gay (adjective): Primarily or only attracted to people of the same sex. The word is often used specifically about men.

Heterosexual (adjective): Primarily or only attracted to people of the sex considered opposite one's own.

Homosexual (adjective): Primarily or only attracted to people of the same sex; a synonym for *gay*. The words *homosexual* and *heterosexual* are seen by many today as medicalized terms that should be retired from common use.

Lesbian (adjective and noun): A woman who is attracted to women. See also *gay*.

MSM: Men who have sex with men. See also *gay*.

Pansexual (adjective): Attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender. Alternative terms include *omnisexual* and *polysexual*. See also *bisexual* and *queer*.

Questioning (adjective): Unsure of or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Queer (adjective): (a) Attracted to many genders and sexes, or (b) outside cultural norms for sexual orientation and/or gender identity. *Queer* is also used as an umbrella term for all people with nonheterosexual sexual orientations. Historically, *queer* has been a pejorative term, and for this reason some people dislike its use. However, many

people who consider themselves transgressive and challenging of the status quo have adopted and repurposed this term and wear it proudly.

Same-gender-loving or same-sex-loving man/woman: Attracted to people of the same gender or same sex. Terms used in African American communities. See also *gay*.

Straight: Primarily or only attracted to people of the sex considered opposite one's own; a synonym for *heterosexual*. Generally used to refer to people whose gender and sexuality are societally normative.

HANDOUT 4.2: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- *Love Is All You Need*, a 20-minute dramatization from Wingspan Pictures exploring a hypothetical suburban community in which homosexual parents are the norm and heterosexual children are considered deviant.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ROXTFfkco>
- PFLAG offers a variety of information and resources on its website (<https://pflag.org/>). In particular, see:
 - Publications on a variety of issues, available for purchase or download.
<https://pflag.org/publications>
 - Parenting and family resources. <http://pflag.org/loving-families>
 - The 2016 publication *Our Children: Questions and Answers for Families of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender-Expansive and Queer Youth and Adults* was quoted in this session.
https://pflag.org/sites/default/files/OUR%20CHILDREN_PFLAGNational_FIN_AL.pdf
- *Coming Out in Faith: Voices of LGBTQ Unitarian Universalists*, by Keith Kron and Susan Gore (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2011)
- *Straight: The Surprisingly Short History of Heterosexuality*, by Hanne Blank (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), an engaging history of the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual*

For youth:

- *LGBTQ: The Survival Guide for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens*, by Kelly Huegel Madrone (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2018)

Today's videos:

- Denice Frohman performing her poem "Dear Straight People" (3:19).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5frn8TAlew0>
- Melisa Chamorro telling her story "How Do You Know You're a Lesbian?" (6:32) at a Moth StorySLAM. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDbxEiuXEA8>

Session 5

Relationships: Guiding with Wisdom

Relationships bring potential for love, loss, increasing levels of sexual contact, and emotional or physical abuse. They may develop in a variety of ways and stages, from the initiation of dating through different levels of physical intimacy and sexual contact. This session will help parents and caregivers prepare for a support role as their children mature and venture into romantic and sexual relationships. As adults examine their own ideas about the “right” age at which to explore new kinds of relationships, they will come to accept the unpredictability of their child’s relationship journey: Their children are changing all the time, as are their social worlds and cultural contexts. Parents’ opinions, too, are likely to change over time.

Encourage parents and caregivers to deeply consider how they can support their children in developing the skills for healthy romantic and sexual relationships. Affirm that open communication channels are key. While the relationship path of their child’s life is not predictable, adults can try to provide support in a predictable way.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Sticky notes, in four different colors if possible
- Handout 5.1, “Inevitable”
- Handout 5.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Make enough copies of Handout 5.1, “Inevitable,” for participants to share while listening to a recording of the poet, Mahogany L. Browne, reading her poem.
- Listen to [Browne reading the poem](#) (on the linked page, click the speaker icon and then the Play button). Cue up the recording to play for the group.

- Label three sheets of newsprint with ages: 8, 13, and 17. Post the sheets side by side where you can easily reach them.
- Label eight half-sheets of newsprint as follows: “Birth–8,” “9–11,” “12–14,” “15–17,” “18–20,” “21+,” “When in a committed lifetime partnership,” and “Never.” Post the half-sheets, in that order, where all participants can see and reach them.
- Make a set of four sticky notes for each participant, labeled “First date,” “First kiss,” “First partnered orgasm,” and “First genital-to-genital contact.” If possible, use four different colors of notes, one for each activity (e.g., “First date” could be blue, “First kiss” green), but make sure that the writing can be easily read on each color.
- Look over the Taking It Home scenarios and decide which one you will use. Choose the one you think your participants will find most relevant as a group. You will invite the group to choose the age of the hypothetical child.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any participants are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Invite a volunteer to light the chalice.

Distribute Handout 5.1, “Inevitable.” Invite the group to read along, if they wish, and play the recording of Mahogany Browne reading “Inevitable.”

Offer a moment for reflection after the poem. Then invite short responses to any of these questions:

- Who in the poem do you recognize?
- Who reminds you of yourself?
- What makes you uncomfortable about the poem?

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask everyone to reflect on and, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: “When I think of first relationships, what comes to mind is _____.”

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question. Make sure each one has an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

10 minutes

Invite participants to get ready to listen to a reading from a *Huffington Post* article, [The New ABCD's of Talking about Sex with Teenagers](#), by Amy Schalet. Invite them to notice thoughts, feelings, or stories that come up. Encourage them to use their journals to make notes.

Read the following passages, pausing where indicated:

While we send the message that marriage can wait, relationships do not, and young people need to learn that building healthy relationships requires mutual interest, respect, care and trust. To start that conversation, we might ask: "Among your friends, are there couples you admire? Why? What makes that relationship special?" "Are there couples whose relationship bothers you? What might improve their relationship?" If romance proves too loaded a topic, we might start by asking teenagers about their friendships.

[Pause]

Parents are often troubled by teenage sexuality because they feel it is an area in which they have little control, as many teens, particularly girls, hide their sexual lives from their parents—for fear of disappointing them or being judged. However, maintaining parent-teen connectedness is critical for teenage wellbeing, sexually and otherwise. Experts often urge parents to clearly communicate their values, but I would add the recommendation to state clearly: "The most important thing to me is my relationship with you; even if you behave differently from what I would wish or believe is right for you, I want you to feel that you can talk to me." By keeping that connection strong and the conversation open, parents are able to have more influence.

[Pause]

Teenage sexuality is an arena of life in which Americans see some of our greatest personal and cultural diversity. . . . [It] encompasses a range of orientations and beliefs that many parents find troubling. At the same time, it offers parents and educators a great opportunity to enter into conversations about accepting and respecting difference within a community: Much as teens

want to be and look like everyone else in their peer group, sexuality is an arena in which each person is unique. And young people need to learn that teenagers range in the pace of their physical and emotional development, vary in sexual orientations, and may hold different beliefs about sex based on their religion and culture.

Invite the group to share a minute or two of silence and gather their responses. Say they may journal, as they are moved, with any thoughts, feelings, or issues that have come up.

PERSPECTIVES

20 minutes

Starting at the newsprint labeled “8,” ask participants what they think a child of that age typically needs from their parent or caregiver. Invite them to consider their own children, children they know well, or themselves at the age of eight. Write their ideas on the top half of the newsprint. After you have a collection of ideas, draw a line under them, and ask the participants what 8-year-olds might need from their parents or caregivers specifically to help them interact with their peers. How can parents and caregivers support their children in being a good friend or teammate? Write their ideas under the line.

At the newsprint titled “13,” ask what participants think a child of that age might need from their parent or caregiver. Again, they may consider their own children, children they know, or themselves at this age. Write their ideas on the top half of the newsprint. Draw a line under their ideas, and then ask what 13-year-olds might need from their parents or caregivers to support their experiences with romantic and sexual relationships. Write their ideas under the line.

At the newsprint titled “17,” repeat the process for age 17.

Say that these questions are designed to spark participants’ ideas about a hypothetical child and teenager. Now ask them to consider their own children. How do the ideas generated by the group seem to fit their child? What is useful now? What might be different as their children approach these ages? Ask for one or two volunteers to share their thoughts.

Remind participants that sharing healthy sexuality in relationship can be a component of psychological well-being throughout the lifespan. Indicate the posted newsprint half-sheets labeled with age ranges. Tell participants that you will invite them to consider a typical (though not the only possible) progression of sexual activities, and choose the ages at which they believe young people are typically (though not always) ready to

engage responsibly in romantic and sexual activities of different kinds. In other words, when do participants believe that the activities on their sticky notes are age-appropriate? Acknowledge that people are ready at different ages, and that other factors affect someone's timeline, such as whether they have an appropriate partner. Mention that not all sexual behaviors will appeal to every person, and that some people feel little or no desire to engage in sexual activity at all.

Give each participant their prepared stack of four sticky notes and a pen. Ask them to write, on each sticky note, the approximate age at which they think young people are ready to engage in the sexual or romantic activity named on it. Point out the age ranges and note that "When in a committed lifetime partnership" and "Never" are also options. Encourage them to do this independently, without consulting other participants.

When everyone is done, ask participants to place their sticky notes on the posted newsprint sheets that correspond to what they wrote.

Note: If any participants have mobility challenges, adapt this activity to pass around the newsprint half-sheets for participants to attach their sticky notes to, rather than asking everyone to get up. Then collect and post the sheets with the sticky notes on them.

Encourage participants to view the displayed results. If you have used a different color note for each activity, this will help make similarities and differences evident. Ask:

- What surprises you about the similarities and differences in placement?
- Considering the age ranges you have chosen, how wide do you think the range of readiness might be for each of these activities? What factors might make one child ready and another of the same age unready for a romantic or sexual activity?
- What emotions come up for you while doing this exercise?

REFLECTION

30 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the Amy Schalet reading, the age range activity, and the questions you are about to read. Say they will be invited to respond one at a time, as they are moved, without interruption. Post and read all of the following questions, and ask that participants respond to the question or questions that speak most deeply to them. Remind them of the amount of time each person will be able to speak.

- What might make one child ready and another of the same age unready for a sexual activity?
- How can you learn what sort of support your child may need at a given time?

- How can you give a child privacy to figure things out about relationships, and at the same time provide information or advice you believe they need?
- What crossed your mind when you were deciding appropriate ages for initiation of sexual behaviors? Were you concerned with what other people were writing? If so, why? Were you thinking about your own experiences? The social culture in which your child is growing up? Your hopes or fears for your child as they encounter romantic and sexual opportunities?
- How can you be gentle with yourself when you are not able to achieve your concept of what “the right parent” would do or say?

TAKING IT HOME

15 minutes

Lead the group in practicing or brainstorming ways to open conversation with children, using one or more of the scenarios that follow. Ask the group to quickly choose an age, relevant to most of them, for a hypothetical youth between 11 and 17. Then read the scenario you have chosen.

- **Scenario 1:** You ask your youth to wash the dishes, and they comply. When you come back into the kitchen a few minutes later, they are singing along with a current pop song that alludes to sexual violence as something fun and sexy.
- **Scenario 2:** Your youth says there is someone they want to start dating; they might say they are “talking to” someone. Upon questioning, they disclose that they spent a fair amount of time talking online or texting with this person over the last few days, and they have made plans to see each other this weekend. This person is two years older than your youth.
- **Scenario 3:** You ask your youth, who is texting with a friend, if they have a pen. They nod and wave you toward their backpack. You dig through several pockets and don’t find anything, so you open the main compartment. They yell, “Stop!” and run over and grab the backpack from you. They pull a pen out of a pocket you hadn’t tried, glare at you, and carry their backpack to their room.

Facilitate conversation. If you have time, offer a second scenario.

After everyone has had a chance to share, invite the group to appreciate themselves and one another for taking the time to be here. Ask participants to think about all that was shared and experienced during the session and to lift up one comment or experience for which they are particularly grateful.

When all who wish to have spoken, invite them to shape their “take home” learning into an action they can commit to. Ask participants to answer, on paper:

- What promise can you make now for something you will do, between now and our next meeting, to help yourself be ready to foster open channels of

communication with your child about relationships and romantic or sexual activities?

CLOSING

5 minutes

Share the closing reading, from “To a Young Girl,” by William Butler Yeats:

*My dear, my dear, I know
More than another
What makes your heart beat so;
Not even your own mother
Can know it as I know,
Who broke my heart for her
When the wild thought,
That she denies
And has forgot,
Set all her blood astir
And glittered in her eyes.
— from *The Wild Swans at Cooley* (1919)*

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 5.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 5.1: “INEVITABLE”

Inevitable

by Mahogany L. Browne

when I dropped my 12-year-old off at her first
homecoming dance, I tried not to look

her newly-developed breasts, all surprise and alert
in their uncertainty. I tried not to imagine her

mashed between a young man’s curiousness
and the gym’s sweaty wall. I tried not picture

her grinding off beat/on time to the rhythm
of a dark manchild; the one who whispered

“you are the most beautiful girl in brooklyn”
his swag so sincere, she’d easily mistaken him for a god.

About This Poem

“This is probably one of the most embarrassing moments for my daughter but it became a timestamp for my uncertainty as a mother of a pre-teen. Using couplets required me to keep it brief, with a structure that confined the reader until the gut-punch ending. I wanted to offer an honest and introspective moment of a girl growing into a young lady, and I try not to place such a heavy expectation on such a seemingly flash-in-the-pan moment but the more I edited this piece, the more I realized I was only a mirror of my own memories. I experienced this sort of sexual awakening in my teens but it was because of her that I was able to voice the fear of losing (my daughter) as she experienced such a fleeting sweetness. This confessional snapshot became an offering to my daughter. I felt I had little control over the romance that would color her womanhood—the same way, I’m sure, my mother felt about me.”

— Mahogany L. Browne

<https://poets.org/poem/inevitable>

Field Code Changed

HANDOUT 5.2: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- “How Do I Talk with My Kid about Healthy Relationships?” (2:30), a video for parents of younger children from Planned Parenthood.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MGvGhacwjo>
- “How to Teach Kids about Love,” part of the Parent Toolkit website, with videos for parents on starting and continuing conversations with youth and young adults about romantic relationships, including gender stereotypes and consent.
<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/video/relationships/how-to-teach-kids-about-relationships>
- “Parents, Teens and the Culture of Sex: The Claims of Parenting,” a half-hour BBC Radio conversation on topics from the book *Not under My Roof: Parents, Teens, and the Culture of Sex*, by University of Massachusetts sociologist Amy Schalet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b017x0vm>
- “The New ABCD’s of Talking about Sex with Teenagers,” a *Huffington Post* article by Amy Schalet. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/teenagers-sex-talk_b_1072504
- “For Families: Teens’ Romantic Relationships,” a three-minute video with Richard Weissbourd on how to talk with teens about healthy love relationships.
<https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-families/teens-romantic-relationships-video>
- “How the Teen Brain Transforms Adolescent Relationships,” a *Greater Good Magazine* article by Dr. Daniel Siegel (author of *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* [New York: Penguin, 2015]), explains how changes to the adolescent brain transform relationships with peers and parents, and what adults can learn from those changes.
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_the_teen_brain_transforms_relationships
- *What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today’s Challenges with Wisdom and Heart*, by Debra W. Haffner (New York: Newmarket Press, 2008)

Today’s audio:

- Mahogany L. Browne reading her poem “Inevitable.”
<https://poets.org/poem/inevitable>

Session 6

Sexual Health: Be a Trusted Source

Many adults worry, long before their children's puberty, about sexually transmitted infections (STIs, also called *sexually transmitted diseases* or *STDs*), abusive relationships, unintended pregnancy, and other sexual health hazards. This session helps adults channel their worries into a long-term, proactive strategy to support their children. It guides them into practices that demonstrate caring, respect, and faith in their children as decision makers about their own bodies and relationships. It is never too early to nurture a child's sexual health.

Sexual health information evolves constantly. No parent or caregiver can have complete and fully current facts. However, adults can establish an atmosphere of open, nonjudgmental talk. They can point children and youth toward accurate information about sexual behaviors, risks, and precautions. Most importantly, they can nurture a child's holistic sense of well-being across emotional, psychological, and social aspects of life.

This session asserts that sexual health is relevant to everyone, whether they are sexually active or not, whatever their genders and orientations, whether they are neurotypical or neuroatypical, and regardless of whether they have mobility limitations, cognitive disabilities, or sensory or mental health challenges.

The participants will reflect on their own experiences, which for some may include a sexual health crisis. Some may have experienced an STI or an unintended pregnancy. Some may share in the group. Others may not disclose, yet may quietly hold a painful story. No one should inquire about anyone's personal history. Head off judgmental, stigmatizing, or belittling comments about unintended pregnancy, violence in relationships, and other sensitive topics. Maintaining a respectful tone will keep participants engaged and comfortable while modeling how they can respond to a youth who might confide in them.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 6.1, Sexual Health Self-Assessment

- Handout 6.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources
- Facilitator Resource 6.1, Questions

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. This handout offers sources for frequently updated sexual health information. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources, such as a local Planned Parenthood affiliate or a nonprofit that supports LGBTQ youth. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session and invite them to bring a copy, or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Print Facilitator Resource 6.1, Contraception Methods Key. Familiarize yourself with the information on contraception available at the [CDC website](#). You may want to have access to this website during the session.
- Print Facilitator Resource 6.2, Questions, and cut the questions into strips.
- Write the Focused Check-in question on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Spotlight prompt questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Post the group covenant.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any participants are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Then read the following quote from the American writer James Baldwin:

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask everyone to reflect on and, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: "When I think about my child's sexual health, my biggest hope or my biggest worry is _____."

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants consider the question. Offer each one an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT**20 minutes**

Share these words from [Act for Youth](#), a website supporting positive youth development:

Often when we speak of adolescents, sex, and sexuality, we focus on what adults don't want young people to do. But sexuality is a normal, positive, and lifelong aspect of health and well-being, and it encompasses more than our particular behaviors. Healthy adolescent sexual development involves not only bodily changes, sexual behaviors, and new health care needs, it also involves building emotional maturity, relationship skills, and healthy body image.

Affirm that raising a child gives an adult a unique, long-term opportunity to nurture that child's sexual health. Say that adults who are willing to explore their own sexual health attitudes, practices, and beliefs—as the group will do in this session—are on a path to becoming trusted guides and informants for a range of sexual health issues the children they are raising will face.

Say that sexual health can come into play across many aspects of life, such as romantic relationships, physical self-care, and online behavior. Point out that sexual health is relevant to everyone, whether sexually active or not. It concerns people of all genders; neurotypical and neuroatypical people; and people with mobility limitations, cognitive disabilities, and sensory or mental health challenges as well as those without them. Say that when children are young, no one can predict who they will become and what their sexual health needs are going to be.

Invite participants to take out paper and a writing implement and turn their thoughts to their own sexual health. Say that they will not be asked to share about these reflections. Remind them that, as always, if an exercise makes them extremely uncomfortable, they may remove themselves from the exercise or from the room, whatever they need for self-care.

Ask them to think of an experience, either their own or that of another adult they've been close to, that in some way demonstrates good sexual health. Say that they may reflect and journal about their sexually healthy memory for several minutes. Post these prompts and read them aloud.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- How does this event or situation demonstrate good sexual health?

After three minutes, ask everyone to stop. Lead the group in taking a deep breath together. Invite a succinct check-in: “What was this exercise like for you? Please say *easy, difficult, I’m not sure, or pass.*”

Next, invite them to recall an experience of their own or of an adult they have been close to that was sexually unhealthy. What was the situation or event? Who was involved? What was sexually unhealthy about it? Allow several minutes for journaling, then ask them to stop. Lead them in taking another deep breath and have them repeat the brief check-in.

Acknowledge that the room now holds many different, unspoken stories. Offer this definition of sexual health, from the [World Health Organization](#):

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.

PERSPECTIVES

15 minutes

Say that research shows that receiving a comprehensive sexuality education is a predictor of healthy sexual outcomes. Share this quote from a [2018 article](#) in *The Atlantic* magazine:

Over the past 30 years, more and more American sex-ed classrooms have shifted toward abstinence-only messages and away from more effective curriculums. Yet, over that same time period, Dutch sex education . . . has gotten progressively more comprehensive, and the Netherlands now outperforms most countries on various global metrics for sexual-health outcomes. On average, Dutch and American teenagers have sex for the first time around the same age—between 17 and 18—but with dramatically different results. Teen pregnancy has been on the decline in the U.S. for the past three decades, but American teenagers still give birth at five times the rate of their Dutch peers, who also have fewer abortions.

Note that comprehensive sexuality education teaches information, yet also equips children and youth to communicate comfortably and to seek new information as they mature. Further, Our Whole Lives (OWL) comprehensive sexuality education programs establish an expectation of frank, accurate communication that adults can reinforce at home. Say that when families lack access to comprehensive sexuality education for

their children, the adult role is even more critical. Suggest that the better adults understand their own sexual health, the better they can help children assess risks, take precautions, and communicate frankly.

Distribute Handout 6.1, *Sexual Health Self-Assessment*. Invite participants to take five minutes to think about the statements and respond privately to them as they like. For example, one participant might scan the statements and choose one to delve into by journaling. Another might prefer to consider each statement in turn and decide how true it is for them. Say that they will be invited, but not required, to share from this personal reflection.

When most participants seem to be finished or five minutes have passed, ask for any clarifying questions about the statements on the handout. Answer as best you can. (It is fine to say, "I don't know.") Then lead a conversation using these questions:

- How do you know what is sexually healthy? How do you know whether your idea of sexual health is appropriate for your child?
- What are some ways your sexual health attitudes and behaviors influence your hopes, needs, or fears for your child? What does your child need from you to grow into the attitudes or behaviors you want them to have when they are older?
- Do you have misgivings about activities your child may express interest in? How can you convey health information you think is important, yet not burden your child with your fears?
- How might you feel about putting a bowl of condoms and bottles of personal lubricant in the bathroom for your teenagers to access at any time? How would you feel about another parent or caregiver providing condoms in their home in that way?

Now invite the group to focus on the factual information one might need to maintain good sexual health. Ask, "Is it possible for you to have all the answers your child might need?" (The answer is "No.") Ask, "Could you point your child or youth toward current, reliable, nonjudgmental sources of answers and support?" (The answer is "Yes.")

Post a sheet of blank newsprint and ask, "Where can, or could, your child or youth get information and counsel they might need to maintain their sexual health?" Invite the group to brainstorm. Write their responses on the newsprint. Distribute Handout 6.2, *Recommended Multimedia Resources*. Look at the list together and share ideas for additions.

REFLECTION

25 minutes

Invite the group to enter a time for reflection and sharing. Say you will offer several questions and invite participants to respond, one at a time, as they are moved. Say that everyone will have a chance to speak (or pass), without interruption. Post the Reflection questions and read them aloud:

- At this time, how well are you serving your child with accurate information about sexual health risks and prevention? How comfortable and capable do you feel in seeking sexual health information? How can you do better?
- What sexual health concerns do you feel comfortable discussing supportively with your child? What concerns do you feel less comfortable discussing? What is getting in the way?

TAKING IT HOME

15 minutes

Say that while there are many actions and practices that will support children and youth in sexual health, the most important is that parents and caregivers must develop comfort with frank, comfortable talk about physiology and sexual function. Invite the group into an exercise that will give them practice.

Ask participants to form pairs. (If you have an odd number of participants, partner with a participant yourself. One purpose of this exercise is to practice one-on-one communication.)

Pass around the bowl of question strips from Facilitator Resource 6.1, Questions, and invite each pair to take one. Say that most of the questions were submitted to an anonymous question box by youth in an *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9* program. Say that these are questions that may challenge adults to listen without judgment, to provide straightforward, factual information, and to affirm and support a child's need for more information, a prevention strategy, or treatment.

Ask pairs to take turns, three minutes each, planning how they each would answer if their child asked them this question. One person should plan and practice, while the other listens and supports them. Say:

Answer the question to the best of your ability, without any additional resources, as if your child were asking it while you were traveling somewhere together. Take into consideration the age of your actual child. In addition to providing information, your answer can incorporate humor. It could include follow-up questions.

Ask pairs to make notes, so they can share later with the group, but to avoid writing scripts. Say that, in real life, a script may not be nearby when a child asks a sexual health question.

After three minutes, invite pairs to switch so that the second person can develop an answer to the question. After three more minutes, reconvene the group. Ask volunteers to read their question aloud, say how old they imagine the questioning child to be, and share their answer(s) with the whole group. Affirm participants' comfort with factual use of sexual terms. Affirm warmth, humor, and lack of judgment in language or tone. Once all who wish to have had a turn, point out that working on their answers in this group has been practice for answering their own children's potential questions.

CLOSING

5 minutes

Thank everyone for being together. Say, in these words or your own:

Our children come from us, but their choices will be their choices. Their health will be their health. We can only offer them who we are, what we think we know, and our generous love.

Share the closing reading, "A Doorway from the Past to the Present," a blessing written by Raquel V. Reyes, which is posted on the UUA's [WorshipWeb](#) and used with permission. Say that the author writes in honor of her Cuban heritage, her husband's Puerto Rican–Dominican heritage, and the teenagers in her Miami UU congregation, many of whom, like her own teens, are gender nonconforming. Raquel wanted to give their generation new words to modernize a cultural tradition, the quinceañera, that is important to Latinx heritage:

*You do not have to wear the dress.
You do not have to have a party.
You do not have to dance the waltz con tu papá.
You do not have to accept the gift of your last doll.*

You can break those traditions.

You have right of passage into adulthood simply for being you.

We are thankful that you acknowledge your Latinx heritage.

We are honored to celebrate this milestone with you.

We want you to know the fancy dress can equally be fancy pants.

We want you to know the fiesta is meant to be a souvenir to take into your future.

We want you to know the dance is a doorway from the past to the present.

We want you to know the doll is to remind you not that you are no longer a child, but rather that you are regal;

that you deserve honor

deserve love

deserve to be cherished.

Felicidades, dear one.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 6.1: SEXUAL HEALTH SELF-ASSESSMENT

How ready are you to be a role model and guide for your child's sexual health?

- I am comfortable with my body and my sexuality.
- I can talk effectively with my peers, family, and partners.
- I know my body and how it functions.
- I understand the risks, responsibilities, and consequences of sexual behavior.
- I am able to recognize risks and ways to reduce them.
- I know how to access and use health care services and information.
- I am able to set boundaries when it comes to sex and sexual relationships.
- I act responsibly according to my personal values.
- I am able to form and maintain healthy relationships.

This handout comes from "What Is Sexual Health?" (http://actforyouth.net/sexual_health/) on the website of ACT (Assets Coming Together) for Youth, a partnership of Cornell University and the University of Rochester (NY) Medical Center. ACT for Youth connects research to practice in the areas of positive youth development and adolescent/young adult health. The checklist is based on the work of the New York State Department of Health's Adolescent Sexual Health Work Group.

HANDOUT 6.2: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Sexual health information:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an important source for any kind of public health information.
 - Reproductive health: <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/index.html>
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health: <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/index.htm>
 - Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs): <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>
 - Sexual violence: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/>
 - Birth control methods: <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/contraception/index.htm>
- *Time* magazine article, “What the U.S. Can Learn from the Dutch About Teen Sex.” <http://healthland.time.com/2010/09/09/what-the-u-s-can-learn-from-the-dutch-about-teen-sex/>
- Scarleteen, a website offering youth and young adults information, advice, and support with issues of sexuality, sex, sexual health, and relationships. <https://www.scarleteen.com>
- Go Ask Alice!, an online health question-and-answer resource produced by a team of Columbia University health promotion specialists, healthcare providers, and other health professionals. <http://www.goaskalice.com>
- “Sexually Transmitted Infections,” a fact sheet offered by the Office on Women’s Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.WomensHealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/sexually-transmitted-infections.html> (PDF at <https://www.womenshealth.gov/files/documents/fact-sheets-stis.pdf>)
- *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011)
- *Guide to Getting It On*, by Paul Joannides (Waldport, OR: Goofy Foot Press, 2018)

Parent support:

- Learn about becoming an “askable parent” on a website that offers resources in Spanish as well as English. <http://www.iwannaknow.org/parent.html>
- The American Sexual Health Association offers advice to parents <http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/parents/>
- “Talking to Your Kids about STDs and Safer Sex,” by Jenelle Marie Pierce, on the website of the STI Project. <https://www.thestiproject.com/talking-to-kids-about-safer-sex-stds/>
- <http://www.ashapublications.org/index.php/product/be-an-askable-parent-2/>

Field Code Changed

- Flamingo Rampant publishes LGBTQ-inclusive books for children.
<https://www.flamingorampant.com>
- Sex Positive Families offers a reading list of fun and informative books for all ages. <http://sexpositivefamilies.com/sex-positive-families-reading-list/>

To share with children and youth:

- *Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU*, by Cory Silverberg (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015)
- *The “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Boys* (New York: William Morrow, 2012) and *The “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Girls* (New York: William Morrow, 2012), both by Lynda Madaras
- “For Teens: How to Make Healthy Decisions about Sex,” a page on a parenting website maintained by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Making-Healthy-Decisions-About-Sex.aspx>
- *It’s Perfectly Normal*, by Robie Harris (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2014)
- *Trans+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You*, by Kathryn Gonzales and Karen Rayne (Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2019)
- *Body Drama*, by Nancy Amanda Redd (New York: Gotham, 2008)
- *The New Teenage Body Book*, by Kathy McCoy and Charles Wibbelsman (New York: Putnam, 1992)
- *From Boys to Men: All about Adolescence and You*, by Michael Gurian (New York: Price Stern Sloan, 1999)
- *Growing Up: It’s a Girl Thing*, by Mavis Jukes (Paw Prints, 2008)
- *Sex, Puberty and All That Stuff: A Guide to Growing Up*, by Jacqui Bailey (Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s, 2016)
- *S.E.X.: The All-You-Need-to-Know Progressive Sexuality Guide to Get You Through High School and College* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2009) and *Wait, What? A Comic Book Guide to Relationships, Bodies, and Growing Up* (Portland, OR: Limerence Press, 2019), both by Heather Corinna

FACILITATOR RESOURCE 6.1: QUESTIONS

Cut the questions into strips. Place them in a bowl and invite participants to take one.

- Does it feel good to have sex?
- Can a STI be sexually transmitted even when someone is wearing a condom?
- What is herpes?
- Is it dangerous if someone gets horny and does not have sex?
- Is it true that you can tell the size of someone's penis from the size of their hand or from their shoe size?
- Can a person orgasm without being touched?
- Where is the *clitoris*?
- What is a French kiss and can it make someone pregnant?
- Who made up oral sex?
- Who made up anal sex?
- Why can't someone piss when they have a boner?
- What if my vagina smells bad?

Session 7

Decision Making: Ready, Set, Let Go!

Parents and caregivers, of course, worry about what might happen to their children. As children move toward puberty, adult concerns expand to include harm that can result from a child's own decisions. With sexual decisions, the stakes can feel quite high. While worry can tempt parents and caregivers to exert more control, efforts at control will not help a child develop their own decision-making skills. This session supports adults to prepare, support, and affirm children and youth who will, inevitably, make their own sexual decisions.

The session helps parents and caregivers acknowledge their own fears. It invites them to have faith in their children's maturation process with regard to sexual decision making. The session guides participants to nurture an atmosphere of trust and communication at home to support a child's developing decision-making capacity.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils and pens
- Handout 7.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session or copy it to distribute in the session.
- Preview the video of Al Vernacchio's TED Talk, [Sex Needs a New Metaphor. Here's One . . .](#) (8:17).
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Spotlight questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the two sets of Reflection questions on separate sheets of newsprint and set them aside.

- Write the three strategies provided in Taking It Home on separate sheets of newsprint. Set these and another, blank sheet of newsprint aside.
- Write the Taking It Home question on newsprint and set it aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any are new, briefly review the posted covenant and remind everyone that these agreed-upon norms help establish trust and comfort for the group. Answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Say that this session will help prepare parents and caregivers for an effective role in their children's future sexual decision making.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read the following words from author and psychotherapist Dr. Elizabeth Halsted, published on the *Psychology Today* website:

The reality of hormonal, psychological, and socio-cultural pressures combined with still immature judgement means [youth] need all the help they can get when making sexual choices. They need to be helped to think, and they need help seeing that sex always involves another person with whom they would be in a relationship of some kind. . . .

. . . Anytime teens, or anyone, can be helped to think about being relationship-positive it is all to the good.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence and take in the words just spoken. Lead the group in taking a deep breath together. Say that while the opening words come from an article about teenage boys' sexual decision making, their wisdom applies to all ages and genders.

Ask everyone to share how they might complete this sentence: "When my child makes their own sexual decisions, I am afraid ____." Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question. Make sure each one has an opportunity to speak or pass.

SPOTLIGHT**20 minutes**

Say that you will show the group a TED Talk by sexuality educator Al Vernacchio, who offers a fresh look at sexual activity between consenting partners. Post the Spotlight questions and invite participants to consider them while they view the video:

- Had you heard of the “baseball” model of sexual relationships? If so, how did it affect you, growing up? What emotions come up as the presenter describes it?
- Does the “pizza” model ring true for you? What emotions does it evoke?
- How do you notice your children or youth talking about sexual activity now? What kinds of words, images, and emotions do you observe?
- How might the “pizza” model help you talk with your child and support them in their sexual decision making? Consider your child’s age and developmental stage as well as your comfort with talking about sexual activities.

Make sure everyone has paper and a writing implement. Show the Al Vernacchio video.

When the video concludes, invite the group to silently journal responses to any of the prompt questions or to the video itself. You may wish to read the questions again. Allow five minutes for journaling. Then ask participants to share brief responses to the following question:

- How do you want your children to feel about their future choices and decisions in a sexual relationship?

PERSPECTIVES**15 minutes**

Say you want to share some information about biology and decision making. Say that human brain development normally continues into a person’s twenties; as a result, children and adolescents make decisions differently than adults.

Read the following words from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:

Many parents do not understand why their teenagers occasionally behave in an impulsive, irrational, or dangerous way. At times, it seems like teens don’t think things through or fully consider the consequences of their actions. Adolescents differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions. There is a biological explanation for this difference. . . .

Scientists have identified a specific region of the brain called the amygdala that is responsible for immediate reactions including fear and aggressive behavior. This region develops early. However, the frontal cortex, the area of the brain

that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This part of the brain is still changing and maturing well into adulthood.

Other changes in the brain . . . are [also] essential for the development of coordinated thought, action, and behavior.

Pictures of the brain in action show that adolescents' brains work differently than adults' when they make decisions or solve problems. . . .

Based on the stage of their brain development, adolescents are more likely to:

- *act on impulse*
- *misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions*
- *get into accidents of all kinds*
- *get involved in fights*
- *engage in dangerous or risky behavior*

Adolescents are less likely to:

- *think before they act*
- *pause to consider the consequences of their actions*
- *change their dangerous or inappropriate behaviors*

These brain differences don't mean that young people can't make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. It also doesn't mean that they shouldn't be held responsible for their actions. However, an awareness of these differences can help parents, teachers, advocates, and policy makers understand, anticipate, and manage the behavior of adolescents.

Ask participants to reflect for a moment:

Now that you are an adult, what goes on in your brain when you make a decision? Think of a decision you have recently made. What brain capacity or skills that your child may not yet have helped you reach your decision?

Invite participants to respond in a word or phrase, sharing anything that may have come to mind. When all who wish to have spoken, invite the group to share a moment of gratitude for the gift of their mature, adult brains that can make decisions.

REFLECTION

25 minutes

Suggest that participants take a journey into their own younger self. Say that connecting with a story of their own early sexual decision making can build their empathy for a child facing sexual choices. Invite them to take a moment to remember

an early relationship or sexual event, one that took place well before their adulthood. How did they decide what they would do? Say they will have five minutes to journal, and that they will not be asked to share these responses.

Make sure everyone has paper and a writing implement, then post and read aloud the first set of Reflection questions:

- What was an early sexual or romantic decision you faced?
- What were any logical reasons for making your decision?
- What were any emotional reasons?
- What were any outside pressures?
- How do you feel now about the decision you made then? Why?

After five minutes, end this segment of journaling time. Now invite participants to reflect, as their adult selves, on a more recent sexual or romantic opportunity or situation, a decision they made about it, and how they feel about it now. Ask:

- As an adult facing a romantic or sexual situation, how did you decide to engage or not engage?
- What factors—logical, emotional, or otherwise, such as the effect of outside pressures—guided your actions?

Give the group several minutes to respond in writing. Then lead a brief discussion:

- How complicated is sexual and romantic decision making?
- Why is it difficult for people to talk with others about their sexual and romantic decisions?

Now say:

As children and youth develop into sexual beings, they will make sexual decisions. In order to be a trustworthy support for a child's decision making, adults must find ways to manage their own fears. Think about any fears you hold about how your child might choose to behave sexually. How can you manage those fears? Take a few moments to reflect or journal, using, if you wish, these additional questions as prompts.

Post the second set of Reflection questions and read them aloud:

- What actions you can take that will decrease your fear?
- What information do you need?
- What conversations can you have with a trusted adult?
- Other than attempting to control a child's actions, what might a parent or caregiver do to prevent outcomes they fear?

Give the group several minutes to write or reflect. Then invite participants to respond, one at a time, as they are moved, without interruption. Remind participants of the amount of time each person may have to speak.

TAKING IT HOME

15 minutes

Say that parents and caregivers cannot completely control their child's actions or make all decisions on their behalf. Affirm that the most appropriate and effective way for parents and caregivers to promote good outcomes for their children and youth is to help build their decision-making capability, so that they will be able to make healthy sexual decisions.

Post the three sheets of newsprint on which you have written these strategies:

- Communicate trust and faith in your child's decision making
- Create an environment where factual sexual information is shared frankly
- Support your child's independence from peer and cultural pressures

Say that these are three different long-term strategies adults can use at home to support a child or youth to make healthy sexual decisions. Read each one aloud. Ask if the group agrees these strategies can be helpful. Can the group think of others? Post a blank sheet of newsprint and write down any new ideas that are suggested.

Now invite the group to brainstorm specific actions an adult can take to use these strategies. Offer some examples: praising and affirming your child when they tell you about a well-considered choice they have made; talking with a peer or a professional to work through a fear of your own; researching a sexuality topic to share information about it with your child; initiating a conversation about the "pizza" model of sexual activities with your child. Depending on the size and the energy of the group, you might:

- Form three (or more) small groups and assign a strategy to each. Have each group brainstorm specific actions they might take to carry out their strategy, writing down their ideas. Then regather the large group. Invite each small group to share, then invite additions to their ideas from the larger group.
- Or lead a whole-group brainstorming session. Post blank newsprint and ask for a volunteer scribe so that you can facilitate discussion. Be sure to allocate equal time to brainstorming actions for each strategy.

Affirm that participants now have a large menu of supportive actions and can certainly come up with new ones. Post the Taking It Home question and read it aloud:

- What is one action I can take that will support my child to make their own healthy sexual decisions?

Invite them to journal or work with a partner to put in writing an action they can commit to. If you have time, regather the group and invite participants to briefly share, if they wish, the commitments they have made.

CLOSING

5 minutes

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you share the closing reading, a benediction by Eric Williams that is posted on the UUA's [WorshipWeb](#):

Blessed is the path on which you travel.

Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.

Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.

Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.

Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.

Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 7.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 7.1: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- The Guttmacher Institute’s fact sheet “Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in the United States” offers the most current information on the sexual and reproductive health of teens and young adults in the USA.
<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/american-teens-sexual-and-reproductive-health>
- “Talking to Your Teen about Sexual Health,” a pamphlet published by Alberta (Canada) Health Services. The “Be an Askable Adult” and “Tips & Tricks” sections (pages 7–9) offer general guidelines for parents and caregivers to create an atmosphere that supports healthy sexual decision making.
https://teachingsexualhealth.ca/app/uploads/sites/3/AHS4586_Teen_Workbook_2018Dec4.pdf (PDF)
- “Dear Daughter: I Hope You Have Awesome Sex,” a letter from Ferrett Steinmetz to his daughter, encouraging her to own her sexuality, on the website of The Good Men Project. <http://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/brand-dear-daughter-i-hope-you-have-awesome-sex/>
- “Teenage Brains,” an article by David Dobbs in the October 2011 issue of *National Geographic*, exploring the research on brain science and adolescent decision making and relationships with peers.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2011/10/beautiful-brains/>
- “The Mysterious Workings of the Adolescent Brain,” a TED Talk by cognitive neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore about the development of the teenage brain.
http://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_jayne_blakemore_the_mysterious_workings_of_the_adolescent_brain
- “Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making,” in the Facts for Families guide on the website of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.
https://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/FFF-Guide/The-Teen-Brain-Behavior-Problem-Solving-and-Decision-Making-095.aspx

Today’s video:

- Al Vernacchio’s TED Talk, “Sex Needs a New Metaphor. Here’s One . . .” (8:17).
https://www.ted.com/talks/al_vernacchio_sex_needs_a_new_metaphor_here_s_one#t-136548

Session 8

Consent: Building Healthy Boundaries

Parents and caregivers are rightfully concerned about their children's exposure to unwanted touching or sex. Adults cannot control the sexual opportunities, risks, or coercion their children will encounter. However, parents and caregivers can be role models for self-care and mutual respect. And they can explicitly teach children their rights, their responsibilities, and interpersonal skills related to sexual consent. This session supports parents and caregivers to be positive influences who help their children and youth develop appropriate sexual boundaries and respect those of others.

As parents and caregivers explore consent and how it applies to their children, memories may be triggered of times when their boundaries were violated or they violated someone else's. Keep this in mind. Speak carefully. Be ready to acknowledge and address any comments—from yourself or participants—that could be interpreted as blame of a person who has experienced sexual violence or coercion. When there is sharing, limit personal stories. Strive to keep the session focused on consent as it relates to parenting.

You will want to remind participants that this session is not a therapeutic environment. Be ready to state that you, the facilitator, are unprepared and without the skills to respond therapeutically to a painful memory or a triggered reaction. Acknowledge that while such memories and reactions may possibly arise in the session, this is not a context in which such memories or reactions can be explored. Be clear and specific that (a) a participant may remove themselves from the room as needed for self-care and (b) you are willing and available to talk further, after the session with any participant who feels disturbed. If you lack pastoral training, you may wish to alert your minister or religious educator in advance that this session is taking place.

In 2019, the UUA produced "Faithful Consent" (6:40), a short video featuring interviews with adults of all ages from a variety of faith traditions. After this session, participants may wish to add an extra session to this series in order to engage with this video, its five short companion clips, and the accompanying discussion guide, all of which can be found on the UUA's web page [Creating a Culture of Faithful Consent](#).

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens

- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Handout 8.1, Definitions
- Handout 8.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include any local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, copy it to distribute in the session, or plan to provide it afterward.
- Preview the video of Phen Bowman, Saidu Tejan-Thomas, Joshua Braunstein, and Raymon Johnson performing [Bois Will Be Boys](#) (3:02) in a poetry slam.
- Preview the video [Tea and Consent](#) (2:49) written by Emmeline May and animated by Blue Seat Studios.
- Preview the video of Monica Rivera’s TEDxCSU talk [Body Sovereignty and Kids: How We Can Cultivate a Culture of Consent](#) (16:17). The portion of her presentation you will show in this session begins four minutes and twenty seconds in, so plan on a viewing time of 12 minutes. Cue up the video so that her first words will be “Now, one of the other things I’ve had the opportunity to do . . .”
- Copy Handout 8.1, Definitions, for all participants. Review the definitions so you will be comfortable introducing them to the group.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the first video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Spotlight questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Perspectives questions that follow the Scarleteen website excerpt on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any are new, do a round of name introductions. Quickly review the covenant, and affirm that observing these norms will support the group.

Say that the topic of consent can touch raw emotions, especially for people who have experienced sexual violence or coercion. Invite everyone to take care of themselves during the session. For example, participants are empowered to take themselves out of

the room, if they wish, or to bring attention to another person's hurtful comments. State that the session is not a therapeutic environment. Say that you will strive to keep the session focused on consent as it relates to parenting while acknowledging any participants' personal experiences that may arise. Ask for participants' support in this. Explain (if this applies to you) that you, the facilitator, do not have the skills to respond therapeutically to a painful memory or a triggered response. Tell participants that if they find themselves struggling, you can check in with them after the session or by phone or email and help them connect with a counselor or religious professional.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read these opening words, a rally chant from protest marches against a culture that allows sexual assault:

*Whatever we wear, wherever we go,
yes means yes, and no means no.*

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

5 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask a general check-in question, such as "How is your spirit today?" and invite participants, one at a time, to respond briefly.

Next, say:

Think of an interaction you have had involving sexual or affectional consent. This could involve consent that you asked for, consent you gave, or consent you received. What was the scenario? What was the communication like, around consent?

Invite participants to journal or reflect privately for two or three minutes. Then invite them to share. Suggest they describe in a few words the physical or emotional feelings that the question has brought up, rather than retelling a personal story. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

10 minutes

Invite participants to watch a video of slam poetry about rape culture. Explain that while the poem is highly gendered, sexual harassment and assault can happen to any gender. Warn participants that the poem's language is blunt and raw and may trigger any memories of or associations with rape, misogyny, and sexual assault. Ask them to consider the following questions as they view the video. Post the Spotlight questions and read them aloud:

- What rings true? If anything feels triggering, do you know why?
- How do you feel the performance represents the culture in which you are raising your child? What seems relevant, what does not, and why?

- How might you place yourself in the scenario?
- How might you imagine your child?

Show the video of “Bois Will Be Boys.”

When the video concludes, invite the group to share a minute of silence to reflect on or to journal about any responses to the Spotlight questions or other thoughts, feelings, or issues that have come up.

PERSPECTIVES

35 minutes

Say that today many adults as well as young people are regularly exposed to news about sexual interactions that happen without consent. Yet even many adults are uncertain what consent is. Many are not sure what to call different kinds of unwanted interactions.

Distribute Handout 8.1, Definitions. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the definition of *consent*. Then ask the group to suggest specific words and actions as examples of a partner providing consent before or during a sexual encounter. Be sure that a range of consensual behaviors, verbal and nonverbal, are mentioned. Point out that this definition emphasizes “yes” messages, that is, affirmative or enthusiastic consent. It differs from the historic shorthand of “No means no,” according to which consent might mean just not saying “no.”

You might offer these examples:

- Kissing someone when they ask if they can kiss you
- Answering “Yes!” to the question “Is it okay if I . . . ?”
- Responding “I love it” to the question “How does it feel when I . . . ?”

Say you will show a short video that explains consent in a different way. Show the second video, “Tea and Consent.” When the video has ended, ask:

- Does the metaphor of sharing tea help to clarify what is meant by sexual consent?
- Could the metaphor, or the video itself, help you explain consent to your child or youth? At what age might it be useful?
- Could comparing unwanted tea to unwanted sex be dangerous? Does it trivialize sexual assault?

Now have a volunteer read aloud the definition of *sexual harassment*. Ask participants for examples of behaviors that fit the definition. You can suggest:

- Repeatedly asking someone out on a date after being turned down

- Making comments or asking questions that are too personal
- Talking about one's own or someone else's sexual preferences
- Constantly telling sexual jokes

Say that determining whether something is sexual harassment is not always easy or straightforward, even for adults, which can make it especially confusing for young people. The fact that someone feels harassed doesn't prove that the behavior was harassment. On the other hand, even if someone did not intend to make someone else feel harassed, the impact of their behavior on the other person is still important.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud the definition of *sexual assault*. Ask:

- Is your understanding of sexual assault in line with this definition?
- How easy or hard would it be to discuss sexual assault with your child? Why?

Have another volunteer read aloud the definition of *rape*. Say that this definition was created by the federal Department of Justice, but each state may use its own. Point out that the definition refers to rape only as the act of penetrating someone without their consent. It does not explicitly include other forms of forced sexual activity. For example, What if someone is touched on the genitals without their consent, but without penetration? What if someone is forced to touch the genitals of someone else? What if someone is brought to orgasm without their consent through physical stimulation, but without penetration?

Note that the definition uses the word "victim" for a person who is raped. Explain that many people prefer "survivor," because it is more empowering.

Say you would like to share a post from a Scarleteen discussion board. Ask participants, as they listen, to hold in their minds the four terms they just discussed, particularly *consent*. Read aloud:

"Is what my boyfriend did, rape? Help me deal with this once and for all"

So about two months into our relationship, we both were really eager to consummate but we never had the time or the right place to go at it. And the few times we were able to try, it was unsuccessful because it was my first time and it was really painful for me.

But this one day, we were at my friend's house all alone in her room (she was away). And we tried to do it again, I really wanted to do it, yes. But when he was about half way in, it really hurt and I told him to stop, but instead of stopping he

pushed it in and he stopped after he was inside me (he wasn't moving) and he was just asking me how I felt. I was in too much shock to even say anything . . .

Ask participants to consider the following questions. If the group is large, you might invite them to pair up to discuss them:

- Was consent given? Why or why not?
- Does this scenario meet definitions of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or rape? Why or why not?
- What gender did you assume the author was? Why did you make that assumption?

Say that estimates of the proportion of teenagers who experience some form of violence in their relationships range from 9% to 35% and that actual percentages may be higher, depending on the population being studied and the way questions are phrased. Acknowledge that people of any gender and any age can be vulnerable to unwanted sexual interaction. Then say:

Even though parents and caregivers cannot protect children 100%, they can help children develop a sense of personal agency and clear boundaries when it comes to their bodies.

Invite participants to watch 12 minutes of a [TED Talk by Monica Rivera](#). Explain that she is the director of the Women and Gender Advocacy Center at Colorado State University. Begin playing the video at 4:20, just before Rivera says, "Now, one of the other things I've had the opportunity to do . . ."

When the video ends, ask participants to take a moment to focus silently on Rivera's injunction "Don't raise kids, raise adults" (13:15). Suggest they journal any thoughts or responses.

REFLECTION

25 minutes

Invite participants to reflect on the opening words, the definitions, the videos, and the Scarleteen post. Post and read aloud these questions. Ask that participants choose a question or questions that speak most deeply to them.

- What is your greatest fear for your child?
- What could cause your child to doubt their own wishes or decisions about their body or relationships?
- What could cause your child to misunderstand or disregard another person's lack of consent?
- In what ways have you supported the body sovereignty of your child? In what ways have you undermined it?

- What cultural forces make it challenging to teach a child about consent?
- What parts of your own history might you use in discussions with your child?
Why would you mention those experiences, and when and how would you have such discussions?

Invite participants to take a deep breath together. Then ask that they speak one at a time as they are moved, without interruption. Remind participants of the amount of time each person may speak.

TAKING IT HOME

5 minutes

Say this, or something like it:

As we've explored in this session, people use various skills and strengths when they're finding healthy, consensual boundaries. What can we take home from this session to help our children build communication skills, self-awareness, self-confidence, and a resilience that will enable them to cope with rejection?

Say you will teach an activity for practicing these skills and strengths. The activity is simplified from one in *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9* and can be shared with a wide age range of children and youth at home.

Have participants form pairs, in which one person is A and the other B. Then lead this process:

- Participant A asks B, "May I give you a fist bump?"
- Participant B gives consent for the fist bump, using whatever words or actions they choose.
- A and B switch roles and repeat the question and consent.
- A and B switch roles again, but now A asks for a fist bump and B declines. Again, they choose their own words or actions to decline consent.
- A and B switch roles again and repeat the question and nonconsent.

Regather the large group and process the activity with these questions:

- How did it feel to ask for consent?
- How easy was it to turn someone down?
- What are some ways you communicated consent? Nonconsent? Did anything make communication difficult?
- How did it feel to be rejected?

Affirm that comfort with open communication and the ability to state, accept, and respect boundaries are components of healthy relationships. These are skills it is never too early to nurture in our children.

CLOSING

5 minutes

Ask participants to think about all that was shared and experienced during the meeting and to lift up one comment or experience for which they are particularly grateful.

Ask a volunteer to extinguish the chalice while you share closing words. If time is tight, share this quote from the Caribbean-American poet Audre Lorde:

Only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.

If you have more time, share these words of Juliet Carter's, published in an opinion piece titled [It's Affirmative: Yes Means Yes](#) in the newspaper of the University of California, Santa Barbara:

I was certainly a stubborn child once who didn't want to kiss my relatives, but eventually, I learned it was something that you just have to do, even if you don't always want to. But by forcing even these most innocent interactions, it teaches children that they should do what is asked of them and their bodies, even if it makes them uncomfortable. It's an act of assumption and it teaches a code of putting other people's desires before your own.

Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 8.2, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 8.1: DEFINITIONS

Consent

Agreement freely and thoughtfully given, through mutually understandable words or actions, to participate in a specific sexual activity. If *no* is not an option, *yes* is meaningless. If a person is underage to give consent, too impaired by drugs or alcohol to give consent, or developmentally unable to give consent, *yes* is meaningless.

Sexual harassment

Any unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances or conduct, including requests for sexual favors.

Sexual assault

Any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient.

Rape

The U.S. Department of Justice's legal definition, as of 2012, is "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." The terms *acquaintance rape* and *date rape* are used when a person forces someone they know to have penetrative sex against their will.

HANDOUT 8.2: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- “Faithful Consent” (6:40) is a short video produced by the UUA featuring interviews with adults of all ages from a variety of faith traditions. A discussion guide accompanies the video. Participants may wish to schedule an additional meeting to explore it. <https://www.uua.org/action/create-culture-faithful-consent>
- “Skills for ‘Yes Means Yes!’ How to Ensure Consent, Set Boundaries, and Protect Sexual Safety,” on the Kidpower website. <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/yes-means-yes-consent-and-protecting-sexual-safety/>
- “Cycling through Consent” (3:47), an animated short from Western University (Ontario, Canada), discusses consent through the metaphor of inviting someone to go for a bike ride. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JwIKjRaUaw>
- Loveisrespect is an online resource to educate and “empower youth to prevent and end dating abuse.” <http://www.loveisrespect.org>
 - Guidance on helping your child who may be in an abusive dating situation. <https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-someone-else/help-my-child/>
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline website includes 24-hour helplines by phone and chat, as well as extensive resources for anyone who is or might be experiencing domestic violence. <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- *Dating Abuse: Tools for Talking to Teens* is a free workshop and set of online courses for parents, teachers, and other adults on how to initiate and carry conversations with teens about dating abuse. <https://www.jwi.org/tools>

For children:

- *The Great Big Hug*, by Isy Abraham-Raveson (Mascot Books, 2019), a children’s book about animal friends learning to set and respect boundaries

Today’s videos:

- “Bois Will Be Boys” (3:02), a spoken-word poem performed by Phen Bowman, Saidu Tejan-Thomas, Joshua Braunstein, and Raymon Johnson. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9qr68XQHKY>
- “Tea and Consent” (2:49), written by Emmeline May and animated by Blue Seat Studios. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrxVavnQ>
- “Body Sovereignty and Kids: How We Can Cultivate a Culture of Consent” (16:17), a TedxCSSU talk by Monica Rivera. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvGyo1NrZTY>

Session 9

Social Media: Integrity in a Changing World

Interactive media define the social worlds of many children and most youth today. Because the youngest generation is always on the forefront of new modes of communication, kids may inhabit a social landscape that is a little (or a lot) unfamiliar to parents and caregivers. In this session, participants will gain confidence to help their children navigate social media, even when they themselves cannot be sure of the way.

Parent and caregiver fears for the sexual safety and health of children and youth on the Internet are similar to their fears about sexual activity, unplanned pregnancy, sexual abuse, and STIs. Some fears are warranted, but many are exaggerated. This session helps parents and caregivers understand why social media is important to young people. Rather than unpack the confusion of devices, platforms, and apps, it invites adults to view social media as an arena that offers children and youth opportunities to learn how to behave thoughtfully, considerately, and respectfully.

Parents and caregivers bring a range of attitudes toward social media. Honor each person's personal preference. Encourage participants to talk with children and youth about social media. Do not insist that parents and caregivers need to engage with the many and varied platforms themselves.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils and pens
- Handout 2.1, Circles of Sexuality
- Handout 9.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources
- Copies of Family Media Agreement and Device Contracts from Common Sense Media

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update any links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit

recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.

- Copy Handout 2.1, Circles of Sexuality, for all participants.
- Download, print, and copy for all participants the [Family Media Agreements and Device Contracts](#) available from Common Sense Media.
- Preview the video [The Problem with Parents, Kids, and Social Media](#) (2:53), an episode of Home School, *The Atlantic's* animated video series about parenting, narrated by Ana Homayoun, author of *Social Media Wellness* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2017).
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Spotlight questions on newsprint and post them.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Say that this session's topic is social media. Invite the group to call out a few online "places" where they or their children interact socially with others. Prompt with a few different technologies, such as texting and video conferencing, and the names of some specific apps and platforms, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you read this blessing, excerpted from one by the Rev. Maureen Killoran that is posted on the UUA's [WorshipWeb](#):

Here, in this space, we are called to weave the web of human community.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

10 minutes

Lead the participants in taking a deep breath together. Repeat the chalice lighting words:

Here, in this space, we are called to weave the web of human community.

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then ask everyone to reflect on and then, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: "One way I worry that social media could harm my child is _____."

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question. Make sure each one has an opportunity to speak, or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

10 minutes

Distribute the Circles of Sexuality graphic. Remind the group that as children get older, relationships matter to them more and more. The health of their sexual life will be intertwined with the health of their social life. Say that social media opens a world of communities where their child can practice healthy sexual behaviors. Ask participants to consider these questions silently for a moment:

- How do you want your children to behave in online communities?
- How can you support children and youth to be their best selves online as well as in direct face-to-face connection?

Introduce the Spotlight video by asking participants to think about how they use social media in their own lives. Invite them to collect their own feelings, experiences, and beliefs about the Internet, social media, and practices like “sexting” (sending or exchanging sexually explicit messages or images via text or the Internet).

Show “The Problem with Parents, Kids and Social Media,” an animated video narrated by Ana Homayoun. When it concludes, invite the group to share a minute or two of silence and then to journal, as they are moved, with any responses that have come up.

PERSPECTIVES

25 minutes

Post a blank piece of newsprint and ask participants to call out the names of all the social media sites, platforms, and apps they can think of where people get together online. Prompt with the examples participants mentioned during the opening. Write down all the ones that are named. When the list is finished, ask participants to think of the ones they have profiles or accounts on, regardless of how often they access them. Then ask them to count how many they access at least weekly, and call out their names. On the newsprint, circle or star the ones that are called out.

Now ask which social media sites, apps, and platforms they believe their children or youth have profiles on. How often do they think their children use these sites? Allow participants to respond, popcorn style. Use a different color to circle or star the ones they say their children and youth use frequently, and note any patterns without making any judgments. (For example, you might say, “Many of us are familiar with Facebook” or “It seems Facebook appeals to adults more than kids.” Do not say, “Wow, that’s a lot of time spent on Facebook!”)

Explain that social media trends are peer-dependent and always evolving. One group of friends might prefer one social media platform, while another group communicates on another, and the social media habits of a peer group can change over a few weeks or even a few days.

Ask if participants know of the online game Club Penguin. Explain, as needed, that it was an interactive social game for children ages 6-14 that was available from 2005 to 2017. Club Penguin members could meet and greet one another as penguin avatars in a virtual cartoon world. The virtual chatting was kept safe by automated filters that prevented certain types of content (such as swear words) from being posted, adult moderators who monitored the game, and an "Ultimate Safe Chat" mode that required users to pick prewritten comments from a menu rather than being able to type whatever they wanted to say. Children could only join after a parent had given permission by email.

Each player got a penguin avatar, an igloo to be its home, and the ability to roam the digital winter world of the game. Using in-game currency (bought by parents or earned within the game by the player's actions), players could buy clothes for their penguin, decorations for their igloo, and other items. They could visit other players' igloos and gather at virtual concerts and parties. At its high point, Club Penguin had more than 200 million registered user accounts. Ask participants to consider why it was so popular. What did children get out of Club Penguin? Why were they attracted to it? Invite them to answer based on either personal experience or speculation.

Point out that as children get older, they are likely to want a social life on social media. They will have access to platforms that lack the safety features of Club Penguin. As with other aspects of sexual health, an adult has limited power to protect their child, but can strive to raise an aware, well-informed decision maker who can protect themselves.

Read these quotes from youth in an Our Whole Lives program for grades 7–9:

From a 14-year-old: "Sometimes I wish adults wouldn't be so threatened [by social media]. My dad doesn't want me to get a Tumblr because he thinks it's only for porn."

From a 14-year-old: "I don't really use social media much but I haven't actually heard of actual horror stories from people and it seems to be fun and a good way to spread information. But like anything if it's used too much it can take away from friends and family."

From a 14-year-old: "I wish [my parents] knew that we use [social media] to talk to our friends. Not that it's only bad."

From a 13-year-old: "Social media is stupid."

Tell participants that danah boyd, an Internet scholar, names four aspects of digital media that users of all ages must understand in order to use it safely:

- Persistence: the durability of online expressions and content
- Visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness
- Spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared
- Searchability: the ease with which content can be found

Say that the next reading suggests a caring adult's role. Read the following, also from danah boyd, in a *Time Magazine* op-ed, [Let Kids Run Wild Online](#) (March 13, 2014):

Rather than helping teens develop strategies for negotiating public life and the potential risks of interacting with others, fearful parents have focused on tracking, monitoring and blocking. These tactics don't help teens develop the skills they need to manage complex social situations, assess risks and get help when they're in trouble. Banning cell phones won't stop a teen who's in love [or help them] cope with the messy dynamics of sexting. . . .

The key to helping youth navigate contemporary digital life isn't more restrictions. It's freedom—plus communication. Famed urban theorist Jane Jacobs used to argue that the safest neighborhoods were those where communities collectively took interest in and paid attention to what happened on the streets. Safety didn't come from surveillance cameras or keeping everyone indoors but from a collective willingness to watch out for one another and be present as people struggled. The same is true online.

What makes the digital street safe is when teens and adults collectively agree to open their eyes and pay attention, communicate and collaboratively negotiate difficult situations. Teens need the freedom to wander the digital street, but they also need to know that caring adults are behind them and supporting them wherever they go. The first step is to turn off the tracking software. Then ask your kids what they're doing when they're online—and why it's so important to them.

Ask whether participants have talked with their children or youth about how they use social media. Have they talked, or how ready do they feel to talk, with children about online safety?

Point out that, through middle-school age, it is widely recommended that parents and caregivers be attentive to their children's social media presence and guide them to utilize privacy settings, avoid disclosing personal information, and stay off websites that are intended for adults only. Mention that middle-schoolers and younger children may not understand why it is not safe to share private information with "friends" they only know online.

REFLECTION

25 minutes

Invite participants to consider the video, the Circles of Sexuality chart, and the Perspectives readings. You may offer all of the following questions for reflection or choose one or two you think speak especially to the group and will encourage deep reflection and sharing. Post the Reflection questions and read them aloud.

Invite participants to respond, one at a time, as they are moved. Say that everyone will have a chance to speak (or pass), without interruption, before anyone speaks for a second time. Suggest an amount of time each person may speak. Read aloud the questions you have chosen:

- What mistakes or harm have you witnessed on social media? How have adults dealt with these? (Respect confidentiality; share aloud only stories that are yours to share.)
- Do you agree that communication will be more helpful than control, in helping your children develop healthy behaviors and stay safe online? Why, or why not?
- How often do you have conversations with your children about social media? What are those conversations about?
- When and how might you talk with your child or youth about how in-person conversations and relationships differ from those that exist only online?
- What if family rules differ from local or state laws governing children's presence on and use of social media? From rules set by other families? From the rules of a platform or app?

TAKING IT HOME

10 minutes

Explain that clear communication between adults and the children in their care is a wonderful practice to foster safe and healthy use of social media. Say that you will ask the group to consider some tools and topics for their family communication.

Distribute copies of the Family Media Agreement and Device Contract from Common Sense Media. Point out the sections for elementary, middle, and high school. Allow participants a few minutes to scan the document. Then pose these questions:

- What do you like about the sample contracts?

- What ideas can you take home to help you prepare and support children’s and youth’s use of social media?

Invite people to respond as they are moved. If you have time after all who wish to have spoken, invite them to journal, or to talk with a partner if they prefer, to shape their “take home” learning into an action they can commit to.

Provide a couple of minutes for everyone to answer, in writing:

- What promise can you make now for something you will do, between now and our next meeting, to promote your child’s healthy use of social media?

CLOSING

5 minutes

Share this closing reading from the Common Sense Media website:

As kids begin to use tools such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and even YouTube in earnest, they’re learning the responsibility that comes with the power to broadcast to the world. You can help nurture the positive aspects by accepting how important social media is for kids and helping them find ways for it to add real value to their lives.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. If you haven’t done so yet, distribute Handout 9.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home. Remind the group of the day, time, and place of the next session.

HANDOUT 9.1: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information:

- “A Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety: Sexuality and the Internet,” by Barbara Huberman, RN, BSN, MEd, on the Future of Sex Ed website.
<http://7676www.futureofsexed.org/parents/1293-parents>
- From digital media researcher danah boyd:
 - “Three Conversations for Parents: Navigating Networked Publics,” a blog post. <http://www.zephorio.org/thoughts/archives/2012/09/18/parenting-conversations.html>
 - *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014)
- ConnectSafely.org, offering information and resources for adults and youth on safety, privacy and security online. <https://www.connectsafely.org>
- Common Sense Media, an organization dedicated to helping families make smart media choices and helping parents and caregivers navigate the challenges of raising children in this digital age.
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org>
 - Download the Media Agreement and Device Contracts distributed in this session:
www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/familymediacontracts1.pdf
 - Read the article from which the closing words were taken:
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/5-reasons-you-dont-need-to-worry-about-kids-and-social-media>

Today’s video:

- “The Problem with Parents, Kids, and Social Media” (2:53), an episode of Home School, *The Atlantic’s* animated video series about parenting.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAFSrGX0mxk>

Session 10

Pornography: It's Not Sex Ed

Sexual imagery is so prevalent in advertising, on television, and on the Internet that even young children are exposed to it, despite adult efforts to limit access. Whether they deliberately seek it or not, today's children are likely to encounter Internet pornography before they become teenagers.

Most parents and caregivers accept that sexual curiosity and sexual arousal are normal and healthy. They also know that pornography endangers children and adolescents. Porn may seem to present answers to a young person's questions, yet parents and caregivers will want to understand, and to counsel their children, that pornography is a grossly misleading substitute for comprehensive, holistic, and respectful sexuality education. Porn is intended for adults and is harmful to children and youth.

This session will help parents and caregivers mitigate their children's exposure to sexualized media and pornography. Participants clarify their own attitudes and concerns. They consider how porn can warp young people's expectations regarding appearance, behavior, and sexual experiences as they mature. Participants explore how to broach the topic with their children.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access and a projector
- Covenant on newsprint sheet, from Session 1
- Journals or paper, and pencils or pens
- Handout 10.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources

PREPARATION

- Explore the Recommended Multimedia Resources handout for this session. Update the links as needed. Expand the handout to include local resources. You may email the handout to participants prior to the session, plan to visit recommended websites during the session (this will extend your meeting time), or copy the handout to distribute in the session.
- Preview Cindy Gallop's TED Talk, [Make Love, Not Porn](#) (4:29), about the impact of pornography as sexuality education.

- Look over the Taking It Home scenarios and decide which one you will use. Choose the one you think your participants will find most relevant as a group. You will invite the group to choose the age of the hypothetical child.
- Set up the computer, test the Internet connection in your meeting space, and cue up the video.
- Post the group covenant.
- Write the Focused Check-in prompt on newsprint and post it.
- Write the Perspectives questions on newsprint and set them aside.
- Write the Reflection questions on newsprint and set them aside.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING

5 minutes

Welcome participants. If any are new, briefly review the posted covenant, answer any questions about it, and invite a quick round of name introductions.

Say that this session's topic is pornography. Say that studies show that, even if adults take measures such as limiting their Internet access, today's children are likely to encounter sexually explicit images and pornography by the age of 10. Acknowledge that while there are strategies for keeping kids and pornography apart, this session will not address those. This time together will help participants find solid ground and workable approaches to communicate about pornography with their children.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you share these words:

"There are some things that you see, and you can't unsee them. Know what I mean?" A character in the 1999 movie 8MM says this, and most of us do know what they mean.

May we prepare ourselves to guide our children, who will see images that can hurt them.

Now read this comment from an article in *Clear Nude* magazine (the speaker is describing the music video for Britney Spears's 2004 song "Toxic"):

The first time I can clearly remember being shocked by a brazen show of the feminine form, I was 16 years old watching Britney Spears writhe on a shiny surface in that unforgettable sheer body sock, covered in strategically placed rhinestones. I was, as Britney said in other songs, "not that innocent," while simultaneously "not a girl, not yet a woman."

Twelve years later, it's rare that I am shocked by nudity. The heavy-handed use of women's bodies in commonplace advertisements and television shows borders on inundation. I am sad to say that I am used to it. "Sex sells" is the mantra of our generation.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN

10 minutes

Invite the group to sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Lead participants in taking a deep breath together. Then ask everyone to reflect on and, if they wish, share how they might complete this sentence: "When I think about my child encountering pornography, I worry that _____."

Invite participants to respond briefly, as they are ready. It is fine for there to be some silence between responses. Offer each participant an opportunity to speak or to pass.

SPOTLIGHT

10 minutes

Explain that the group is about to view a TED Talk that was deemed too explicit to post on an all-ages YouTube channel. The presenter points out that when children lack access to comprehensive sexuality education, they can end up learning about sexual behavior and attitudes from pornography. Distribute writing materials as needed. Ask participants to pay attention to how the TED Talk makes them feel. If the video sparks additional concerns about their children's possible encounters with porn, participants might jot these down.

Show the video of Cindy Gallop's TED Talk.

When the video concludes, invite the group to share a minute or two of silence while each participant gathers their responses to the video. Invite people to journal, as they are moved, with any thoughts, feelings, or issues that have come up. After a minute, suggest they continue throughout the session to jot down their thoughts about reasons or ways for parents and caregivers to strengthen their kids against the harm of sexually explicit imagery and pornography.

PERSPECTIVES

25 minutes

Read the following question posted by a youth on a Scarleteen discussion board under the topic "Porn or not?" Invite participants to imagine that they received this question via email from a youth.

Hey there, I was wondering if anyone is familiar with the photographer David Hamilton and his work? What do you think of it? It shows naked or barely dressed girls. . . . Some of my friends have been looking at the photos (and there's even movies like that) and I was wondering if it would be considered

porn or not . . . and if its ok to look at it. I mean there's sex and naked girls . . . but it's not the usual stuff u think of when u think of porn . . . it's more artistic and antique looking, I guess? So would it be considered porn still or is it art? Thanks! Sorry if it's a stupid question or this is the wrong place to ask it. Lol

Post the following Reflection questions, and give participants a few minutes to silently consider and respond in their journals to them:

- How might you answer the young person's question?
- What's your definition of porn?
- Why do you think it matters to this youth whether the photographs are porn? What additional, unspoken questions might be on this youth's mind?
- Why might a young child be interested in porn?
- Why might an older child or youth want to see it?

After participants finish writing, ask if any wish to share their definitions of pornography, or anything else from their reflections. When all have had a chance to speak once if they wish, say that pornography is defined differently across different cultures and peoples. There is general agreement that pornography includes graphic and explicit depictions (in words, images, or both) of sexuality, but such depictions are not always considered pornography, and there is no consensus about what exactly makes them pornographic or not.

Invite the group to brainstorm ways that pornography is harmful for children and youth. You may wish to post some blank newsprint and jot down answers. Here are some important ideas to include; you may also use these to prompt contributions:

- No matter what your child's gender or sexual orientation, porn provides unrealistic information about sexual activity and desire.
- Pornography can create confusing, guilty, and uncomfortable feelings that young people are unprepared to manage.
- Pornographic scenarios are unlikely to demonstrate respect, consent, or safer sex practices.
- Pornographic images are created to entertain adult viewers and make money for producers. Most of the situations depicted are unrealistic.

Once you have established a solid list of pornography's harms, say you will read aloud from an optional workshop in *Sexuality and Our Faith for Grades 7–9*, a Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ program designed to companion the Grades 7–9 OWL curriculum:

Pornography can confuse and misinform young teens, in part because the performers are adults paid to have sex for entertainment's sake. It can be difficult

for young viewers to distinguish between the exaggerated, genitally focused sex in porn and the realities of caring, mutually respectful, whole-body sexual interactions off-camera. Young teens may assume that what they see onscreen is how they should look or behave if and when they do become sexually active. Depending on the media they access, the messages they may receive include the following:

- The consent and pleasure of sexually receiving partners (those who are penetrated, regardless of gender, but disproportionately female) are less important than the penetrating partner's sexual satisfaction.
- Unprotected sexual intercourse is the norm.
- Sexual encounters typically lack kissing, caressing, tenderness, time for arousal, and humor.
- Sexual encounters are typically free of mishaps, laughter, play, and interruptions,
- Sexual encounters consist primarily of oral, vaginal, or anal penetration.
- Sexually active people rarely deal with visible physical or emotional challenges, disabilities, or problems with sexual function.
- Sexually attractive people are typically not diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or body type.

Internet pornography is enticing because the images can be arousing and can satisfy curiosity. In addition, the web provides access to an endless stream of new, increasingly graphic images. Young teens may not differentiate between real sex, fantasy, and material that is intended to degrade and humiliate onscreen participants. They may not comprehend the impact pornography may have on their own sexual fantasies and real-life experiences, and they may not realize that people can be sexually desirable without looking like porn performers. If they learn about sexual activity from porn, they will not realize the importance of communicating about boundaries, consent, safer sex, and likes and dislikes. They will be unlikely to recognize the importance of sexual equity and mutual pleasure in healthy sexual relationships.

REFLECTION

20 minutes

Pause for a moment. Invite participants to take a deep breath together. Then ask the group to reflect on the video, the chalice lighting words, the readings, and their conversation thus far. Say you will post and read a set of prompt questions, allow time for reflection and journaling, and then invite responses. Suggest that participants focus on a question or questions that speak most deeply to them.

Post the Reflection questions and read them aloud:

- Once a child has seen porn, how can parents and caregivers respond? What are the messages that you, as an adult, want to share?
- How comfortable would you be having a conversation about pornography with your child? How comfortable might they feel discussing it with you?
- How might your household's values or faith principles provide a foundation for a conversation about pornography?
- What safety measures are you taking / can you take to ensure that children will not access any porn adults may use in your home?
- What can you do to help your child understand the difference between pornography and sex education?

Allow a few minutes for journaling. Then invite participants to respond, one at a time, without interruption.

TAKING IT HOME

15 minutes

Say that today's Taking It Home activity is designed to help make parents and caregivers more comfortable having conversations with their children about pornography. Make sure everyone has writing materials, and ask participants to write down situations in which they would want to raise the topic of pornography with their child or youth. If participants are stuck, suggest examples like discovering porn on your child's cell phone or laptop, overhearing your child discussing porn with a peer, and passing an adult store together.

When participants finish writing, say they will now have the opportunity to practice a conversation about pornography with a partner. One partner will take the role of parent or caregiver while the other plays a child or youth responding to the adult, and then they will switch.

Share this advice from the Help Your Teen Now website. It is from an article titled "Were Your Kids Introduced to Pornography at a Friend's House?" Read:

It can be easy to panic and try to stress to your child that pornography is bad if that's how you feel, but sexuality is human nature. Shaming your child for viewing pornography can send them mixed messages about how they should and shouldn't feel about sex.

Have participants find a partner and decide who will begin as the adult. That person chooses one of the situations they wrote down, explains it to their partner, and begins a conversation as though their partner were their child in that situation. The "adult" and "child" should talk for about two minutes. After that time, invite pairs to switch roles,

giving the other partner a chance to be the adult and start a conversation using one of their own situations. Stop the pairs again after two minutes.

If you have time, instruct participants to find a new partner and role-play two more conversations. In their second turn as the adult, participants can repeat the same situation they chose before or try a new one.

Reconvene the group. Process this exercise by posing the following questions, inviting participants to think or journal about these questions:

- What from this role play might help you effectively open a conversation about porn with your child?
- What “do’s” and “don’t’s” did you discover that will help you?
- What aspects of your role play were difficult for you? Why?

Invite people to respond as they are moved. When all who wish to have spoken, invite them to shape their “take home” learning into an action they can commit to. Read these questions aloud:

- How will you begin to engage your children in conversations about pornography?
- What is one action you can take to become more aware of your own attitudes and behaviors regarding pornography?
- What is a conversation you need to have with a partner or trusted friend?

Invite participants to answer this next question on paper:

- What promise can you make now for something you will do, between now and our next meeting, to foster clear and healthy communication about pornography with your child?

CLOSING

5 minutes

Share the following quotation from the Protect Your Kids website:

Pornography’s pull is powerful, and even really good kids get caught in its trap.

When parents discover their child has been seeking out pornography, they often feel a toxic combination of fear, anger, and guilt. The most important step you can take for your child’s healing is to first recognize and sort through your own emotions.

Why is this so important?

Your negative feelings can cause your child to feel a lot of shame. Shame will not only hinder a child's ability to heal, but will often push them further into secrecy and addiction. So before you begin helping your child, please take a moment to steady yourself.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice. Thank the group for their participation. If you haven't done so yet, distribute Handout 10.1, Recommended Multimedia Resources, for participants to take home.

HANDOUT 10.1: RECOMMENDED MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

For more information and assorted perspectives:

- “The Porn Conversation,” a project by Erica Lust and Pablo Dobner, offers guidance on how to talk to your kids about porn. <http://thepornconversation.org>
- “What Teenagers Are Learning from Online Porn,” by Maggie Jones, *New York Times Magazine*, February 27, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>
- “5 Things Your Child Needs to Know about Porn,” by Amanda Grossman-Scott. <https://educateempowerkids.org/5-things-child-needs-know-porn/>
- Protect Young Minds is an organization whose mission “is to empower parents, professionals and community leaders to protect young kids from pornography, and promote healing from any sexual exploitation.” <https://protectyoungminds.org>
- The Australian government’s Office of the eSafety Commissioner offers thoughtful tips for parents and caregivers on ways to limit and mitigate children’s and youths’ encounters with sexual content online. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents>
- Dr. Marty Klein is an expert on sex and porn addiction. <http://www.martyklein.com>
- Susie Bright is a pro-porn feminist. <http://susiebright.com>
- “Internet and Social Media” (7:26), an Our Whole Lives training video on online safety from the UUA Library of Video and Audio Files. <http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/internet-and-social-media>
- “How to Talk to Your Kids about Porn,” a *Huffington Post* article by Caroline Bologna (October 20, 2018). https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2018/10/20/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-porn_a_23566969/

For youth:

- “5 Reasons Porn Is Not Sex Ed,” a *Teen Vogue* article by Brittney McNamara (July 10, 2017). <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/porn-is-not-sex-ed>

Today’s video:

- Cindy Gallop’s TED Talk, “Make Love, Not Porn” (4:29). https://blog.ted.com/cindy_gallop_ma/