



Healthy Sexuality Education as Violence and Abuse Prevention:  
Tying it Together with Roads To Family  
EPAL Episode 2.7 Transcript

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Total time: 37 min 58 sec

Nicole Cunningham 0:00

Thank you for listening to this short recording. I'm Nicole Cunningham, Abuse Prevention Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force. In this series of SATF's Exploring Prevention Audio Library, we connect with people across Oregon to learn more about creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. Today, we're joined by Rachel Ginocchio, from Roads To Family, and we'll get to hear more about some of the exciting projects that Roads To Family working is on. Let's start with some introductions. Rachel, would you like to let us know who you are and what you do?

Rachel Ginocchio 0:26

Oh, absolutely Nicole, thank you for having me. My name is Rachel Ginocchio and my pronouns are she/her. And the name of my organization, like you said, is Roads To Family, and I'm a sexuality health educator and writer in Portland, Oregon. So a little bit about my professional background, I hold a master's degree in Public Health and I got that from the University of Washington. And I began my career in sexuality education, oh my gosh, it's been a long time Nicole, I would say maybe about 25 years ago. And so over the years, I have held various positions across public across private and nonprofit organizations. And so I thought maybe I'll just highlight a couple of my favorite, my favorite jobs that I had. So I was a Health Communications Specialist for the American Sexual Health Association, which is a fancy way of saying that I worked on the national STD, the sexually transmitted disease, hotline as it was, as it was called back then. I directed two Planned Parenthood clinics in Portland, Oregon. And also way back when Nicole, I co-developed a five year strategic plan for public health genetics in Oregon. So the human genome had just been mapped and the state was trying to figure out what the implications would be for the health of Oregonians. And it was a really super unique project. And I've always been fascinated with DNA, I'm interested in like, how does it get passed to the generations? And what meaning do we attribute to DNA? Right? What does it mean, in terms of our identity? What does it mean, in terms of our relatedness? And how we think about family?

Nicole Cunningham 2:08

That's just amazing, Rachel, thank you for sharing all of that. I, we have always felt that you bring such a unique perspective to the work and that you have such a multi-faceted approach to the work that you do

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and I think that your background really underscores probably why that is and why you come with so many great ideas and questions when we're in space together. So thanks for that background. That's, that's amazing. Tell me about your current work in your organization Roads To Family.

Rachel Ginocchio 2:34

Yes, of course and thank you for those compliments. Yeah, so now I have Roads To Family and I get to focus on exactly what I love to do, which is sexual health. So in my work, I teach puberty class at a couple of private schools in Portland. And before the pandemic, I ran a neighborhood workshop called pizza in puberty. And the idea is for an adolescent to bring along a trusted adult, and we eat food and we chat about puberty basically. We talk about the intellectual, the social, the emotional, the physical changes of puberty, and it's usually a lot of fun. I was just thinking about a story, of a funny story, I was going to share a funny story with you because it just came up recently. I had a mom who told her daughter that they were going to a workshop at a sandwich shop. So the youth didn't realize until she saw the name of the workshop on the door, she didn't realize that it was about puberty. She thought she was going to workshop to learn how to make sandwiches. Oh my gosh, she was like, really outraged at the beginning. And then she ended up being like the best student in the class. She was interested, she was engaged, he asked a ton of questions. So I have many fun stories from pizza and puberty.

And it's the purpose is really to get the adults and the adolescent talking together. And also just to sort of model a complete comfort in talking about all of the topics within sexual health. And then I have a corollary to pizza and puberty, which is brains and brews, so that's the adult workshop corollary. The tagline is learning and growing together and becoming a much wiser parent. And so a local, I would invite a local expert in and they would talk about a salient topic. We did adolescence and anxiety, teens and technology, how to be an askable adults, and we did sexting and pornography more recently. And so we share, we hear from the expert and then we share personal stories, we kind of talk about our successes and our challenges, and it's really just a fun way for the adults to share and learn from each other.

Nicole Cunningham 4:42

That is so cool. It sounds to me like really you're creating spaces where we can have conversations that might otherwise be difficult to have or conversations that folks may not feel like they're equipped to have on their own. You know, thinking about parents and young people who are thinking about topics like sex and puberty and sexuality and all of that, is that kind of the mission of Roads To Family is to make those things more accessible?



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Rachel Ginocchio 5:04

Yes, absolutely to make those conversations accessible, and to go further than that, to have fun with those conversations, to explore the topics, to not have any shame or hesitation, but just to know that sexuality, and we can talk about this more later, but sexuality is part of who we are as a human. And so why not? Think about it and talk about it and explore it in a way that's really positive, and really engaging for youth.

Nicole Cunningham 5:34

Absolutely. And Rachel, how did you how did you get to this place where you found this role that Roads To Family could play? And what were some of the ideas that kind of led you down this road to where you are now?

Rachel Ginocchio 5:46

Okay, so many years ago, I took a break from my professional life to create my own family. So my husband and I struggled with infertility and it took us seven years to create our family. And our family came through adoption and in vitro fertilization. Additionally, I come from a three generation family created through foster care, my dad, adoption, my sister and my daughter. And so I share that only because my current work, you know, comes from my professional interest. But it also is greatly shaped by these deeply personal experiences. And so I've been questioned about my family pretty much my entire life, right. And so I love talking about what makes us related, and what creates family. And I am also just really curious, but also to be totally honest, like a little bit baffled about all of the judgment that comes around, who deserves to create family, what is family supposed to look like? So in my work, I really want to address these harmful biases, and replace them with just like a greater acceptance and respect for all different kinds of family. So since my kids are older, I have a high schooler and a middle schooler now, I decided to reemerge in the field of sexual health. So I had been doing sexual health, I took a big chunk of time off, 15 years off to raise my own family. I was a full on mom. And then I reemerged into the field. Okay, when I reemerged into the field, sexuality education looked totally different than when I had exited it. Right? Sex Education used to be all about anatomy, right? So it was all about our body parts and how they work to create a pregnancy and spread sexually transmitted infections, right? So the loud and clear message always was that if you don't want to get pregnant, or if you don't want to spread a sexually transmitted infection don't have sex.



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Nicole Cunningham 7:46

Absolutely. And we know that there's so much more nuanced there. And I can imagine that you have lots to say there on that nuance so I won't stop you.

Rachel Ginocchio 7:57

So Nicole, yes, what you just said, just hit the nail on the head and it's the perfect lead in. So the gold standard now for sex education is what we call "comprehensive sex education" or "comprehensive sexuality education" right? Woohoo! And it still includes that topic of anatomy and reproduction, but it throws into the mix a whole bunch of other topics. We're talking about gender identity and expression, relationships, sexual orientation, body positivity, anti-bullying, boundaries and consent, and hopefully, the topic of pleasure. Comprehensive sexuality education is also a really powerful tool to discuss concepts like gender equality, LGBTQ issues, power and oppression, capitalism, and my favorites, reproductive justice. But are you ready? I have to tell you my beef with comprehensive sexuality education before we tout it's why it's amazing in terms of violence prevention, I have to tell you my personal beef with it. Here's my beef. So when we think of really good comprehensive sexuality, education, it includes all of these other topics, right? So all of the other topics within sexuality education have really expanded, right, but the discussion that we keep having around human reproduction is still the same conversation we've been having since the beginning of time. Right? It's a really neat and tidy message to say, babies are the result of sex. So if you don't want to have the baby don't have sex.

Nicole Cunningham 9:34

Absolutely.

Rachel Ginocchio 9:36

Right.

Nicole Cunningham 9:36

Absolutely. Yes, Yes.



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Rachel Ginocchio 9:39

And so that's a problematic message, right? One, it's totally heteronormative and so not helpful on many accounts. Two, we have so much data now that tells us that it's not an effective message for preventing unintentional pregnancy, right? It's in fact the same message that's at the heart of abstinence-only education which we know doesn't delay first intercourse, doesn't prevent unintended pregnancy, doesn't prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, right, though and then the kicker for me is that the message that babies are a result of sex, it's also it's no longer true, like it's become inaccurate.

Nicole Cunningham 10:16

Sure, definitely, especially with there being so many different routes now for making families and for creating them. Absolutely.

Rachel Ginocchio 10:22

And so, right, so there is this amazing world of science and technology out there. And the science and technology enables to create babies and make families in so many different ways, right? We have help from surrogates, we have help from them sperm egg and embryo donors, we have insemination, we have in vitro fertilization. So my focused mission is to change the way we talk about human reproduction so that includes all of the ways we create pregnancies and create family.

Nicole Cunningham 10:55

Rachel, that's amazing. And I think that I really appreciate the way that you framed this in the context of comprehensive healthy sexuality education, right? Because I think that you're right, we're seeing so much progress in that movement. And we're seeing so much expansion when it comes to what kind of concepts are included in this education, and how we're talking about things like gender, sexuality, consent, bullying, all of those things. But I think that it's it really is a gap that it feels like there's so much opportunity there for you and for others doing the same kind of work that you're doing to really, exactly like you're saying, hone in on that place where we're not thinking more expansively about what families and what the word family even means and what it looks like, right. I think that that's, that's amazing that you've identified that place, and that you're able to speak to it in such a way that makes so much sense, right in a way that really ties it back to how we can package all of this together to give medically accurate and comprehensive information that not only allows our young people to feel informed and empowered, but then helps us, we know, down the road when we're thinking about how are we preventing, you know,

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violence, abuse, these different kinds of things that often show up when folks don't have access to information like this. So Rachel, in that vein, tell us a little more about why this matters to you. Why is it important that we're tying all these things together and being more comprehensive in our approach with young people?

Rachel Ginocchio 12:18

When we fail to address the complexities of human reproduction, we stigmatize youth and their families. Right? We know that less than half of US families are comprised of a heterosexual, married man and woman raising their genetically related children. So these days we have single parent families and families with LGBTQ AI adults, adults that are co-parenting, families with multiple adults. We have divorce and remarriage we have blended and extended families, families created through adoption and foster care, families created through sperm, egg and embryo donation and surrogacy. And we have chosen families with and without kids. So really, we need to stop talking about nuclear families as the norm, they are not the norm anymore. So when I say that most families don't look like the Cleavers from Leave it to Beaver, right kids these days don't know what I'm talking about but I think the adults do.

Nicole Cunningham 13:19

Absolutely.

Rachel Ginocchio 13:20

Another reason, Nicole, that I think it is important to include a more truthful and complex explanation of human reproduction is that youth are growing up without a vocabulary in which to talk respectfully about families in their community. And the other thing that's happening is that teachers don't have the skills to be inclusive in their classrooms. So I was just talking to a teenager who was donor conceived. And she said that when she was in kindergarten, the kids wanted to know where her dad was right? And they insisted that she had a dad because everybody has a death, right? That you need a dad to make a baby. And she said she didn't have a dad, she had a donor. And the kids wanted to know what this was, of course, and she had to explain it to them, right, even though most of them didn't even know how babies were made to begin with, right and she was only five or six years old. So we talked about how it really should have been the responsibility of the adults, the parents, the caregivers, and the teachers to explain human reproduction in a way that included her and included her family. A lot of times people will question whether having a more inclusive explanation of human reproduction is relevant to today's youth. They think that youth aren't

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interested in something that has to do with their future family making endeavors. And it isn't just about their future fertility, it's about helping them make healthy sexual health decisions in the now. So we know that lesbian and bisexual youth have an equal or perhaps higher rate of unintended pregnancy than their straight peers. How much of this stems from pressure to wanting to fit in or wanting to conform to a cultural norm, you know, probably a lot. So if we started at a young age and educated youth about all the ways humans reproduce and create family, perhaps that would help them see a de-stigmatized future for themselves, which I think would impact their current sexual health choices.

Nicole Cunningham 15:20

Absolutely. And not only, you know, thinking about their current sexual health choices, but I go back to that piece of, the more education and the more folks or young people are being able to access medically accurate information, the more likely they are to feel empowered to ask other questions, right? How, how are we modeling for young people that we want them to be curious, we want them to understand that they have a voice and options, and that they're not just living in a world that's run by adults, and then only adult voices and decisions matter, right? Young people are an entire section of our population and have rights and they deserve to feel valued and empowered. And I think that your approach to this is really in alignment with that, right? It really gives more weight to the voice of the young people, which feels crucial.

Yeah, like, absolutely. And I do think that for, you know, especially for LGBTQ youth, but all youth, youth that are asexual, youth that have intersex conditions, youth with medical conditions, right or those that one day dream of perhaps being a single parent, right? They all might need to rely on knowledge about assisted reproduction to start their own families. So it sort of enables them, it gives them information so that they can sort of dream, their best dream for the future as well.

That's so beautiful and so important in the work, that idea of you know, dreaming, and being able to imagine what their own future looks like. And, you know, giving them the tools for that. I think, regardless of where folks fall in terms of their beliefs about sexuality education, I think we can all agree that we want, we want our young people to feel like they can imagine for themselves, the world and the future they want, right, and that they can grow up in a way that helps them feel valued and like they have a place. And I think that's a really big outcome of what you're doing.

Rachel Ginocchio 17:14

Absolutely, yes. Beautifully said.





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Nicole Cunningham 17:17

Well, with that, would you mind telling us about how you're doing some of this work? What are some of the projects that you're working on to get closer to this goal that you have?

Rachel Ginocchio 17:25

Yeah, um, I have two main projects going on right now, I just I love both of the projects and I'm super excited about them. So I just signed an author's agreement with Lerner Publishing, and I'm going to write a middle grade book that's for 10 to 14 year olds, about babies and how families are created. And so I've been interviewing families, and I'm learning about how their family got to be a family. And then into those narratives, the family narratives, I will weave the science behind reproduction. And so how does insemination work to create a pregnancy? How does in vitro fertilization work? I'm hoping that the stories collectively create a collage or a mosaic of experiences all shaped by people's different intersecting identities and perspectives. And in the end, the goal is to promote a more inclusive version of human reproduction that really celebrates every means of conception, every means of gestation, and every family.

Nicole Cunningham 18:26

That's just amazing. I think that the more the more that we can get our folks access to literature resources that they see themselves reflected in, it's just such a great idea. We're so excited for you and that, that partnership that you've been able to get into there, we can't wait to see what that looks like.

Rachel Ginocchio 18:44

Thank you. I'm working hard on it. The fun part has been interviews and now I have to figure out how to put all of those into a book. In that part it's my first rodeo, I don't know how to do it. I'm going to have fun with the interviews and not worry about that part yet.

Nicole Cunningham 18:57

Absolutely.





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Rachel Ginocchio 18:59

I was also recently co-awarded a grant from the Oregon Department of Education and it expands the explanation of human reproduction. I've partnered with Portland Public schools, the Oregon chapter of GLSEN, which advocates for LGBTQ inclusive schools and Advocates For Youth, which is a nonprofit organization focused on healthy sex education. And I have amazing partners from each of these organizations, as well as tremendous support from the Oregon Department of Education. And so we've been working hard to develop youth-driven lessons for high school. And it's really neat, Nicole, because the education materials will be open source. So they're available to any educator that's interested in sort of exploring this age old topic of how babies are made, but exploring it in a really new way.

Nicole Cunningham 19:48

That's incredible. That open source piece is so so important too, because we know that we have lots of different needs across the state when it comes to what our educators and our school systems and our partners are able to access what their, you know, what feels useful to them in their communities. And I think that having that be accessible and available in that way is just such a great way to remove some of those barriers and to make sure that this information is accessible and available to folks who need it, regardless of where they are and, you know, their connection to the Portland metro area, right, which we oftentimes see as a barrier for folks in other parts of the state.

Yes, I love the fact that educators can take it and they can adapt it for their communities, right. And so yeah, I'm really excited to be able to participate in open learning sourced materials.

Thank you so much for that Rachel those sound like some incredible projects and we're going to be so excited to see how they turn out and how you know how this journey goes for you as you're adapting and developing those. So one thing that I want to I want to kind of highlight here is that we are in April, which is in Oregon, both Sexual Assault Action Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. And we know that there is some really significant and just comprehensive overlap when it comes to thinking about sexuality, sexual violence prevention, child abuse prevention, and all these different ways that we are preventing violence and abuse. And I'm curious if you can talk to us a little bit about what you think is important for people to know in your opinion about how sexuality education and violence and abuse prevention overlap.

Oh, my gosh, yes such a such a good and important questions. So I'm highly opinionated on this. And I think that comprehensive sexuality education is one of the best ways to prevent violence and abuse. So I talked a little earlier in our conversation about the components of comprehensive sexuality education, but I realized the last few minutes, I have really focused on sort of my passion piece, which is this anatomy and reproduction piece. I think there are lots of avenues for improvement in this aspect. It is only one small part of comprehensive sexuality education. And I think it's kind of ironic, Nicole, because if you think about it,

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right, when we say the words, sex education, many parents, caregivers, and teachers push back against it, because they think sex education is about sex, that very narrow piece that I am focused on, but that's what they think sex education is about. Right? And so when we talk about the need for sex education at every grade level, they think it's about teaching kindergarteners about sex. And that's not at all what it is about, right? Sex education should be about everything that happens before sex is even part of the discussion, right? And way before sex even happens. Can I elaborate on this part a little bit? Is that okay?

Comprehensive sex education is about giving youth the information and the skills that they need to develop healthy relationships with themselves and with other people. It's about being in relationships for the right reasons. And it's about choosing good friends and being a good friend. It's about consent, before we touch anyone in any way, or send a photo around, we have to check in and even have a conversation about what feels good and what doesn't. It's about developing positive self-esteem and self-worth, so that we don't become bullies. And so that we know how to stand up to bullies, and we know how to get help when we are being bullied. It's about knowing how we feel, managing those feels and communicating our feelings in a way that gets our needs met. It's about exploring how our family and our friends in our communities, and the media in particular, influences our decisions and the outcomes of those decisions. It's about valuing diverse perspectives. It's about setting goals and learning how to make super smart decisions so we can reach those goals. And these days, um comprehensive sexuality education is also about learning how to navigate and manage our digital lives right in a really respectful way. So Nicole, did I mention sex once?

Not in any way aside from the word!

Rachel Ginocchio 24:16

Right? I didn't, right? Yes, the pieces around anatomy, puberty and reproduction are really important. They're my favorite subjects, right? But those are just that small part of comprehensive sex education. We want students to know about their bodies and pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, yes, but that's one piece of it. So to address your question, is that together, the information and the skills that youth get from comprehensive sex education are the ones they want, so that they when they enter relationships with other people, and I'm talking about whether the relationship is a friend in elementary school, a teacher, a mentor, a religious leader, a coach, or romantic partner of course. When they enter into those relationships, youth themselves want to make sure that those relationships are healthy ones. Sex Ed skills enable youth to recognize healthy relationships, but also the unhealthy ones. They want to be able to recognize manipulation, coercion, oppression, and harmful power dynamics, right so that they can avoid them. What is much more important is the flip side of all of that. Sex Ed skills help youth understand that they do not have the right ever to be coercive, manipulative or oppressive. We want to teach youth to avoid being harmed. We want to support them when they are harmed. But our focus is in preventing the harm from happening in the first place.

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Nicole Cunningham 25:55

Rachel, I am, I am just off audio clapping here. And I'm so excited for this focus and the fact that you have identified that that is such a huge piece of the work right? I think that oftentimes we find that people have a hard time with the idea that young people grow into adults, right, and adults who perpetrate harm or cause harm oftentimes, you know, were young people who didn't have the skills or who had experiences that were that were abusive or harmful in themselves. And so I think it's really crucial that we're, we're highlighting that piece of giving folks the skills they need when they're young to also grow up and develop into successful and healthy adults. Absolutely.

Rachel Ginocchio 26:37

Yes, yes. What you just said, Nicole, when I think about comprehensive sexuality education, might prevent youth, but those youth are going to grow into adults. So we want those, the youth and the adult, right, we want to prevent them from perpetuating the bullying, the harassment, the psychological aggression, the stalking, the violence, the child abuse, the child sexual abuse, the neglect, you know, and you know, this, you know, the list goes on, right. And I am also really glad that you mentioned violence against ourselves, because I think injury and suicide can also be prevented from comprehensive sexuality education. This is why it's so important to have comprehensive sexuality education in school. Just yesterday, I read an article in The New York Times, I don't know if you saw it, but there was a young woman in England who started a platform called Everyone's Invited. She created a space where young women and girls could share their accounts of sexual violence and sexism and misogyny and thousands and thousands of young people have shared their experiences, experiences that happened in school. And in the article was a statistic that said that 58% of girls, between the ages of 14 and 21 have been publicly harassed in their learning environments. Those statistics are heartbreaking to me. So do I think that comprehensive sex education should be taught in school? Yes. And do I think it has a direct role in preventing all kinds of abuse and violence? Absolutely.

Nicole Cunningham 28:16

Cannot agree more and thank you so much for that, for tying in that piece of this is not just an issue that you know, affects a few young people or, you know, young people who are female identified only right, like, these are things that we need to be talking about with all of our young people and making sure that folks have access to education and understanding of the things that will help them protect themselves, but also, like you said, stop the cycle, because we know that these things are impacting all of our young people,

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right? Even if you're maybe not one of those 58% of young people who've experienced the harassment, you probably have a friend who has, you probably have someone that you care about greatly, who has, you know, that's that comes back to, we're talking about things like how to be a good friend, how to how to show up for the people you care about when you have relationships, and when you want to, you know, be a positive force in that life. And I think that what you're saying here really hits that on the head. I also appreciate that because it ties back for me to that idea of giving youth a voice right and giving them, you said earlier, there's this piece of you know, youth want this information, they want to know how to access skills, and they want to understand what's going on. And when we're not providing that or when we're not prioritizing that essentially, what we're doing is saying that what you're asking for and your voice, and all of that doesn't matter, because we as adults have ideas about what you need, and what's best for you. And so I just think that this whole idea of giving, giving them what they are asking for and giving them what is necessary based on the real world experiences they're having. I just think that's so critical and such an important lens that you are using, right when you're when you're thinking about the messaging here.

Rachel Ginocchio 29:55

Yes, absolutely.

Nicole Cunningham 29:57

Well, you have just so many amazing things going on and so much that is going into your planning around these things. I'm wondering if you can tell me about any, any challenges that you've run into, in developing these ideas or, you know, getting to a place where you're working on curricula or these books? How did you get here? And are you having challenges that you had to overcome?

Rachel Ginocchio 30:22

Yeah, gosh, um, yes. Many challenges, right that's what makes it fun, I suppose. I guess it's getting past the challenges that are fun. But it is, I feel like there's two huge uphill battles that I wonder if there is a point where we will, we will summit the top or not. But okay, um, we kind of a little bit touched on the first one. So then I think comprehensive sexuality education, that term in and of itself is a mouthful, most of the time people don't know what I'm talking about and if they do, there's a lot of pushback. So there's a huge marketing problem with just that term, comprehensive sexuality education, Parents and caregivers, and educators hear those words and for a variety of reasons. They want those, the subject, they want the whole thing thrown out of school, right? They are convinced, again, that sex educators want to teach their

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kindergarteners about sex, which is not something a kindergartner wants to know about. They do want to know how babies are born, of course, or how babies are made. Of course, sure, it is a wonderful and fascinating topic, that if they are interested in that they should know about that. But they do not want to know about adult sexual behavior. Right. So kicking comprehensive sexuality, education out of school, kids end up learning about it from the internet, and pornography and movies and TV and social media. And most of the time, these visuals are not what it means, do not show what it means to be in a healthy relationship with oneself or with other people. So you know, and I think that, in fact, like these venues focus more on the sex part of sex education, which again, it's just one small part of what comprehensive sexuality education is trying to do. So I feel like we've tried for years to kind of clarify what sex ed really is, and I don't know, will it ever work? Do we just need a new name?

Nicole Cunningham 32:25

That's a really good question, you know, and I think that's, that's kind of, I want to be sure that if you have any other challenges that you want to share that we get to those, but keep that in your brain, because I do have questions for you about do you have advice for folks who are trying to do this work or who are looking to get into these conversations, and we know that that word sex is such a barrier, right? So I would love to hear about any other challenges, and I'm hoping that if you have any advice for folks that you might have a few moments to let us know about that as well.

Rachel Ginocchio 32:56

Okay, sure. So the other challenge is, the other challenge I have is with the negativity about all of it. So comprehensive sexuality, education, prevents neglect, it prevents abuse, it prevents violence, right, like we talked about, which is crucial for people to understand and I think is why agencies will fund sexuality education, right, because it's such a crucial piece of it. But what we really, really, really want sex ed to do is not only prevent the bad stuff from happening, we want it to promote the good stuff. We want it to promote self-esteem and self-efficacy and healthy relationships and equality and body positivity and confidence, and acceptance and respect, right? When we bundle all of those concepts together- Tada! That's what healthy sexuality is. So what we want comprehensive sexuality education to do is to promote healthy sexuality, right, the recognition that our sexuality is human and normal and a reason to celebrate. Okay, Nicole, but promoting healthy sexuality is an even harder pill for people to swallow. Like maybe even more so than the idea of comprehensive sexuality education in school. If we can change the norms and expectations around healthy sexuality, I think we could make a lot of progress. The Dutch teach sex education starting at age four, and their teens are much more likely to describe their first sexual experience as positive, unlike their American teen counterparts. So why don't we as a society like why don't we want our youth to have

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consensual, positive, respectful, healthy, pleasurable sexual relationships? If and when they are ready, right? If we insist on teaching them, all of them negative stuff about sexuality, if we are instilling shame, when do they deserve? And when do they get to have the positive?

Nicole Cunningham 35:09

Absolutely. It's such a good question, Rachel. And I think such a huge, really important piece of how folks can maybe start to think about how they can do this work and how they can shift some of their messaging and programming. Rachel, what advice do you have for folks who want to start having some of these conversations in a way that's more aligned with how you're having these conversations? What do you suggest for folks who want to move towards thinking about positives and promotion of health rather than only thinking about the negatives and preventing violence and abuse?

Rachel Ginocchio 35:40

Oh, such a great question. I think the most important thing is to listen to the questions that the youth have. If they're asking questions, that's the key that it's developmentally and age appropriate, which is a big thing that adults and teachers always ask. So if the kids are asking, they're curious, and then especially parents and caregivers, they get to put their own values into the questions that they're answering for their own kids. So think about what you would like your kids experience to be when they are in relationships with other people, and not just their friendships. But when those friendships turn into crushes, and those crushes turn into romantic relationships. What do you want those to be like for your kids, and always think about sort of moving towards things healthy, happy, respectful, consensual relationships.

Nicole Cunningham 36:39

Could not agree more. Thank you so much, Rachel, that's such great advice. And we're just so grateful that you, you know, are doing this work, and that you have so much support to expand it, and to continue with this, this effort to move these conversations in a direction that is not only healthy, right and supportive, but that really values the voices of young people. And that gives them more of that autonomy and more ability to dictate for themselves, right what this looks like. And I think for too long, we've seen so much of this work driven by what we as adults think and I just really value that piece in your work of, you know, what are what are young people asking, what do they want to know? And what do we want for them? Right, not just not just what do we want as adults, what do we want for the future of our young people and for you know, all that they want for themselves? So thank you for that and for really continuing to highlight that in

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your work. Is there anything else that you wanted to share with us today while we have you that we didn't get to talk about?

Rachel Ginocchio 37:35

It was so fun hanging out with you on this sunny Friday afternoon, Nicole, we could talk for hours more, so we'll have to save more conversation for another day.

Nicole Cunningham 37:46

Absolutely. Rachel, thank you so much. And I agree it's been wonderful. So we look forward to continued conversation but thank you for being a part of this. We're excited to have you and excited to see where your work goes from here.

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