

SELF



Sex
Education
For
Parents



CARE

The M List Presents a series of conversations on self care

2022 / The Mamahood

A Conversation with Cath Hakanson of Sex Ed Rescue

Heather Anderson of The Mamahood:

Hello, Cath, I'm so excited to have you here today and talk about self care as it relates to sex education for parents raising children and all the ways that conversations around sex can relieve our own parental guilt and heal our families as a whole by creating a path of communication, comfort and empowerment for our kids. So please go ahead and introduce yourself and let us know all about what you do and how you got started.

Cath Hakanson of That Parent Group + Sex Ed Rescue:

Thanks, Heather. Okay, so I'm Cathy Hakanson or Cath Hak. Because Hakanson is such a mouthful for most people, I shorten it. What I am is a jack of all trades, but at the end of the day, I work in sexual health, and the technical term is a sexologist, but that term can be used very loosely. I run a website called Sex Ed rescue, and I'm all about helping parents to have chats and conversations with their kids about love, sex, relationships, and all the things to do with sex education. And because I've got a nursing background, and a sex therapy background, and I've worked with people for so long, I tend to work with the people who find it a little bit hard. Some people find it easy, because their parents talked with them. So they sort of know what they're doing. But the bulk of the population are probably like even I was; I felt totally clueless when I first started talking to my kids. So I'm all about helping parents to have these conversations, because they're really important conversations to have.

There's a wide time range of when you can start.

HA:

And how young are the kids of parents when you start helping them typically? Or is there any starting point or when people tend to come to you or start worrying about it?

CH:

That is a really good question. Most people think about it at the age of puberty, because that's when our parents might have had the talk. And you know, it's almost like a cultural joke about 'the talk' where parents sit you down and tell you everything you need to know to have a happy, healthy, loving, committed relationship in like 10 minutes. And then that's it.

So a lot of parents think about having this 'talk' at that age. But a lot of parents also start thinking about it when their kids are 3, 4, 5 years old. And they're pretending to be pregnant and just stuff things up their shirt. And they're starting to ask questions about where do babies come from or how they're made. But I get parents finding me whose children are still babies, which totally blows me away - that they're thinking of it, because I wasn't thinking of it back then.

And then I have parents who don't even think about it until the teenage years, and then they realize that their kids are starting to become sexual. And then they panic and think, hey, we haven't talked about that thing. What do I do? Where do I start? So there tends to be...

HA: The full gamut.

CH: Yeah, definitely. It's a wide range, which is great.

HA:

Well, you just reminded me of something hilarious. I fall into the category of having been sex educated as a child starting at four or five, and I had all these little sex ed books around the house. So I got an early start with my own kids. When they were toddlers, I took a sex education workshop of some kind and learned to make sure to use proper body terms and all that. So you know, right at three, my daughter's like, "I have a vulva!"



HA (cont'd):

But what's funny is I've been talking about it, and we have books - we actually have a lot of books that you've reviewed, and we've read "It's Not The Stork" when the three of them were probably 4, 5, 6 years old.

And they just forget! They learn it; they have almost no reaction - well you know, the biggest reaction I ever got was, "You and dad did what!?" And then like an hour later, they're moving on with life. But what's funny is I've been doing that since toddlerhood, and now I have two kids entering puberty. And the oldest one, a 12 year old, just said this in the car the other day, very seriously: "Mom, you know that thing that is super hyped, like in cartoons and movies? Like the thing that parents do with their kids called 'the talk'? Ummm, did we have that yet?"

And I'm thinking: Did we have it yet?! We've been having it for 10 years!! And even though part of him knew that, the way 'the talk' is portrayed in the media made him worried about it. Like, when's it coming? When are you gonna do it to me?

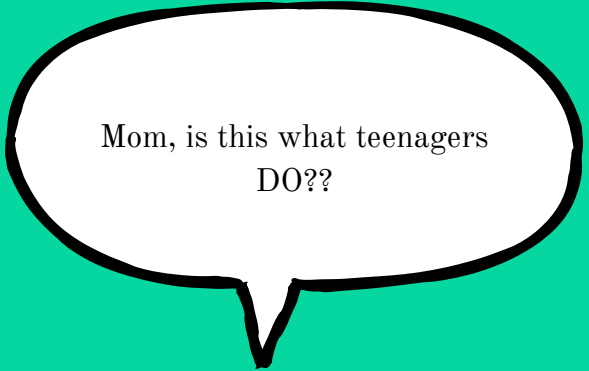
CH:

You're bringing up a really good point because what you're talking about concerns the whole approach that I take that it's not about having a single talk. It's about lots of talks, so that the communication is open and honest and it's positive, so that if they've got questions about something, they turn to you. Because if you haven't talked about oral sex, and they hear someone talking about blowjobs at school, there's a really good chance that they're gonna come over and talk to you because they know that you're talking about stuff already.



HA:

Oh my gosh, you know how I just said, “I’m so open; I’m ‘evolved’, and I’ve been doing it since they’re two”? Well, we were watching a TV show that a friend recommended for tweens. And it was pretty good. But all of a sudden, there was a scene with a teen handjob that caught me off guard. My 10-year-old daughter is really into the show, loving every second of it. And she’s also very into sexuality for some reason. She’s always asking questions. She’s excited about puberty. She can’t wait to get her period. I don’t know where this kid came from. This is like, not me in any way. But all of a sudden she’s horrified: WHAT are they doing? And I was caught off guard, because it was tricky to explain. And in the show, the characters are 15 years old. And she knows 15-year-olds in real life, so I felt the added pressure of her projecting whatever I say onto those kids in her mind. And she really wanted to know. The girl had visibly spit on her hand for lubricant before reaching off camera to do the implied hand job - so there were these unexpected details I hadn’t planned on going over yet. And I’m sitting there dumbstruck: ummmmmmm. And she says, aghast: Mom, is this what *teenagers* do? She was kind of disgusted. And I just answered the questions and felt super awkward about it. I’m like, “Yeah, yep, that’s what teenagers do.” And I watched that shocking fact sink across her face. My point being, there’s really no hard stop to being caught off guard or feeling at a loss for words.



Mom, is this what teenagers
DO??

No age is too young to learn about body autonomy.

CH:

And a question like that is a perfect opportunity to talk about values, to talk about keeping up with the Joneses. You know, why do you reckon she did that? Do you think she wanted to do it? Because other friends are saying they're doing it? And she feels they have to? But are they really doing it? Or are they just saying they're doing it? So they look cool? Oh there's just so many angles you can take those situations? It's great.

HA:

Yeah, there's so many layers, because that same show had another part that I actually had to fast forward. But it touched on sexual assault. It wasn't like an actual rape scene, but it was obviously the girl had been rufied or something nefarious. And again, my daughter wanted to know what was going on and we talked about consent. And there are so many layers to that discussion; what is consent and when does it start. Like as early as when you don't want someone to hug you when you visit. No age is too young for body autonomy.

CH:

Yes and this is about their safety.

HA:

Exactly! These conversations are so important. I'm pretty sure I could have personally avoided several negative teenage experiences via conversations from more experienced adults. So how do people tend to come to you? Through your Facebook group? How does it go that you end up working with them? And what does that look like?

CH:

A lot of people now find me through my Facebook group. That started probably four years ago, and I remember when I added the first couple of people, saying, "Look, it's gonna be really quiet for a while." And I was actively doing stuff every week. And then through word of mouth, that group grew and grew. It's just sitting under 80,000 at the time we're recording this. So people find me that way. But then a lot of people just find me through Google. They'll put a search sentence in, like you know, "my kids got their hands down their pants all the time". I get a lot of people finding me through Pinterest of all places. I've got pins, they're on periods and puberty and stuff, and people will find it and then they'll click through out of curiosity and find me that way. But a lot of it's word of mouth.

If I had a dollar for every question about a kid humping a pillow..

HA:

Yeah, and I love your website. And when they dig into your website, do they end up filling out like a form and start talking to you? What are you helping them with exactly? I'm just trying to wrap my brain around it.

CH:

Yeah, the problem is that sex education is a really broad area. Most people think about it as sex. So the website I have set up to make it easy for parents, because I'm a parent myself. And when I first started looking at sex education, I was really frustrated by the fact that it was hard to find information, period. But it was hard to find information that actually answered my questions and told me what to do. So I break things up into topics, because puberty is a really common pain point for a lot of parents. So I have a whole section on the website that's about puberty with quizzes, like "is it time to start talking to my kid?" "What do I talk about?" "When do I know when puberty or periods are starting?"

Then I have pornography. That's another whole section on its own, pornography and sexting, because their conversations we do need to be having in this day and age.

And then the sex education, which is the one about sex. And when you look at the posts I have, it's about playing doctor, hands down the pants, kids walking in on you having sex, where do babies come from? how are babies made? All those sorts of things. So I've got lots of content there answering those pain points - or the things that parents are commonly worried about.

And then I create the resources to answer their questions. I don't believe in reinventing the wheel. So if there's something that's out there, and it's good, and it just ticks the box, I'm all about pushing people towards that. But what I've found is there are a lot of gaps out there for helping parents. So I then go in and create resources. Like I have a whole book on explaining sex to kids, which is crazy. There's diagrams, pictures, everything in there. And the whole idea is to walk parents through and help them to have one conversation. Because I have a sex therapy background and an education background, and I'm very aware of what can stop you from learning, which is feeling flustered, lost, frustrated. And when you can break it down into details and hold someone's hand and walk them through every stage of the conversation, they're more likely to go ahead and have a conversation, which is what I want. I want people out there talking. So I create the resources to help them have those conversations. Oh, and masturbation! Tell you what, -

HA: I was just about to open my mouth and ask you about masturbation!

CH: If I had \$1 for every time someone asked a question about a kid humping the edge of the lounge or pillows, or hands down their pants, I'd be rich!

What about masturbating in the living room?

HA:

Well, that was gonna be my next question. I was gonna throw things at you that I see my community frequently asking so that if they're reading, they could get the answer right here on the spot. But what I see people struggling with is younger kids masturbating and wondering how they might address the fact that they're playing with themselves while watching TV in the living room. What do I do? I don't want to make it awkward. I don't want to make a 'thing' out of it. But it's also not something I want them to do at school. So what's your tip for pre-pubescent public masturbating - from age two to puberty? Let's say they're playing with themselves, like masturbating in the living room.

CH:

Now, I do have a blog post on that one which goes into that. Yeah, it's a thing. Because our parents - probably not your parents, because you had open parents who talked to you?

HA:

Yeah, yeah. But so I gotta say, my mom was awkward. So she taught me all this stuff. But I was private. So my true joke is, I still haven't told my mom that I got my period. I'm sure she's figured it out because I made three kids but...

CH:

Yeah. So most of us grew up with shame around masturbation. So our parents would have told us we were being dirty or rude or not to do that. So the approach nowadays is that most parents want to break that cycle of shame. They don't want their kids growing up with that. So they know that the kid is doing this, and it makes them feel uncomfortable. But they don't know how to have the conversation in a way that's not shameful. So what it's all about is that we know that children do this, their bodies have nerves, they discover that things feel good. And they do it because it feels good. Or they might do it because they're overtired, or they're worried about something. But they do it for a reason. They're not doing it to get their rocks off. They're not sitting there going, gee, I'm feeling really horny, I might go rub my vulva or touch my penis; they're doing it for different reasons. The horniness doesn't come until puberty, because Mother Nature makes us horny so we'll go out and have sex, get pregnant and have babies. But when they're little, they're doing it for a reason. So as parents, it's like, yeah, it's a natural behavior. But we need to put boundaries around that because we can't have them rubbing their genitals on the lounge, when Granny's sitting next to them, or you've got a plumber over who's fixing something in the kitchen sink, and you've got a kid sliding on the floor.

Most kids are just masturbating because it feels good.

CH (Cont'd):

It's about two things, there's one thing about bringing in boundaries to keep them safe, because it's about keeping them safe from inappropriate touch, and from people thinking that they're an easy victim. But it's also about teaching them the rules of society - like you don't sit in the middle of the street picking your nose, you do that in private. So it's about teaching them these rules to fit in and also to keep them safe as well. So it's about bringing in those boundaries. And we're very lucky that there's a thing called "the traffic lights". It's a model developed by a family planning organization in Australia, and it's now rolled out worldwide. And it's the model that everyone uses, so that when a kid is doing something sexual, there are questions you ask to work out whether it's a problem or not, and what to do about it. For most kids, they're doing it because it feels good. So yeah, we just have to direct them to a private place. Talk to them about washing their hands so they don't have smelly fingers all the time, that sort of stuff.

HA:

It's so funny. Another one I see a lot is about sexting. And I don't know if there's any positive way to 'sext'? My understanding as a parent is I've told my kids not to sext because of the risk of what's going to happen on the other end of the device. But what are you talking about with that?

CH:

Yeah, and this is where it gets interesting. When sexting first started to happen, the consensus was very much "we need to stop it", or "it's wrong". Kids were self harming over images that people were sharing and stuff. And then, after, you know, we all had more time to think about it, the approach has slightly changed a little, because the times are different. I remember coming home from school and talking to friends and liking boys, and you talk about someone - and then a friend would tell somebody and you know, all the stupid stuff we used to do as teenagers. But nowadays, it's different. Kids come home and they text each other, or they flirt online with stuff. So they like someone - a boy or a girl, or someone nonbinary, whoever they like, they might send them a text message and the flirting might happen in the online space. But the problem with that is when it's in the online space, you don't know who can see it.

So there's been a slight swing around about sexting. And there's a fantastic blog post on my website that Leah Jewett from the UK, sent out that sums up sexting really beautifully as to how we can respond. And it's based on research as well. So the approach now is to have these conversations and to talk to our kids about this. But we also need to be mindful that this might be part of the steps for having a relationship with someone. So we just need to keep that open in the back of our mind that this might be how our kid might communicate with their partner. But we need to talk to them to make sure that if their partner does share it with someone else, you know, how are they going to respond to that? So we want to make sure that they're making an informed decision, and not going into it blindly. And there is a fantastic book about sexting for tweens. And quite a few parents have emailed me lately and said, they've been reading it with their tween and they found it super helpful for having conversations with their kid about how to handle sexting.

Hormones will always trump common sense.

HA:

Wow I like that difference and that twist. Because yeah, it's like the new digital modern flirting. And if you're going in informed that maybe your sexy picture that you're taking, that you're sending to your new love interest, maybe you do it knowing that "oh, well, this could get shared with their friends, but I'm ready for that." Like that kind of attitude.

CH:

Yeah. And then at least they can make an informed decision. Keeping in mind though, that as they go through puberty, one week, they can make a perfectly rational decision. And then a week later, they do something totally stupid. And you look at them and you think, how the heck did that happen? And then a week later or two weeks later, back to making smart decisions. So we have to keep that in mind. A parent sent me a message the other day about how hormones always trump common sense. And so it's really hard as a teenager, because hormones just come into play as well. Because sexual feelings can be really strong and overwhelming as well. So, you know, these are other conversations that we need to have. But you know, how many people went and had sex without a condom? Because they were just feeling so good about it, that they just didn't have enough common sense to say, Whoa, let's do something. Let's not get any sperm up there. Let's do something else.

HA:

I can answer that question: A lot of people!

CH: Yeah. When you combine hormones with puberty, that's why they always say one of the blessings for an early puberty is that most kids by the time they're over all the hormonal stuff, they're at a good age where they're starting to think about being sexual, but their hormonal transformation is mostly over so they can make smarter decisions.

HA:

I've never thought about it that way. I've been trying to stave off puberty - not that I can control it - but thinking like they'd be wiser later, but your point is so the opposite of what I've been thinking, I have to digest that. Whoa. Yeah, hormones do mess up your brain like logic, I guess.

CH:

Oh, and just a lot of the research now is saying that we used to think of children as being grown up at 18. But the new research that we have about brain development now shows that they are really not grown up till they're about 25, 26. Now, Karen Young, behind the blog, [Hey Sigmund](#), is a psychologist, and on her blog she goes into the psychology and the brain stuff behind parenting. And she's got some fantastic blog posts on her website that talk about what happens to the brain as kids go through puberty and adolescence. And they're great to read, because they give you insight into what's going on with your teenager. And I think when we have insight as a parent, we can look at them. And instead of us reacting emotionally, we can look at it and go, Oh, yeah, I read this thing about that. And yeah, that makes sense.

HA:

Yeah, I love that. And I want to bring up how just educating oneself as a parent, is a form of self care. Because, you know, learning and educating ourselves can get rid of those feelings that people come to you with - the guilt of, "I've started too late" or "I don't know what I'm doing", or "What I did was just wrong", or "I'm messing up my child", or "I have baggage from my own childhood. And now I'm gonna check that onto my child." So can you address that? What kinds of emotions parents are coming to you with? And how educating themselves makes them feel better, and is a form of self care?

You don't need to know everything.

CH:

Mommy guilt, isn't it terrible? But it's like parenting is a self discovery journey. You discover it brings up a whole lot of stuff for yourself. And I get a lot of parents coming to me who are feeling guilty. They're feeling guilty, because they haven't had the conversation yet. And they're worried that they've left it too late. And they're worried about what that means. But then also, I have parents who are worried because they've said they've explained sex to their three year old or four year old and five year old, and then their kid has acted out or done something. And then they equate that to the conversation that they had. So it's a fear that they've started too early. Or they're worried that they think they might say too much. Or that they might say the wrong thing. And then they're overwhelmed as well, because they might not have done sex education at school, or they might have done it at school - and it was just biological or inadequate. My teenager, she's doing biology, Human Biology at the moment, they're doing reproduction. And she says it's just fascinating because it's pure biology. And the Sex Ed they've got at schools is just about putting condoms on, or just presenting the fact that contraception exists, and nothing to do over relationships and all that stuff. So parents come to this, and they're like, well, I might have done sex ed back at school, but I don't think I did. And I've been in a relationship with someone for 15 years. So I haven't been out on the sex or the dating scene for a while. So then they feel guilt, because I feel like they're clueless. They think that they don't know anything. And they think that they need to, you know, go off and almost go back to Sex Ed school again and learn everything in order to have these conversations. And it causes like this spiraling pitter patter of fear and, and meanwhile, while all this is going on, you know, in the head, it stops you from having conversations.

So it's funny, whenever I create a book, there's almost a formula that I follow, because I come from a nursing background, and a sex therapy background. Like someone would come in with a problem with their relationship. And I'd look at it and I'd go, oh, yeah, this is what the problem is, and this is what they need to do. But no, they might believe that something else is a problem. So now I just work with what they believe. And once we work through that, they'll then realize that that's not the problem. And then we'll switch it over to what's really going on. So it's a bit like you can lead a horse to water but you can't make a drink. So I'm a big believer in addressing the fears and the things that stop us from talking. Because while we've got all this stuff going on in our head, it's actually stopping us from talking and it's got us stuck. And it's because, as parents, we don't want to harm our kids. We want to help our kids. But when we've got feelings, that our conversations will hurt them, and we're feeling all this guilt, it stops us from talking. So that's why I'm big into addressing parents' own fears first and figuring out what's stopping you. And I'm also big into creating resources. So if you want to explain puberty to your kid, you don't need to know everything. You just turn to the bloody book, and for everything, there's a book that can tell you everything you need to do, so that you're just one step ahead. And this is the thing, there're a lot of great resources out there that can help you have those conversations. I've got a peer in Sydney, in Australia, and she goes into schools, and she does stuff with kids. And during COVID, she decided to pour a lot of money and a lot of resources into creating workshops. They're on demand, you can just sit there with your kid. I had to bribe my son with McDonald's to watch it with me. And she's got this whole workshop on how to own puberty, and it's targeting the kid.



what if you watched a video together....

HA:

How to own puberty?

CH: Yeah, own their own puberty. So the idea is you sit there with your kid, and there're activities. So she'll get you to stop and there's a workbook and you fill out the workbook. As you go, and you stop, she even gets them moving their body through it so that they're not just sitting here glued to a screen. And what's even better, she's got one now on explaining sex, and she does it beautifully. It's so gentle, it's non confrontational. So I'm trying to talk her into doing one on pornography and consent, because they're just fantastic. But she doesn't sell many of them because her sales page is not very good. I'm trying to talk her into getting my copywriter to fix up a sales page. But they're just fantastic. So I think the only ones she sells are the ones that I push people towards. But this is a thing: As a parent, you don't need to sit down and have this huge knowledge. All you have to do is be one step ahead of your kid, and just have a resource to turn to. Yeah, and the video course is fantastic. And all you need to do is bribe your kid to sit down and watch it with you.

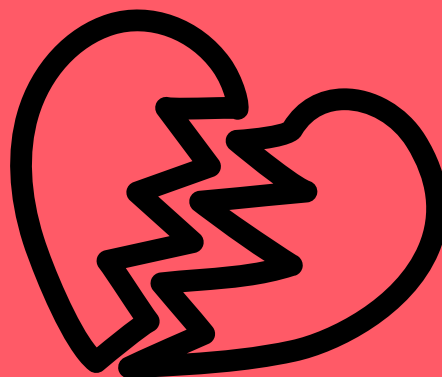
HA:

Yeah, and I love your approach of addressing the imaginary block or the perceived problem first, so that people open up and see, you know, either that there isn't a problem or address the real issue. But one thing that I see some parents struggling with is that maybe they have their own 'baggage' from childhood or an experience, and they have PTSD around their own - maybe sexual abuse or sexual assault - or just a bad experience around sexuality, which complicates them feeling comfortable talking about it in the first place. Like, how do you work with people that have traumatic past history who are trying to parent and talk to their kid?

CH:

I'm glad you brought that up. Trauma. If you remember, when mindfulness was a real buzzword, and everyone was talking about mindfulness? Well, I feel almost like I'm starting to see conferences pop up about trauma and stuff. Because when you think about it, sex education empowers people to make smart decisions. If you don't have knowledge, you can't make smart decisions. So there's a lot of us parents nowadays who did stuff sexually that we have regret over. And we've got trauma over it, because we had no knowledge. So we couldn't make a smart decision. And now we have to live with the consequences of that. Because I come from a nursing and that sex therapy background, I see a lot of people with trauma and it is a real problem. What happens, is that a lot of parents are too scared to talk to their kids, because they're worried that they're going to pass that trauma on. So they might not enjoy sex with their partner. And they've never enjoyed sex because of some trauma that happened in their childhood. And they're really worried that they're going to pass that on to their children. And I do see a lot of this where parents are scared that their kids are gonna grow up feeling the way they're feeling. And I just want to say now that they won't, especially if you're having lots and lots of conversations, because kids learn from other families as well. So you might not have the healthiest relationship or you might be a single parent, but they're mixing with other families. They're seeing other people, they're watching stuff on TV. So they're still getting information from other sources. And I think we need to remember that with sex education and when we've got our own kids, that we might have this trauma, but kids aren't necessarily going to pick up on it.

All research says that teenagers don't want to get the facts from their parents because they know they can just google all these books or stuff, or they're getting the facts at school. But what they're wanting from parents is the stories. What do you do when you like someone and they're going out with your friend? Or what do you do if someone does something that shames you? And everyone's laughing about it? They want to know those sorts of things. When will I be ready for sex? And the teenage years is where it does get really tough, because kids will be learning about sexual assault, and they'll go well, were you ever sexually assaulted mom? And I actually was when I was nursing. And I, you know, whenever my daughter asks those questions, I don't know how to respond. And you know, here I am the expert helping people with this. But it's like some conversations you can put off and you can turn around and say, well, that's private, I don't want to talk about it. But then they're going to know that there's something there. These are the buttons that really do start to get pushed as I get to the teenage years. And, yeah, you do have to sometimes start addressing some of the skeletons in your own closet as well. But you don't always have to, you can just outsource them. Because there's great books that also talk about all this stuff as well.



We have all this knowledge but we discredit ourselves.

HA:

Yeah, I remember, I had three births that I mentioned. But I have two older kids that I inherited my bonus kids. And when they were entering puberty and teen years, things were coming up and I was like, I don't even I didn't research it. And I didn't get a book. So I hope I didn't do it too badly. But they're now adults. Like around, I remember, my daughter was pretty naive around sexuality, but she was starting to drink alcohol, which, for me, was like a problem and how I got sexually assaulted. And she was going out with a girlfriend and they were gonna go clubbing and meet up with some guys. And I could tell they were gonna get pretty drunk. That's just the impression I got. I was like, Okay, I have a story for you. I need to tell you, you can get drunk, but you need to think about this and have a failsafe and a backup plan and a safe ride home and stick with your girlfriend and don't get isolated. And don't go off with the strange boys that you're meeting there, once you're too drunk and all these things. She's like, okay, Mom, I'm just going dancing. And I was like, but you have no idea what could happen when you go dancing, you know!

CH:

Yeah.

HA:

I didn't want the same thing to happen. But yeah, I know. Remember, like you think things are obvious when you're explaining stuff. And you know, both of them had a pretty sheltered upbringing as Mormon kids on the other bio side of the family. And I gave them all a sex talk. And I thought they had it all down. And I remember thinking, you know, they're pretty old too. And sex was starting to happen in their friend group. And one of my kids goes, so let me get this straight. When you're going out on a date? Do you put the condom on before you leave the house?

CH: It's a great question.

HA: And then I was like, No, you have to wait till your penis is erect. You know, the stuff that I wouldn't have thought to answer the things they asked, and you are just like, whoa.

CH:

And they're great questions. So we have all this knowledge, and we discredit ourselves. But we forget that. Yeah. And that's a good question. Like, a lot of girls will practice putting tampons in, when they don't have their period and the vagina is dry. It's not lubricated. There's no blood to help it get in and get out. So yeah, these are the sorts of questions and the fact that they can ask you those questions. When you start getting questions like that it really shows that you've got a strong and connected relationship. But this is the thing about sex education, when they're little up before puberty, it's just facts, you're giving them information. But then as they go through puberty and become teens, the conversations are different. It's not so much factual, but it's the experiences about like, if I go out, do I already have the condom on? You know, that it's a little bit factual but that's yeah, so it's that storytelling as well, and that's the stuff that you can't necessarily get at school or from a book.

Resources have the facts, parents add the stories.

HA:

You're right about the storytelling because we'd done all the facts. You're so right. And the fact you know, all the books don't have the books we had didn't go into that detail, which gave him the question. And then it comes down to needing to answer it with a story because he was still looking at me with this kind of face and it's like, what? And then I ended up telling personal anecdotes about, you know, young sexual things where we're trying to put condoms on. And I said, "Well, yeah, it's actually kind of funny. And it can be an awkward moment because it breaks up the flow like you're kissing and you're making out and you might be lying horizontal and totally, like in the position to have sex and you're both feeling it and you get consent. And then you're like, 'Excuse me', and then you have to sit up, go to your bag, get the condom out, and you're sitting on the edge of the bed fumbling in the dark. It can be like a flow breaker,.. And he's looking at me across the kitchen - it feels like yesterday, I can still see his face - like, what? Like the dread of what do we have to do?"

CH:

You just reminded me of books. I read a lot of youth fiction, because they're just really good stories. They get to the point really quickly, and they don't tell a story over like, four versions of the book. Yeah, they're part one, part two, part three. And what, what I'm noticing a lot now and a lot of the youth stuff is the diversity, like same sex romance stories. I see consent being built into sex scenes. I see safe sex coming in - condoms! And they'll build safe sex into a sex scene, and they'll build consent into the sex scene. But they'll also build a plot like putting a condom on during the sex scene as well. And things like this are great, because it's just, it's yeah, it's none of this bareback sort of stuff.

HA:

Yeah. Yeah, it's adding reality.

CH:

Yeah it's showing them that it can happen. And it can be romantic and it can be sexy.

HA:

Yeah, I know, I love that things are definitely evolving. And I've seen, you know, there's like a new - well this is for adults, but I think it must translate across is, like, you know, women-founded brands of pornography that are all consent based, and they have like a mission and values, that the people in the porn are actually having their own pleasure and controlling the narrative. And it's like, oh, that's refreshing. That's not what I grew up with. Yeah, it's adding that that real element into what actually happens in a real life sex scene when you get the condom and put it on. And yeah, you can make it sexy. I don't remember how or where but as a kid, somebody taught me it can be sexy if you put the condom on the other person.

CH:

But it's all such valuable information for people, all this stuff.

HA:

So overall, what would your takeaway be to comfort the people of all age children that are thinking, "Oh, man, how do I do this? I think I've messed it up." What is your takeaway message to them?

We all make mistakes; you've got time.

CH:

I think it's, it's many conversations, so our children take a long time to grow up and to leave home. And if you can have these open, honest and positive conversations nice and slowly over the next 5, 10, 15, 20 years, that's how long you've got. So there's no rush. So I'm big into reminding people that no one's perfect. We all make mistakes. Some of us leave conversations too late. Some of us started too early. Some of us don't talk about it at all. And being it's about being kind to yourself, and realizing that sexuality can push a lot of buttons, but they're important conversations we need to have. Because this is the thing: when I first started sex ed, with my own kids, I thought it was about me actually giving them information about sex and how babies are made and all the stuff that we taught at school. And then as I started doing more research, and as my own kids got older, I then started to notice that it was actually more about the conversation. It was the fact that we could sit at the dinner table. And if we had sausages that night, my son might go, Hey, look, this looks like a penis. And we'd all laugh and go, yeah, it does. Those sorts of things. So when you can have those open, honest and positive conversations, it actually opens a doorway to a stronger and more connected relationship. Because if you can have these conversations when they're little, they continue through until the teenage years. And it then means that you've got your kids' back. So when they're a teenager, or they're hearing stuff at school as a tween, you know that they're going to come home and talk to you and you're there watching their backs. So they're not going to be vulnerable, like we were. They're not going to be as at risk as we were because we had no one watching our backs sexually as kids growing up. So it's about just keeping that in mind that there's no rush to have these conversations. And there are resources and tools out there to help you through it all. So you're not on your own. You don't need to go off and spend hours and hours researching stuff, you know, there are tools and ways to make the conversation easier for you.

HA:

And if somebody is like, just entering parenting, and they've got like a toddler, would you say there's no, there's no too early to start, you can start the conversation with like, what, what would you say start with,

CH:

You can start from birth. And I've got one big program, and it's called successful conversations, and it breaks sex education into different parts. And on the section that's called "the what to say", I've got it starting from zero to two, and then three to five. So there are definitely things you can do with kids when they're little. And they're just little things like if they you know, if they grab their genitals while you're changing their nappy, you might go yep, that's your penis and gently move their hand away so that you can get the poo away. That sort of stuff. There's lots of little things that you can do when they're little. And yeah, the conversations really don't start till they're about three.,

HA:

Yeah. How did that person get pregnant? My three and four year olds were like: How'd the baby get in there? How does it come out?

CH:

Yeah. And three is that age where their brain is just starting to think and they're becoming more like a human rather than this little feral beast that's running around. They're starting to think and their brain is putting connections and things together.

HA:

This reminds me of the whole “I did it wrong”. And “I messed up”, or “I waited too late” kind of thing. I see this question a lot. Like “I started with made-up stories in toddlerhood, they asked me how a baby was made and when they were three, I froze, and I said it comes out your belly button”. And then, you know, there's a lot of this type of question. I don't know if you see this. But in my group, there's a lot of people making up a story on the fly that they feel is appropriate for the young child. And then later they're like, so how do I tell them that I lied about the belly button thing? Like, how do you back your way out of these things you make up? When later, the child says, “Wait, Mom, you said the baby comes out my belly button?”

CH:

And kids are smart. They realize because they go to school, they hear the other kids talking. So if you're constantly following them off with made up things, they then don't see you as a reliable source of information, which then means they're going to go to other people with their questions, or they're going to turn to Google. And we know what they'll find if they ask questions about bodies and sex on Google, they'll find porn. So this is why I'm a big believer about answering their questions, because it's about basically training your kid to see you as a reliable source of information. So if they've got any questions about bodies and love and sex, they come to you with those questions. But what you can do is if you've been in that situation, where you have sort of said, Oh, well, it's a special cuddle or you know, the baby comes out the belly button or whatever, you can actually turn it around and say, hey, look, you're old enough now to know the truth about how babies are made. Sometimes parents make up silly little stories about how babies are made, because we don't want to talk about the real way. So here's a book, so how about we sit down and read it together. So you can go back and apologize. And as parents, I think we've got to realize that kids learn by mistakes. So if they see us making mistakes and us owning up to those mistakes, it then gives them permission to be kinder to themselves when they make mistakes. So I think it's really important for kids to know that no one's perfect. So often, our kids learn probably more from our mistakes than we think they do.

HA:

I love that framing. It's like, yeah, own it. Talk about it. I like your explanation, too. Like sometimes parents make up silly stories for little kids. But now that you're five, I'm going to tell you, you came out my vagina.

CH:

Like the Santa Claus story of the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy.

HA:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Hi, I'm still holding on to those. Like my kids know about vaginas and birth and sex, but they still believe in Santa, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy.

CH:

And this is a thing a lot of people think, that telling kids about sex destroys their innocence. It doesn't! Learning about it in the school yard in a shameful way, that's what destroys their innocence. Or when they're vulnerable to inappropriate sexual touch; that destroys their innocence. Knowledge does not destroy their innocence at all, especially when it's coming from you in a loving, gentle way in the family home.

HA:

I love that you brought that up, because sometimes I see people ask the question, like, is it too soon to tell my kid about coming out my vagina? They're only four. And then some parents will say “No, you're gonna ruin their innocence. They're not ready for sex.” And it's like, no, you know, they're not ready to have sex, but they're old enough to hear that it happens or what it is.

Just be kind, and realize you've got plenty of time...

CH:

And then what is innocence? Like I've written about this a lot, because this is what gets me. It's like, well, what do you mean by innocence? To me, innocence is where my children still believe that the world is a good place. They're not disillusioned; they haven't lost hope and dreams. To me. That's innocence. When they become disillusioned, and they think it's just this system of corruption and stuff. That's when innocence is lost. But we have conversations about these things. My kids, I would still call them innocent. And we talk about a lot in our house with the job I have.

HA:

No, yeah, I would say like I said, I feel like my kids are so innocent, because they believe in possibility and magic and that the world is a good place, and that they can grow up to be what they want. But they know all about sex, sexuality. Like, yeah, that didn't really affect their innocence in any way. They still believe in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, but they know what rape is. They know all the things.

CH: Yeah. It's good. I love that.

HA: Well, this has been a wonderful conversation, I could talk to you for 800 hours, and we should probably revisit it. And so for now, thank you, Cath. It's a pleasure as always, and if you wanted to be the last word, what would you say to people as you say as a final goodbye?

CH:

I think just be kind, and realize that you've got plenty of time to have these conversations. No one does it perfectly. If anyone says they are doing it perfectly, they're lying. And just remember that it's not necessarily about the facts that you're giving your kids but it's about having that stronger, more connected, open and trusting relationship. That's what sex education is all about.

HA:

Love it. Beautiful closer. Thank you so much, Cath.

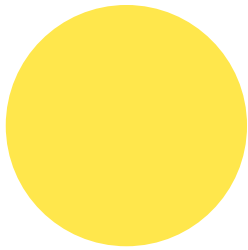
CH:

Thanks, Heather.



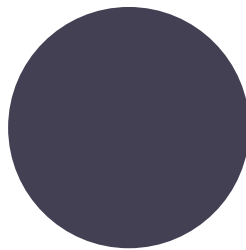
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Cath Hakanson helps parents talk to their kids about sex with less cringe and more confidence so they can empower their child(ren) to make smart sexual decisions.



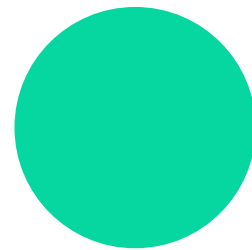
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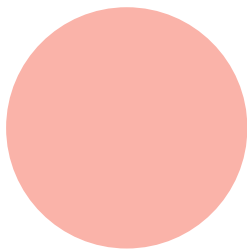
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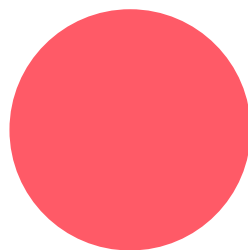
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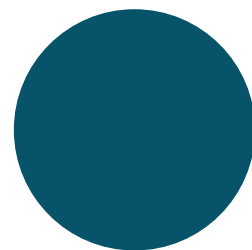
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