



# Parenting Through Puberty

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- ▶ Creating an Environment that Welcomes Communication
  - ▶ Know Yourself
  - ▶ Physiology Impacts Communication
  - ▶ Validating Emotional Experiences
- ▶ Concrete Strategies for an “Open Door Culture”
  - ▶ SOY
  - ▶ Wondering
  - ▶ OARS
- ▶ Sexual Development: What to Talk About
  - ▶ Puberty, Anatomy, Reproduction
  - ▶ Crushes and Boundaries
  - ▶ Sexual and Gender Identities
- ▶ Scenarios: Practical Applications



Parenting isn't  
stressful at all.

JESSICA, AGE 27



## Pressure, Stress, Anxiety: Vignette

**Your child comes home from school and is visibly distressed. They slam their books down and burst into tears telling you that their teacher totally called them out because they walked into class a few minutes late, right before they had to take a test. As tears run down their face, they sob “This is so unfair!”**

➤ You should not have been late to class! You are late to everything. Haven't I taught you better than that?



➤ It's not a big deal, it will blow over by tomorrow, I'm sure nobody even noticed. You shouldn't even worry about it.



➤ How many times have I told you to plan better?

➤ Well, What do you expect? If you were late, it only seems logical that you would get in trouble. It is a natural consequence.



➤ You can do better next time! I know you can!



➤ I can call your teacher.

➤ I hope this did not impact your performance on your test.



# In that moment, what do you feel, think, believe is the priority?

- ▶ Your job is to teach your child life lessons
- ▶ Your job is ensuring your child follows rules
- ▶ Your job is to reiterate expectations
- ▶ You are uncomfortable with your child's negative affect; you want him/her to feel better
- ▶ You don't think this is a big deal, you don't agree/irritated with the "drama"
- ▶ You think your child's behavior reflects badly on you
- ▶ You want your child to succeed, not fall short
- ▶ You want to keep up with the Jones Family
- ▶ You are activated/triggered (e.g., tardy, disrespectful behavior, etc.)



Is Your Knee-Jerk Response  
Working for You and your  
Adolescent?

# Potential Unintended Consequences

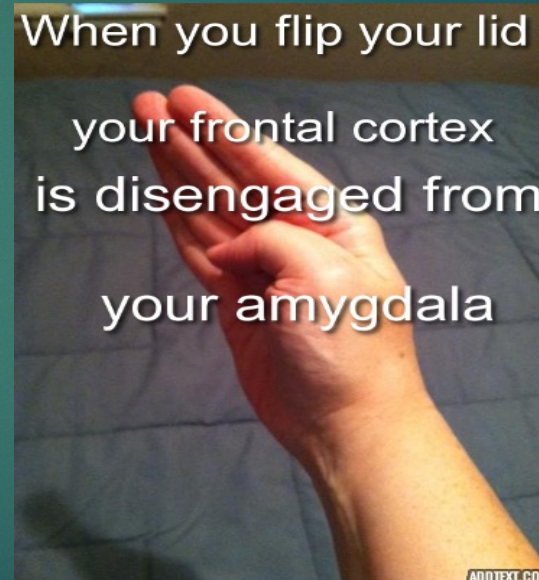
- ▶ Your adolescent will likely NOT hear anything else that you are communicating to them.
- ▶ Your adolescent may feel worse after this interaction.
- ▶ Relationship misstep. Your adolescent may not come to you in the future for support. Possibly closing the door for continued conversation.





# Parent Stress Response

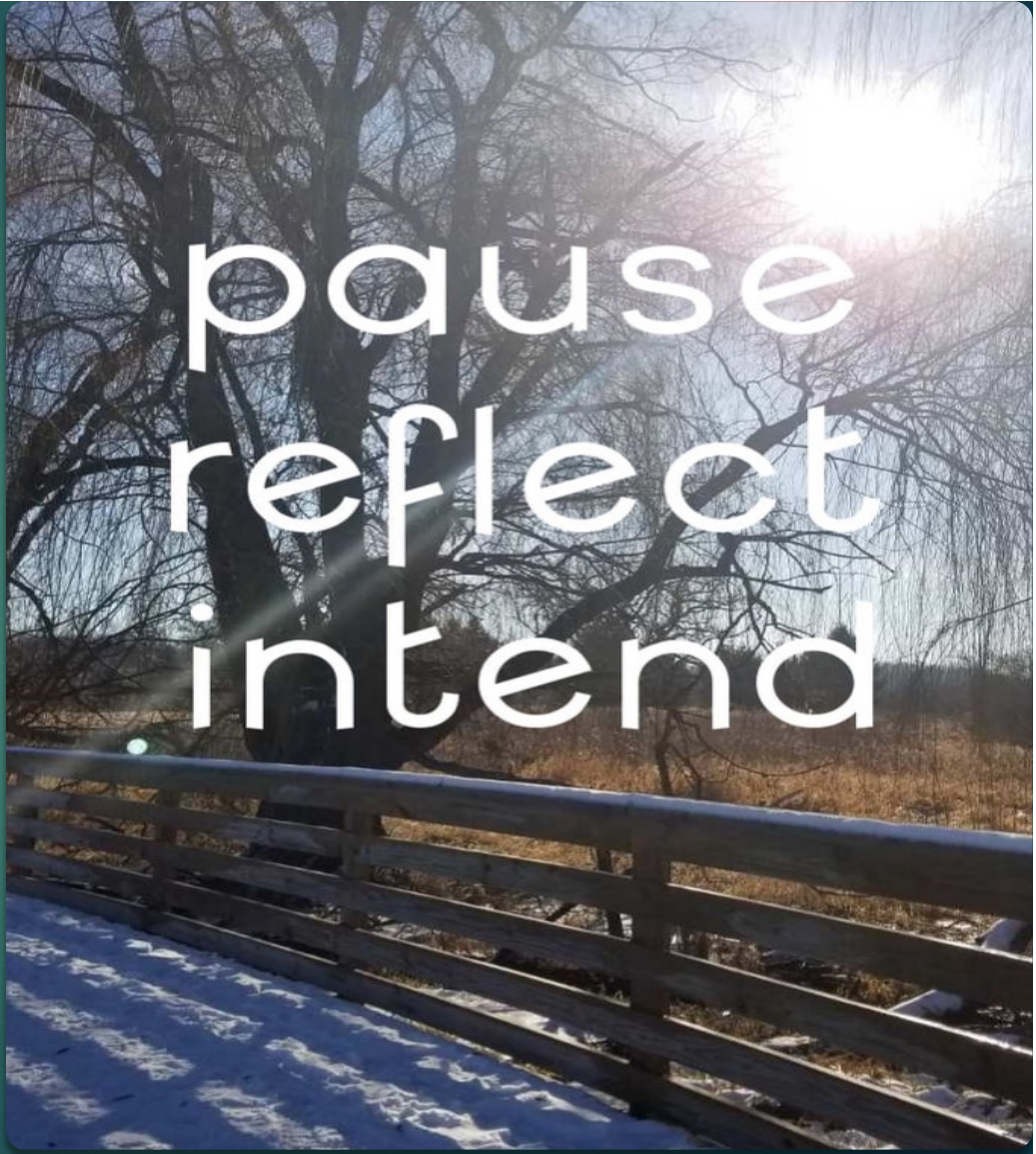
# Physiology Plays an Important Role: Flipping Your Lid



KNOW YOURSELF!

What is driving  
your reaction?

pause  
reflect  
intend

A photograph of a wooden fence in a snowy field with bare trees and a bright sun in the background. The sun is positioned in the upper right corner, creating a lens flare effect. The trees are mostly without leaves, and the ground is covered in a layer of snow. The fence is made of dark wood and runs across the foreground.

**REFLECT,  
REPRIORITIZE,  
*and* RECALIBRATE**



Consider this as a Parenting Priority and Responsibility:

**Validate your adolescent's emotional experience – this allows you to connect with them and creates an emotionally safe environment that welcomes reflection, communication, and collaborative problem-solving.**

# Validating Emotional Experiences

- ▶ Validating is seeing the situation from your child's perspective and accepting his/her feelings just as they are
- ▶ It does not mean you agree with their behavior
- ▶ It does not mean you are giving approval for how they behaved/responded
- ▶ Validation and genuine curiosity to understand your child's experience opens the door for continued conversations
- ▶ INITIAL VIGNETTE
  - ▶ That sounds pretty awful; sounds like you had a rough day; tell me more about it.

“A strong connection with a parent is the closest thing to a silver bullet for preventing mental health problems in kids”  
(Stixrud and Johnson, 2021)

“A relationship with one loving and attuned parent or caregiver is the single most protective factor for any child”  
(Nakazawa, 2022)





...the principles of communicating effectively with kids actually haven't changed since the 1980s (or the 1880s).

**Listening carefully and respectfully, understanding, offering advice, not trying to ram our perspective down kids' throats, working problems out respectfully:** these apply to every parenting challenge in every generation. We just need to remember to apply them to the new frontier.”

Stixrud & Johnson, What do You Say? (2022) p.217-218

# Creating an “Open Door” Culture at Home

- ▶ **Be available and willing to talk.**
  - ▶ “If you ever have more questions, I’m happy to talk about it.”
- ▶ **Avoid shame and judgment.**
  - ▶ Don’t yuck anyone’s yum; avoid calling things disgusting, silly, or weird.
- ▶ **Validate and empathize.**
  - ▶ Stay present; avoid minimizing your child’s feelings or experience.
- ▶ **Offer additional resources.**
  - ▶ Let go of the need to be the expert or the only resource. Identify other safe adults that you trust.



# Putting It Into Practice



- ▶ Non-judgmental response: SOY
  - ▶ Some people...Other people... You might...
  - ▶ “Some people are really excited about going to a big school with lots of people. Other people prefer a smaller campus with fewer students. You might like either of those, or want something in the middle.”
- ▶ Wonder aloud:
  - ▶ “I wonder if this relationship is the way you expected it to be.”
- ▶ Validate the feeling (even if not the content)
  - ▶ “I get that you’re really frustrated right now” or “That sounds really hard!”

# Putting It Into Practice

## Use OARS to support decision-making:

- ▶ Open-Ended Questions –
  - ▶ Elicit more descriptive information
  - ▶ Help us avoid making assumptions
  - ▶ Can focus on the positive (“what do you enjoy about...?”)
- ▶ Affirmations –
  - ▶ Validates word/ideas already offered
- ▶ Reflections –
  - ▶ Check for understanding
  - ▶ Show that you’re listening (“You’re saying....”)
- ▶ Summaries –
  - ▶ Covers all the points made thus far to help elicit the tensions at play
  - ▶ Ex. “You really like spending time with Kate, but you don’t like it when she messages you repeatedly.”

# Sexual Development



- ▶ Know yourself! Sexual Development in children elicits significant reactions from parents
- ▶ Important to keep in mind that sexual development is NORMAL
- ▶ Important to keep in mind your hopes for your child in the long run...
- ▶ Many talks, not “THE talk”
  - ▶ Who/what will educate them if you don’t?
  - ▶ Talking about it does not make it happen!
- ▶ Important to be aware of your reactions, to know where you stand on these issues and what your priorities are, and to be able to communicate these in positive, non threatening ways while balancing the reality of adolescent sexual development

# Age-Appropriate Conversations

## National Sex Education Standards

Grade	Topics To Cover
K-2	Proper names for body parts, gender identity/roles/expression, different kinds of family structures, understand that all living things reproduce, consent (everyone can say no), understand that teasing is wrong, identify sexual abuse, know who trusted adults are
3-5	Reproductive systems including form and function, social/emotional/physical changes of puberty, sexual intercourse for pregnancy, sexual orientation/identity, healthy relationships, consent, harassment
6-8	Reproductive systems including form and function, identify credible sources of info, sexual behaviors, abstinence and contraception/STI prevention (including condoms and emergency contraception), healthy sexual and romantic relationships, sexual harassment, consent, sexual assault




# Puberty, Anatomy, & Reproduction

# Puberty

Social, Emotional, &  
Physical Changes

- ▶ Make sure that your child knows the medically accurate terms for body parts (both their own and the other anatomy)
- ▶ Discuss changes that will happen during puberty and make sure your child knows the plan for dealing with them (especially periods, wet dreams, and unexpected erections)



Your 6th grader is working on homework in their room after dinner. You walk past and realize the door is closed, which is unusual. Concerned, you open the door to see your child touching their genitals.

- Be cool. Ask them to check in with you later.
- Explain that masturbation is normal and that you aren't angry.
- Make sure they know that at this age, you expect them to explore their body on their own. If anyone else touches their body, you want them to tell you.
- Ask if they have any questions about their body.
- Reiterate that masturbation, or touching your body in a way that feels good, is appropriate **private** behavior.



# Crushes & Boundaries



# Knowing Our Own Boundaries: Friendships!

## Self Reflection

- ▶ Examples: body, tech, language, time spent together, what you talk about with others, etc.
- ▶ Help your kids identify patterns in their own behavior to help them learn to name their own boundaries: “You don’t seem to like it when Kate texts you late at night.”

## Experimentation

- ▶ We often don’t know what our boundaries are until they’ve been crossed - that’s OK!
- ▶ Help young people build internal check-ins: Does this feel good?
- ▶ Help kids identify their stop sign - when should I check in with myself?

You are out to dinner with your family. Your child is continuing to text/message with a friend, and seems to be getting increasingly upset. You're frustrated because you wanted to have nice dinner out, but they just can't put down the phone.

- "I'm noticing that you seem frustrated."
  - "You're telling me you're not frustrated, and I'm noticing that when you get a new message your shoulders keep going up. I wonder if you're having a conversation that isn't going the way you expected."
- "It's frustrating when things don't go the way we expect them to."
- "I hear that you don't want to talk about it with me right now, but if you change your mind, I'm open to talking about it later."

Your 8th grader Crystal has her first boyfriend, James. You know that Crystal and James had their first kiss recently. You're not sure Crystal has thought about her boundaries.

- Validate the relationship and Crystal's feelings.
- Be blunt about your concerns:
  - "I know you and James kissed; have you thought about going any further? James might have thought about touching your body in other ways, and it's important to think about what you're comfortable with. I wonder how you might know what you're ready for."
- Avoid extremes that forbid certain behaviors. Try rules like "door open."

# Respecting Others' Boundaries



**We don't have control over other people's feelings.**

- ▶ You can't make someone like you.
- ▶ Sometimes, it's not about us.

**What are some signs that someone is uncomfortable or not interested?**

- ▶ Fight
- ▶ Flight
- ▶ Freeze

# Rejecting Someone



Saying “no” can be just as hard as asking for a yes.

- ▶ Tell the truth. Tell the truth. Tell the truth.
- ▶ It's OK to change your mind or not to know.
- ▶ If we're rejecting someone, practice kindness. Remember the golden rule.
- ▶ If someone doesn't respect our “no,” that's a good time to reach out to your supports (parents/caregivers, teachers, counselors, etc.)



# Direct is kind.

BRENE BROWN

# Boundaries & Technology

Social Media, Video Apps, Porn, Sexting, etc.

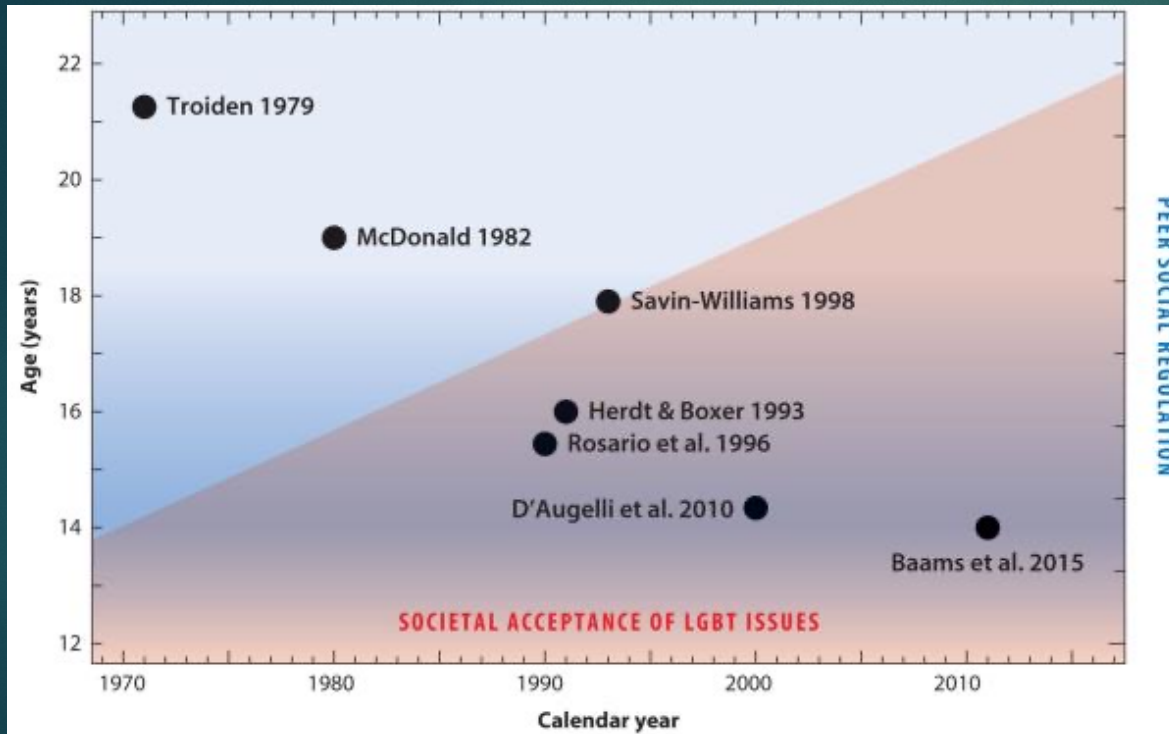
- ❖ When you encourage your child to think about their boundaries, make sure to include tech-based scenarios
- ▶ Talk with your child about the risks of sharing sexual content via apps or online
- ▶ Remind your child that pornography is intended for entertainment, not a how-to manual
- ▶ Set boundaries in your home around tech use (not after X time, not in your room, etc.)



# Sexual & Gender Identities



# Identity Development in Youth



## Sexual Identity/Orientation

(d'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; American Psychological Association, 2013)

- \* LGB Identity Awareness: 10 years old
- \* LGB Identity Self-Labeling: 14 years old
- \* First Disclosure of LGB Identity
  - \* To Friends: 16 years old
  - \* To Family: 17 years old

## Gender Identity

(Vanderburg, 2009)

- \* Children as young as 3-5 years old can understand gender and their own gender identity.

Your 7th grader, Kate, tells you that her friend Ray is now going by Rachel and using they/them pronouns. She also shares that her other friend Crystal is pansexual. You're not sure what all these words mean, or why Kate is telling you.

"Thanks for telling me - I'll need to practice Rachel's pronouns. What are you thinking about all those things? Do you have any questions?"

- Model that it's OK to need time to absorb new identities
- Don't assume that your child has all the answers
- Be curious about their thoughts and feelings:
  - "Some people figure out their identities sooner, other people learn about themselves later. You might..."

# Supporting Healthy Sexual Development

Strategies to Use at Home

- ▶ Be curious! Ask questions.
- ▶ Help young people find language and communication styles that feel realistic or comfortable for them to discuss boundaries of all kinds with family, friends, and partners.
- ▶ Recognize that awkwardness is OK and normal!



Questions?  
Thoughts?  
Discussion...