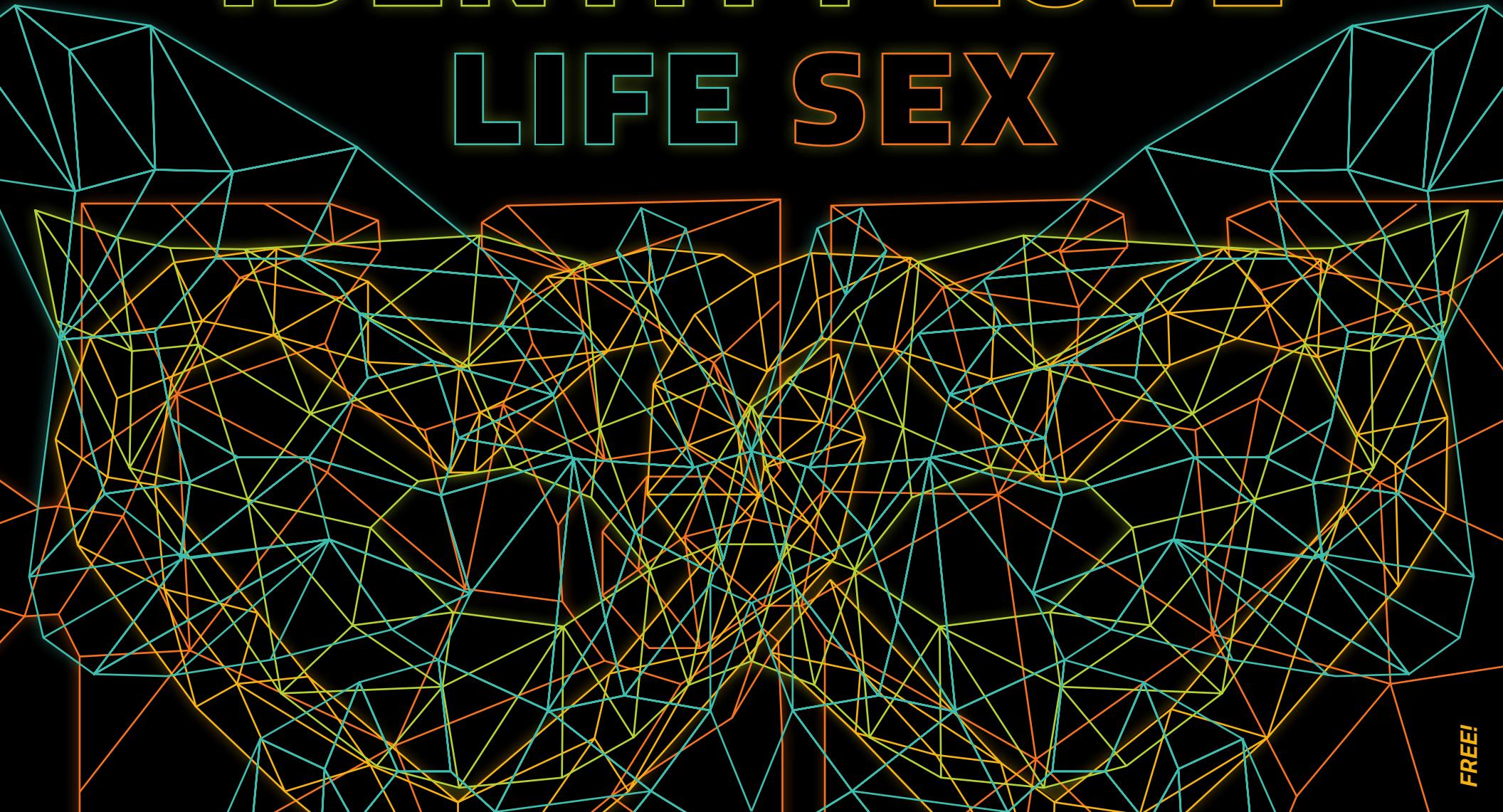
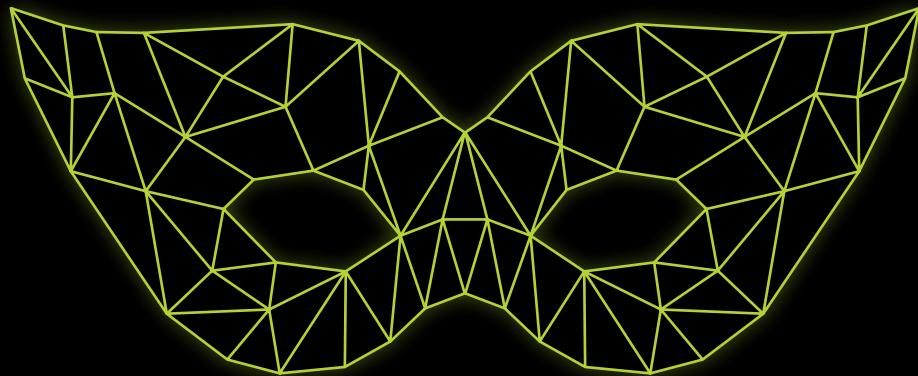


THE RATIONAL ENQUIRER

IDENTITY LOVE LIFE SEX



IDENTITY



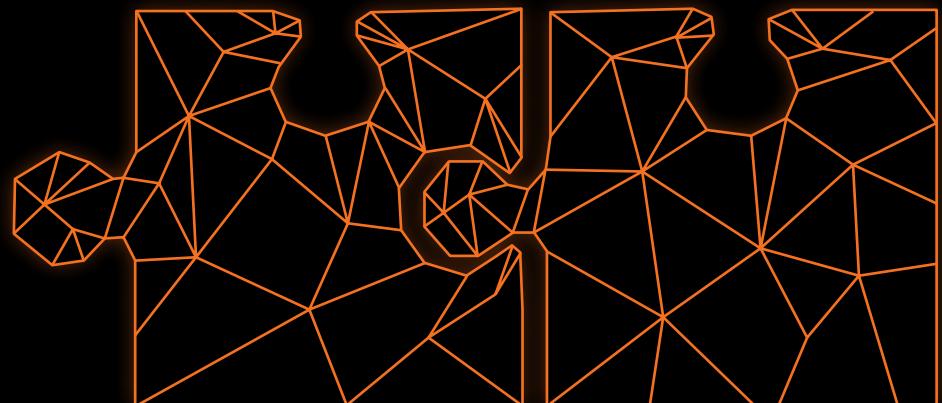
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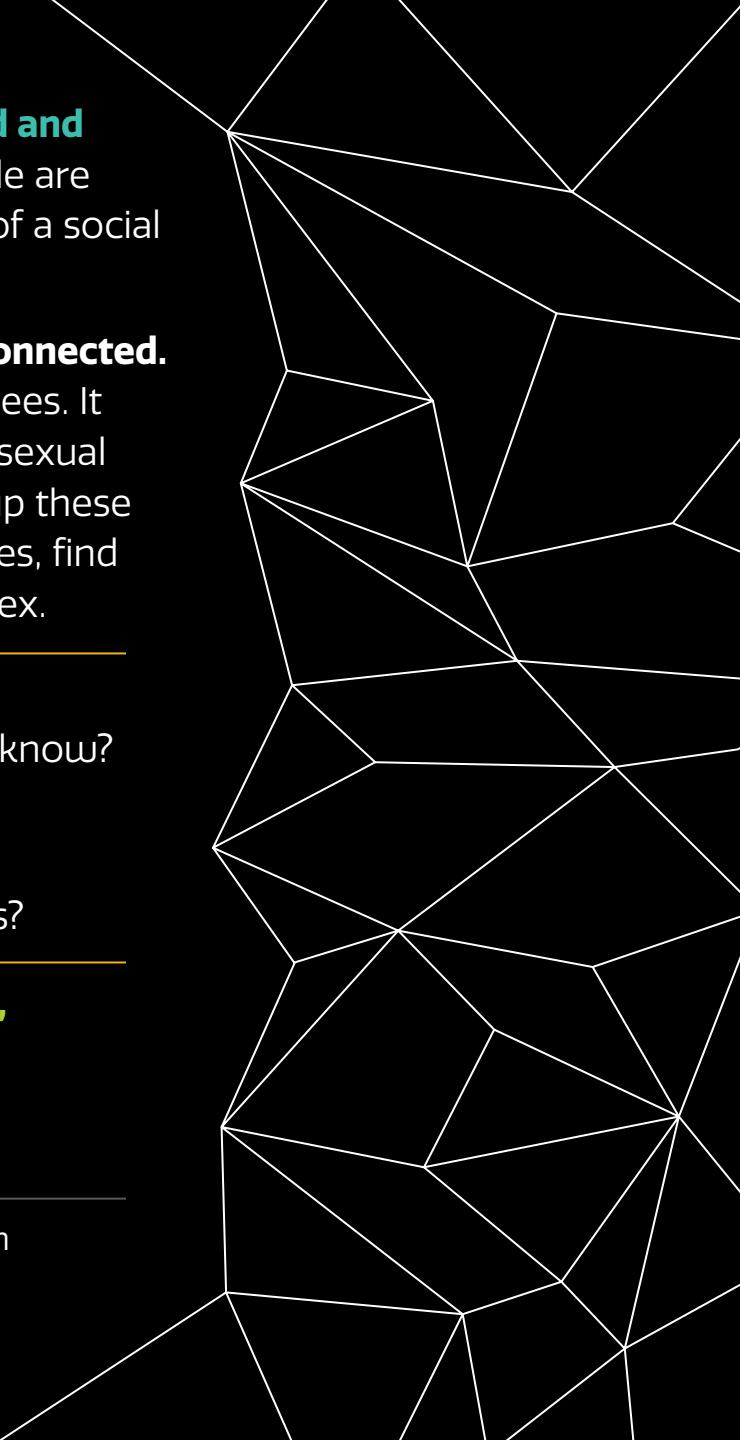


LIFE



SEX

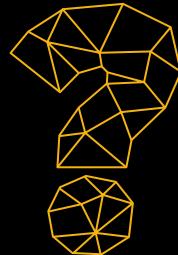




Our world is connected by vast amounts of information we send and receive through our phones, iPads/tablets and computers. People are able to share their experiences, connect on social media, be part of a social movement and find support online.

Like our world, our sense of identity, love, life and sex are interconnected.

Sexual health education is so much more than the birds and the bees. It is about promoting healthy relationships, consent and preventing sexual assault and violence. You will see young authors and artists take up these topics and others in this issue. You will read about their experiences, find resources and learn something new about identity, love, life and sex.



As you read each story, think about

- How does the article relate to you or someone you know?
- How does the article relate to the larger world, current media and events?
- What actions can you take to help yourself or others?

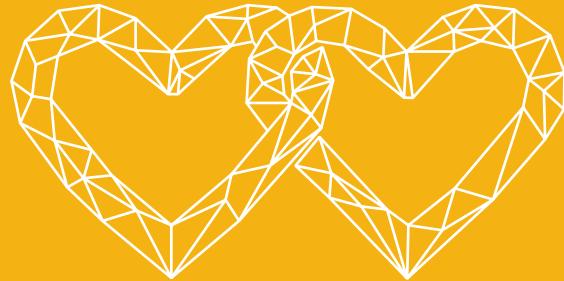
Share your thoughts with someone you trust – a parent, sibling, friend or other trusted adult.

Use these articles to start a conversation.

Have questions or want more information? Check out the resources within the articles as well as the resource page at the back of this publication.



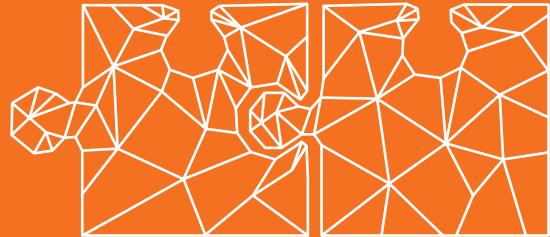
IDENTITY	5
Gender roles: Don't believe the hype	6
Identity and communication	8
No big deal: Sex and disability	10
Truth artwork	12



LOVE	13
A teen's perspective on healthy relationships	14
Nevertheless	16
Heart artwork	17
For the sake of my son	18
My story: Open adoption	20

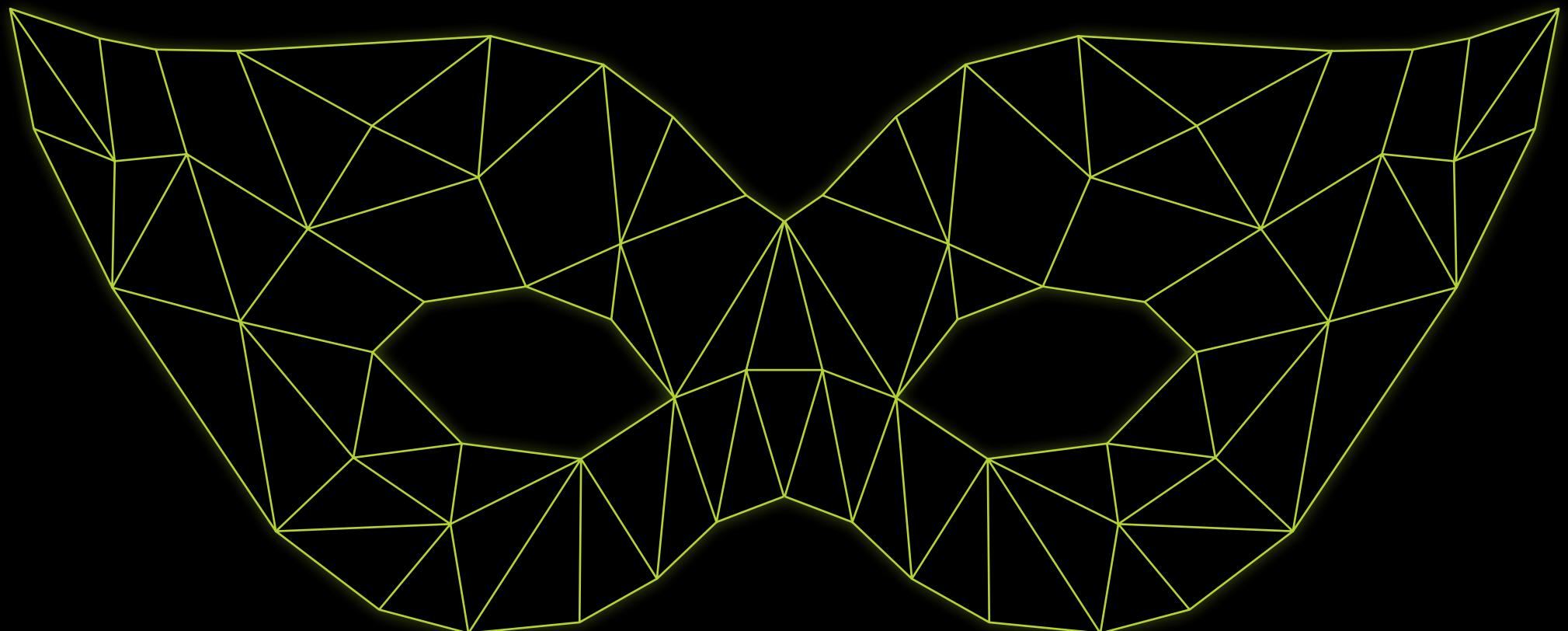


LIFE	23
Project Dot	24
Communication artwork	25
Reacting to unwanted sexual contact: Frozen silence	26
When it's not consent: What to do	28



SEX	30
Love and sex: Not right now, thanks	31
Your first time: What counts?	32
Plan ahead: Prevent unintended pregnancy	34
Talking to your parents about birth control	36

IDENTITY



I am me. I am enough.

GENDER ROLES DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

There are strong gender roles when it comes to sexual activity and relationships, and we often play into them without thinking. For example, society perceives sexually experienced young women more positively than sexually experienced young men. How can you shake the gender roles that put people in undesirable and unhealthy places?



I am sure you can think of some ways on your own, but here is a short list to give you a head start:



Recognize that you live in a world of stereotypes.

By just recognizing the names we call people who do and do not have sex, you are well on your way to thinking about people in a more inclusive manner. Thinking critically about these names is one way to fight and challenge stereotypes that surround you.



Think about each person as an individual.

Each person has his or her own reasons for doing things. Every person and situation is unique. Remember that, and it becomes harder to label people based on their actions or reputation.



Put yourself in another person's place.

Next time you think of someone as a player or slut or loser, think about why you jump to that conclusion. What do you really know about this person? Are the rumors you hear true? And if they are, does that person really deserve that name?



Open up your world to the idea that there are many different genders.

That makes it easier to open up to the idea that there are many ways people act sexually, and they can all be considered "normal."

There is another really good reason to stop believing in these strong gender roles when it comes to sexual activity and relationships. The more you believe in slut shaming, make fun of people who choose not to have sex, and pump up young men for being sexually active, the more you will believe that's how the world should be. And if you believe in this way of the world, you might pressure yourself into playing into a gender role.

So, if you are a young woman and you think that young women who express their sexuality or have sex are sluts, then when you feel sexy, you may think of yourself as a slut. As a result, instead of feeling good about yourself, you might feel ashamed. In the same way, if you are a young man and, for whatever reason, you do not want to have sex one day, you might think something is the matter with you because if you truly were a stud, you would not give up the chance to "get some."

Believing in these gender roles can hurt you and those around you.

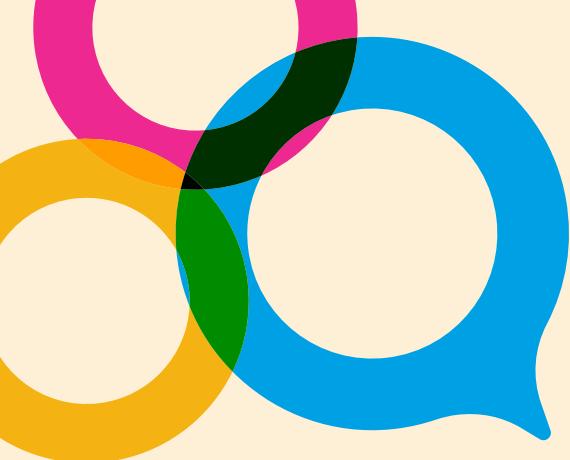
Reprinted with permission from the book "Sexual Decisions" by Kris Gouwen, PhD.

Kris is looking for young people to review her book, "Sexual Decisions." To be a reviewer, contact Kris at drlkrisg@gmail.com for a free copy. Submit your book review to Lindsay.weaver@dhsoha.state.or.us as an article submission for the next edition of "The Rational Enquirer."

For additional reading on gender and gender roles:

» <https://tinyurl.com/yc66m3kz>

» www.smyrc.org



Identity and communication

When you're in high school, you spend a lot of time trying to figure out who you are

and explaining it to people if and when you choose to. I have seen many people have a hard time getting their family to understand them, and their family unknowingly says hurtful things because they don't fully understand the situation.

A common example of this is when someone comes out to their family as transgender, but their family refers to them as a gender they do not identify with. This not only discredits their transition but also shows that the person doesn't understand their situation. From the family members' perspective, this mistake is understandable because their relative of one gender is now asking to be called another. It seems new because they have always known their relative one way. But the person was likely

struggling with their identity for some time — seeing themselves as whatever they came out to their family as long before the family actually knew. That misunderstanding makes people in the middle of a transition feel awful. They struggled with their own identity for so long and, once they have it figured out, their family can't figure them out or doesn't understand.

Everyone struggles with their identity, from who they want to be to who they want to be with and why. Just by thinking about things from other people's point of view, you can make it a little easier for both of you. Bottom line is that if you are being hurt by a lack of communication, communicate and try to understand where both parties are coming from.

—Stefan Fields
Teen author

Gender and sexual identity and communication tips

- 1** **Don't make assumptions** regarding someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no one way someone should look or act regarding identity or sexual orientation. People self-identify themselves; it is not for others to label them.
- 2** **Be understanding** as people process their identities and sexual orientation at their own pace. A person may shift or change how they would like to be referred to either by name or pronouns. Work on understanding there is flexibility in identity, even if you find it confusing.
- 3** **Use appropriate language** through listening to the person describe their sexual orientation and gender identity in their own words. Use respectful language at all times, not just when you think the person is present.
- 4** **Do not "out" people**, which means disclosing a person's identity or sexual orientation to others without the person's consent. This could happen through gossip or because they think others have a right to know. This could put the "outed" person's safety at risk and could negatively affect them emotionally.
- 5** **Ask yourself, "Why do I need to know?"** before asking a question of an LGBTQ-identified person. Asking yourself this question will ensure you are not just asking out of your own curiosity and that the question you are asking is appropriate and does not cross personal boundaries.

Resources

- GLSEN, formerly Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
www.glsen.org
- PFLAG, formerly Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (bi- and trans-friendly, too)
www.pflag.org
- Basic Rights Oregon
www.basicrights.org
- Sexual & Gender Minority Youth Resource Center (SMYRC)
www.smyrc.org
- PDX Q Center, medical and non-medical resource directory
www.pdxqcenter.org/resources/
- Oregon Department of Education. Guidance to school districts: Creating a safe and supportive school environment for transgender students
<https://tinyurl.com/yczrpzg3>

No big deal: sex and disability

There is really only one thing that you need to know about sex and disability ...

Disabled people have sex, too.

Beyond that, it's pretty much impossible to generalize.

What do you mean by disability?

The word "disability" covers a huge range of conditions: physical disabilities like spina bifida, sensory disabilities such as blindness, "invisible disabilities" such as epilepsy, developmental disabilities such as Down's syndrome, psychiatric disabilities such as bipolar disorder ... the list goes on and on. Some people are born with a disability; others acquire one later in life. In fact, most people, if they live long enough, will experience a disability of some kind before they die. Disabilities can be so mild that they don't have any effect on day-to-day life or so severe that they require full-time care and assistance.

What stereotypes do people with disabilities face?

So very few things apply to all disabled people. In fact, the main thing we have in common is that we have to deal with other people's stereotypes and prejudices.

One common stereotype is that disabled people just aren't sexual. Media images of disabled people often present us as pathetic or child-like. Even images that are supposed to be more positive can have the same effect: "saintly" or "heroic" doesn't always fit well with "just plain horny."

Of course, some disabled people, just like some non-disabled people, may choose to be celibate for part or all of our lives. And some conditions such as depression or chronic fatigue syndrome may reduce interest in sex, at least temporarily. But there isn't anything about having a disability that magically prevents someone from having sexual feelings. We feel desire and lust just like anyone else. We are sexual just like anyone else.

What myths about sex do people with disabilities have to face?

The other common myth is that, if disabled people do have sexual feelings, then we must go around in a permanent state of sexual frustration, either because we "can't have sex" or because nobody could possibly want to have sex with someone with a disability.

Many disabled people get thoroughly tired of being asked questions along the lines of "Um, can you, like, DO IT?" — with "IT," of course, being penis-in-vagina intercourse.

For a start, a disabled person is just as likely as anyone to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, so penis-in-vagina intercourse may not be something that person is interested in. And many people (with and without disabilities) find that intercourse isn't necessarily the best or most pleasurable form of sex anyway. There's a lot more to sex than just intercourse.

Some disabilities may mean you need to make practical adjustments to partnered sex, but these are usually pretty simple with good communication and a bit of imagination (and if you don't have those, you probably shouldn't be having sex with anyone in the first place).

Of course, disabled people have to practice safer sex and birth control just like anyone else. This should be obvious, but it doesn't seem to occur to some people that anyone with a disability might get pregnant or contract an STI. In a few cases, a particular disability may affect your choice of safer sex or birth control methods.

What about finding a good partner?

Having a disability can sometimes make it harder to find a sexual partner. It can be difficult to socialize and meet people if social events are held in inaccessible buildings. Prejudice can also be an issue, especially in the teenage years. For many teenagers, dating seems to be more about "getting" someone who is seen to be a good "catch" than who you actually want to be with. And sadly, even in adulthood, there are some non-disabled people who can't imagine anyone with a disability as a possible partner. That's their loss.

But there are plenty of people out there who don't have that problem. Contrary to the media images we're fed, being attractive and sexy has nothing to do with having a "perfect" body or being "normal." If you fall for someone's gorgeous grin and deranged sense of humor, the fact that they use a wheelchair to get around may turn out to be a minor detail.

In a way, having a disability can actually become a positive advantage when it comes to sex. It means that you need to learn how to communicate and be up-front about what works for you and what doesn't. Having to change and adapt the standard "script" means you have to be flexible and creative. And you have to focus on what actually feels best for you and your partner, instead of getting hung up about what's "normal" or how you're "supposed" to have sex.

—Clare Sainsbury

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from Scarleteen, www.scarleteen.com*

Truth

Brittany Meeks and
Morgan Millican

Teen artists

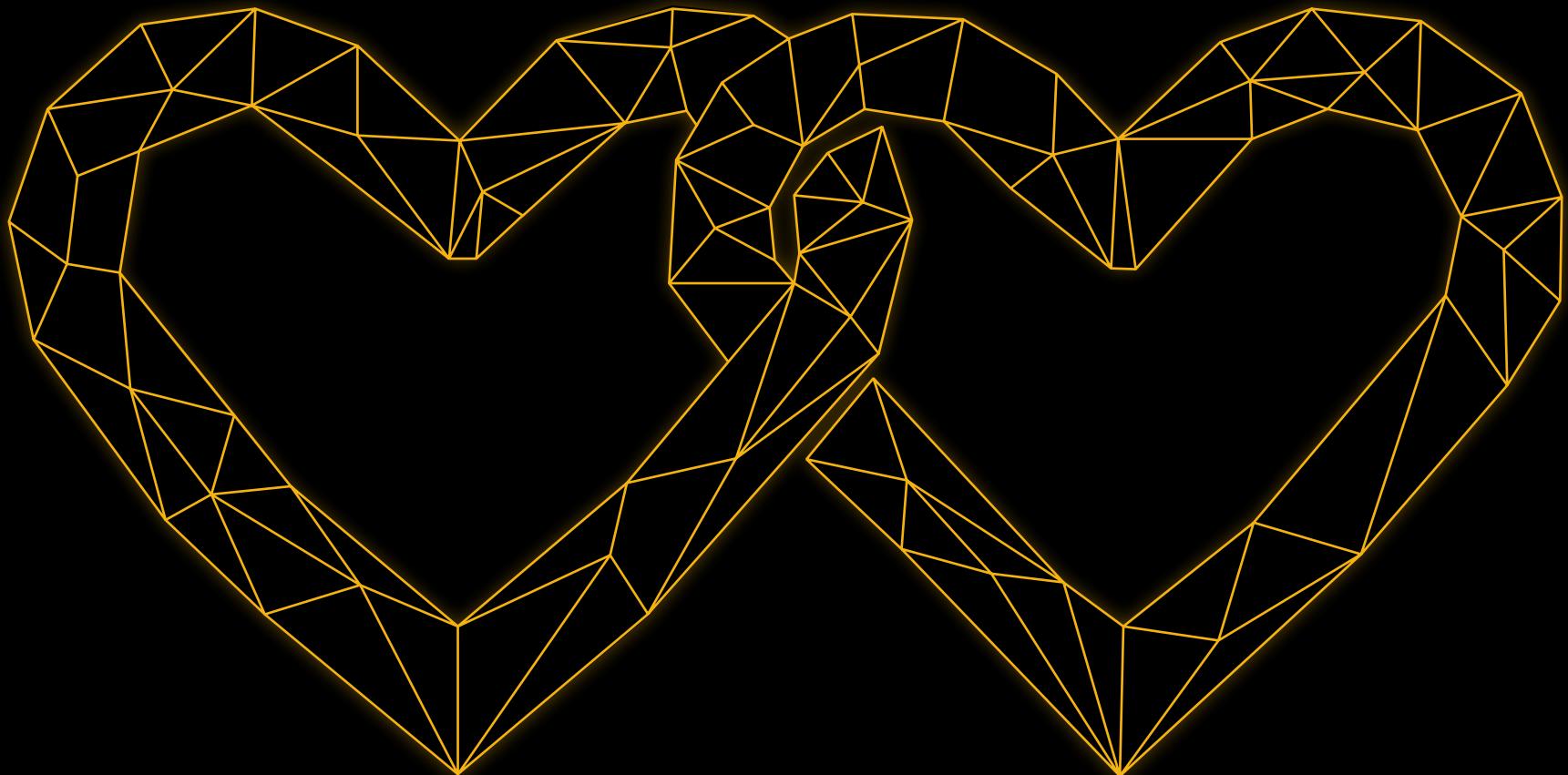
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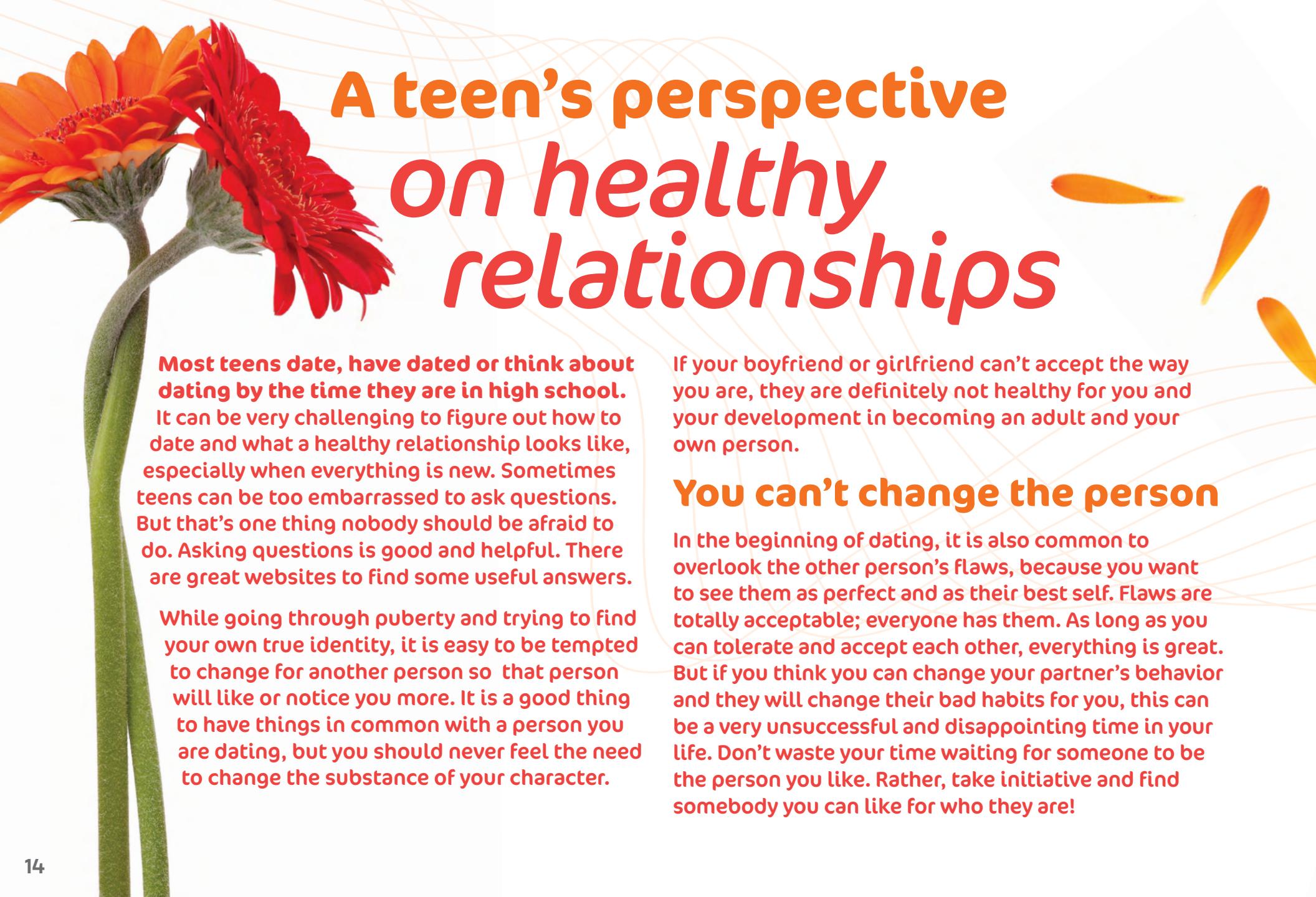
Three Things Cannot
be long hidden The sun.
The moon and The
truth.

MM
BM

LOVE



Love comes in many forms



A teen's perspective on healthy relationships

Most teens date, have dated or think about dating by the time they are in high school. It can be very challenging to figure out how to date and what a healthy relationship looks like, especially when everything is new. Sometimes teens can be too embarrassed to ask questions. But that's one thing nobody should be afraid to do. Asking questions is good and helpful. There are great websites to find some useful answers.

While going through puberty and trying to find your own true identity, it is easy to be tempted to change for another person so that person will like or notice you more. It is a good thing to have things in common with a person you are dating, but you should never feel the need to change the substance of your character.

If your boyfriend or girlfriend can't accept the way you are, they are definitely not healthy for you and your development in becoming an adult and your own person.

You can't change the person

In the beginning of dating, it is also common to overlook the other person's flaws, because you want to see them as perfect and as their best self. Flaws are totally acceptable; everyone has them. As long as you can tolerate and accept each other, everything is great. But if you think you can change your partner's behavior and they will change their bad habits for you, this can be a very unsuccessful and disappointing time in your life. Don't waste your time waiting for someone to be the person you like. Rather, take initiative and find somebody you can like for who they are!

Healthy relationships are not abusive

Also, don't mistake an abusive relationship with a healthy one. If your partner makes you feel bad about yourself, that person is not a good or healthy influence on you. Abusive or unhealthy relationships can show themselves in many different ways. For instance, the person might isolate you from your family and friends and express an extreme jealousy whenever you talk to someone else and don't pay them all the attention they want.

Verbal abuse is abuse nonetheless. Just because you can't see a physical wound doesn't mean they didn't hurt you. Emotional abuse can be as bad as physical abuse and sometimes worse.

If you are experiencing abuse, it is important to get help from a person close to you. In a case of physical or sexual violence, you need to confide in somebody you can trust and break up that toxic relationship. A partner and a relationship should enhance both your personalities and not suppress them.

—Sabrina Pfister
Teen author

Resources

Where to get help for relationship abuse

It is not normal to be unhappy in a relationship. If you think that you could be in an abusive relationship you can look for information and help online, such as at <https://www.plannedparenthood.org>. Planned Parenthood is a very reliable source. It has been around for nearly 100 years — helping people and advocating for global health.

You can find more help at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence>, which is one of the major operating components of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The website <http://www.thehotline.org/help/help-for-friends-and-family/> provides a free hotline for abuse victims.

Last but not least, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline provides resources for teens, parents, friends and family. All communication is confidential and anonymous. Call 1-866-331-9474 or go to www.loveisrespect.org.

A lot more is available online, but these resources are reliable and can be helpful in a case of an abusive relationship.

Nevertheless

You know the way that I feel,
You know how to make me sick,
You know that I don't love you,
You know I never will,
You know how to hurt me,
You know that I'm still here,
But you still keep calling, calling out my name,
And you know I'll keep falling, falling for you again,
I feel your arms around me even when you're gone,
You know I long for love, you know that you can give,
You know I still don't love you,
You know I never will,
But still we keep each other leading on in time,
Because we are both in love with the idea of me in your arms

—Teen author



Heart

By Esmeralda Vasquez
Teen artist
La Grande School-
Based Health Center

A large, semi-transparent silhouette of a pregnant woman is visible on the left side of the page. She is holding the hand of a young child, likely her son, whose back is to the viewer. The scene is set against a bright, overexposed background.

For the sake of my son

Not every teen father is a deadbeat dad.

I've been there for my son even though I was being pushed out of his life. In my second semester of freshman year, I found out that I was going to be a dad. I was in disbelief that I had gotten my girlfriend pregnant, especially at my age. I was in such disbelief that I forced us to continue with life as if nothing happened. I was in total denial. We didn't even tell our parents or anyone else until we couldn't hide it any more.

Once her belly got big enough for people to notice, we finally told our parents. By then she was already five months pregnant. All of our parents wanted us to abort or give the baby up for adoption, but we had already talked about it before we told our parents and made up our minds that we were keeping the baby. Plus, she was already too far along for an abortion, so our parents respected our wishes and let us keep the baby.

After that, everything was going great for us. We planned how everything would be: how we'd split the costs and who would have him on certain days, etc. We worked hard to make sure we thought of everything. Then my son was born. Everything went downhill. At the hospital, all of our parents started arguing about everything from visiting time to breastfeeding versus bottle-feeding. Each side didn't want what the other side wanted. This ended up causing me and my son's mother to break up. I wasn't allowed to see my son unless I went to her house. I wasn't allowed to go inside so I would sit outside on the curb at her house holding him. Even though I hated it, I still went and sat on the curb for as long as I could just to see my son. I only went so he would know I loved him and that I would be there for him no matter what. While that was going on, I was in the process of taking her to court so I could get equal time without her supervision.

It was a long miserable battle, but was worth it because now I have joint custody and equal parenting time. Also my son's mother and I have grown up and are able to communicate and be friends for the sake of our son. We decided to leave our son out of our problems because it only hurts him.

So next time you think every teen father is a deadbeat dad, think about how a teen father never gave up until he could see his son.

—Uhusti Gause

*Uhusti has been a teen father since 2014.
He attends Centennial High School.*

Resources

For young fathers

Squires

<https://www.squirespdx.org>

info@squirespdx.org

503-421-0933

For young parents

Insights Teen Parent Services

<https://insightstpp.org/>

503-239-6996

My Story: Open Adoption



The very first time I dialed the number for Open Adoption & Family Services, I was sitting on the steps outside the public library.

I was 18 years old, six months pregnant and beyond scared. I had kept my pregnancy a secret from my family up until this point and now I had less than three months to make the biggest decision of my life.

My first call with the agency is a little fuzzy in my mind. I had so much adrenaline, so many nerves that I don't really remember what I asked. I do remember a really kind voice on the other end of the phone telling me that no matter what I chose, there were people and resources to help me through it. They could help me find the right resources to parent on my own, or help me figure out what an open adoption would look like for me. While I never discussed abortion options with my adoption counselor because of how far along my pregnancy was, I know that they provide education and resources for that option as well. (All three options are valid, and there is absolutely no shame in considering each one.)

My family stood by me throughout my process, despite the chaos I had caused. The decision was mine to make, and I wanted to be informed.

No one at the agency ever tried to sway me one way or another. It was very clear that they were there to give me my options, not to tell me what my next move should be. In the end, I had to separate my needs from my child's needs. Which decisions were I making with fear? Which decisions were I making with love? There is no one that can decide that for you. After a few weeks of living in the decision process, I realized that my job as a mother was to give my son the absolute best childhood I could give him, and that meant moving forward with open adoption. My adoption counselor gave me a book of letters from potential families. I was to read through them and let her know if there was anyone I was potentially interested in.

I was incredibly lucky with my open adoption journey. When I found August's parents, I knew immediately that they were the ones. They walked into the room and I thought, "Oh, there you are. You are the ones that will love him as much as I do." It didn't make my choice any easier, but it made me certain that I was making the right one. We went through the last two or so months of my pregnancy together. I visited their home and saw the beautiful nursery my son would grow up in. They framed pictures of me and placed them around his crib so that he could see my face each day. Every moment I spent with them was a reminder of how magical and beautiful our son's childhood would be.

August is nearly 7 years old now and is, unquestionably, the most amazing person I've ever known. Matthew and Eric have raised him to be kind, curious, adventurous, hilarious, compassionate and just a little bit sassy (although that might be genetics). There hasn't been a moment in these past seven years that I haven't thought about him. It took the better part of that time for me to truly allow myself to be happy again. There is so much shame and secrecy around adoption in our culture. I didn't know that I was allowed to be happy or even proud of my choice, but what's not to be proud of? I gave my son the childhood he deserves, and I get to be there to watch him live it. He will always know how much I love him, and I will always be there to answer any questions he may have.

When I chose Matthew and Eric as August's parents, I knew that they would be the right fit for him. I never imagined they would also be such a perfect fit for me. In each of them I have gained a partner in crime, a confidant, a co-parent, a shoulder to cry on and a lifelong friend.

*When I found
August's parents,
I knew immediately
that they were
the ones*

We made the decision to become a family because it was the best thing for August, but in the end it turned out to be the best thing for all of us. There are some people that are meant to come into your life one way or another, and I wouldn't trade this experience or these people for anything in the world. They always find a way to make me a part of the little moments, no matter how far apart we are. Every year we grow closer as a family, and I am forever indebted to them for the constant love and support they have provided both my son and myself. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't have it any other way.

All mothers have their own unique journey, and all people have the right to make the decision that is best for them. Organizations such as Open Adoption &

Family Services can help you understand your options. In the end, you have to put in real work to decide what's best for you. Do your research, talk to someone, be honest with yourself and be kind to yourself. This is not a road you are walking alone, and there is nothing shameful about this journey.

*—Taylor Redwine
Young author*

Taylor lives in Oregon, loves to read and is currently training for her third half marathon.

I never imagined they would also be such a perfect fit for me

Resources

Open Adoption & Family Services

For local all-options pregnancy counseling and open adoption services

www.openadopt.org

1-800-772-1115

Para Español 1-800-985-6763

All-Options (formally Backline)

Help line that provides unconditional and judgment-free support for people in all their decisions, feelings and experiences with pregnancy, parenting, adoption and abortion

www.all-options.org

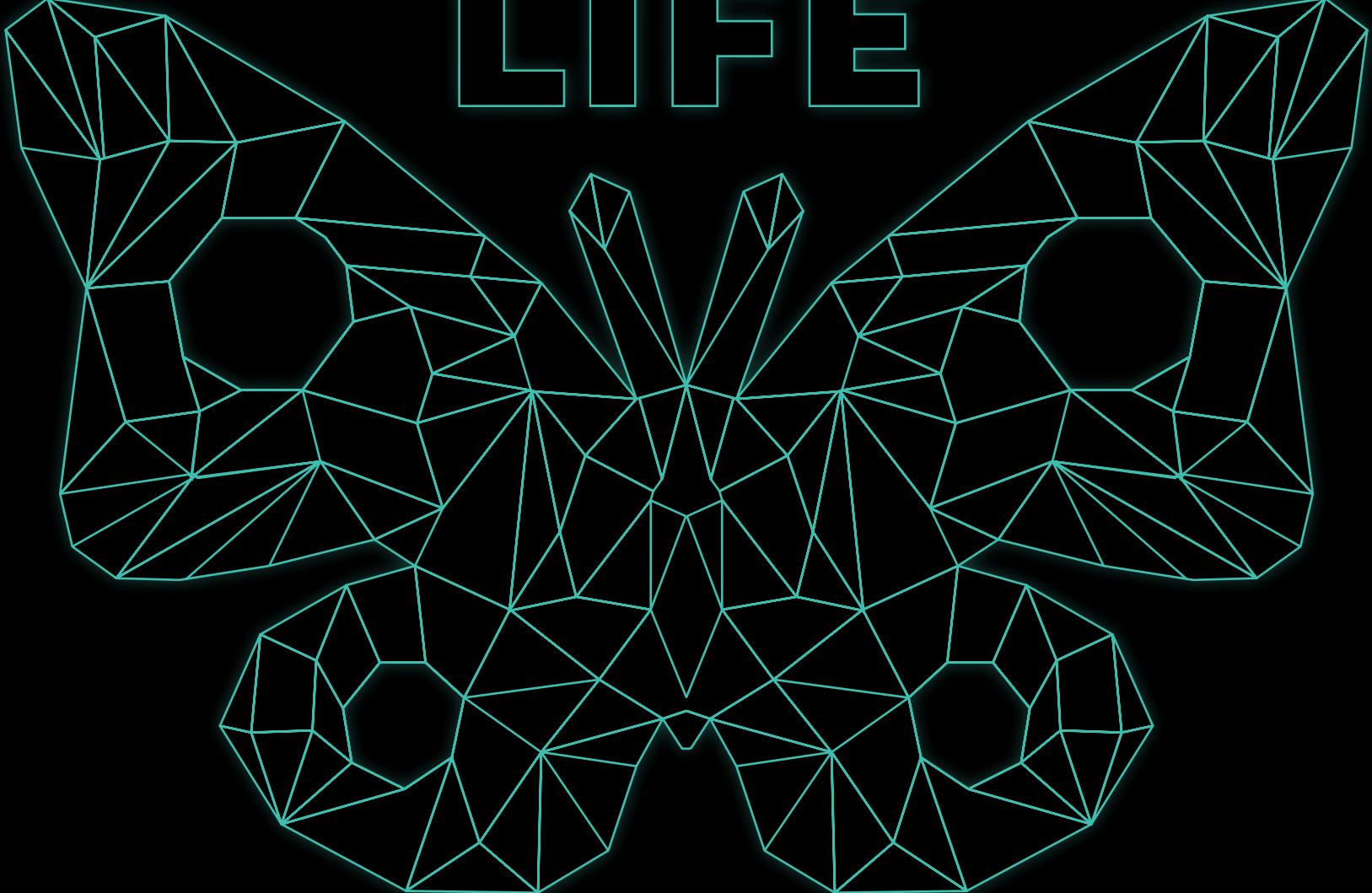
1-888-493-0092

Monday–Friday, 10–1 a.m. EST;
Sunday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. EST

Oregon Department of Education

For information on teen parent programs

www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/Pages/teenparentprogram.aspx



LIFE

Taking action for sexual health

Project Dot.

At my high school I run a menstrual hygiene club, Project Dot, where we fundraise to send reusable feminine hygiene products to young women in need. The club aims to celebrate the tabooed subject in an attempt to make women more comfortable with their own anatomy and confident in themselves.

I am traveling to Uganda in a few weeks and bringing reusable pads with me to distribute in the local school. Over the past few months, I have been meeting with people and developing a comprehensive menstruation curriculum.

The mission of Project Dot is two-fold: to provoke conversations in the community about menstruation and its impact on girls and to change the experience for girls where menstruation poses a barrier for going to school.

Periods affect nearly every person with a uterus at some point in life. Menstruation in rural areas of Uganda and Cameroon, Africa has jeopardized education for many young women. Students can miss four days of school on average every month when they are menstruating because they lack the supplies to allow them to continue to attend school.

Project Dot collects donations such as reusable pads, underwear and reusable menstrual cups/diva cups for young women in need.

If you are interested in starting a Project Dot at your school, email projectdot.lhs@gmail.com for information on getting started.

To donate, please see our website: <https://projectdotinfo.weebly.com>.

—Abby Dalke
High school student

*Abby is co-founder and outreach coordinator of Project Dot.
<https://projectdotinfo.weebly.com>*

Communication

By Lexi Feldman

Teen artist

La Grande School-Based Health Center



Reacting to unwanted sexual contact

FROZEN SILENCE

I was with my friend Emily at the home of a guy she knew. She knew Mike from school and was friends with him. Emily and I went to different schools, but she told me how funny he was and she wanted me to meet him.

Mike was older than we were and had a confidence about him. I liked him. A bunch of us were over at his house, and some people were drinking, and we were all talking. It was pretty low key. Emily and I were sitting on the couch talking.

Mike came over and sat down next to Emily, his arm over both our shoulders with me on the end and Emily in between us. As his arm was over my shoulder I felt his hand brush my boob, I thought it was an accident so I ignored it. Then he did it again. I looked at my friend who was sitting in the middle of us and she didn't see what had happened. And then, as his arm lay over our shoulders, he reached down and grabbed my boob. He grabbed it! He grabbed me while we were all sitting on the couch, with all of these people around. I looked over at Mike. He had a look on his face. With that look, I just knew.

Then I did something I never thought I would do. I froze. I completely froze. I was so shocked and overwhelmed with what had just happened, I didn't know what to do. I didn't get up, I didn't yell out, I didn't do anything. I just sat in frozen silence.

Later, after we left, all of these thoughts were running through my head. This was Emily's friend and I trusted her judgment of people. If he were that kind of person, she would have told me. And why would he do this with all of these people around? Did anyone else see what had happened? Then I tried making excuses. Maybe it was because he was drinking (I wasn't). Is that why he did it? Did he think I was interested in him sexually? Was he interested in me? Then I remembered the look on his face. There was no mistaking; there were no excuses.

Then there was the self-blame. Was there something I did where I was asking for it to happen? Did I smile or laugh too much? Did I make him think I was interested in something more? Why did I put myself in that situation? I'd never had anything like that happen. I never thought about what to do if something like that did happen. Why couldn't I have known what to do? Why did I just sit there not moving? Why did I let that happen?

There were so many things I just did not want to deal with. I was so embarrassed. I didn't want to tell Emily even though she was right there. Was this sexual assault? I didn't want to label it, and I didn't want other people to label it. I didn't want anyone to know. What would people say? Would they take his side and call me a slut? Why did I just sit there and ignore it when he brushed my boob the first time? I should have said something, or at least I could have moved away. Why didn't I move away? My friend Emily is fun, outgoing and could speak up for herself. I am more quiet and reserved. I feared if I told her she would have thought I wanted it to happen or that I was trying to come between her and Mike.

Emily and I still saw Mike and we all went out places together. I thought if I ever said anything about what happened to anyone, people would question me on why I still considered him a friend. When I transferred to the same school with Emily, Mike was still there. He graduated before us. I never said anything about it, and he never did either. I avoided situations the best I could where something like that could ever happen again between me and Mike, and nothing ever did.

What Mike did to me was wrong. He had touched and grabbed me sexually when I had not wanted to be touched. He had power over me in that situation and he took advantage. Even though I still feel shame and embarrassment, this is my first step in releasing these feelings in writing about what happened. I've learned some things I want you to know:

You are not alone if someone has touched, grabbed, groped or had sex with you when you didn't want it to happen. There are flight, fight and frozen reactions people can have in overwhelming or traumatic situations. I froze, and if you froze under a similar circumstance, it's not your fault. You didn't do anything to cause it to happen.

Don't let, negative self-talk, excuses, self-blame or the blame of others cloud your judgment.

—Teen author

Resources

If you have questions or need to reach out to someone for yourself or a friend, please see the resources below:

Your Life Your Voice is available 24/7 and is a free anonymous helpline where you can call, online chat, email or text trained counselors. Spanish-speaking counselors and translation services for more than 140 languages are available, along with a TDD line (1-800-448-1833) for speech-impaired and deaf callers.

www.yourlifeyourvoice.org | 1-800-448-3000

The National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline provides resources for teens, parents, friends and family. All communication is confidential and anonymous.

www.loveisrespect.org | 1-866-331-9474

The National Sexual Assault Hotline provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services around the clock.

www.rainn.org | 1-800-656-4673

When it's not consent

WHAT TO DO

My first health class was in the fifth grade. We talked all about the birds and the bees, and everything in between.

At the time, I felt mature because I was the only one that didn't giggle every time the teacher said the word "sex." My mom had been very open with me about sex ever since I was young enough to really understand it. At the time, I remember feeling really sophisticated because I already knew what happened when "A man and a woman loved each other very much." But what if they didn't?

It wasn't until eighth grade when we finally learned about sexual violence and rape. When they talk about rape and sexual violence in middle school, they don't go into much detail. They tell you that rape is when there is sexual touching without consent. And from the movies that I had seen, it always seemed to happen with a stranger. I assumed that rape only happens when you're walking in a dark alley by yourself at night and a strange man grabs you and takes you behind a bush. It wasn't until the next year I found out that I was wrong.

For some reason, I never thought of rape coming from a friend or a boyfriend or a husband. It turns out that more often than not, rape or sexual assault comes from someone you know. Even if you are romantically or sexually involved with someone, you always have the right to say "no" to unwanted sexual contact. I think a lot of the time people think that because they gave consent once, they always give consent, but that is completely false. Even if you are both naked laying in a bed together, you always have the right to say "no" at absolutely any point in the situation.

Sexual assault is a huge problem in our society. Our society does a great job telling the masses that girls should be judged by their bodies. We see it everywhere. Not only is it what a large number of songs are about, but we see it on billboards, magazine covers, social media, the porn industry, and in music videos and video games. This objectification has led to a degradation of all genders. It's important to see how these actions are affecting the young people of today, and what the outcome is going to be when they are starting to become sexually active.

It's important to understand that if you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault, it is not your fault. It doesn't matter what you were wearing or how much you drank. It doesn't matter if they were a stranger or if it was your husband of 20 years. Unwanted sexual contact is never OK, regardless of the situation.

It's also important to know that you are not alone.

According to the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV), one in every four women will be a victim of sexual assault in their lifetimes. After an assault you can seek help, such as contacting a crisis hotline for services (1-800-656-HOPE), completing a rape kit with a health care provider or contacting the police.

If a peer tells you they have been sexually assaulted, the best thing to do is be supportive.

People that have been assaulted may feel ashamed of the assault and isolated. It may be hard for them to go out in fear of running into the person that raped or assaulted them. You can help by believing them. Some may ask questions about what they were wearing or if they were intoxicated. That is known as victim blaming and can be very counter-productive.

It can often take a lot of courage to get help. If you do not believe a person, it can make them feel alone, like they shouldn't come to anyone about it. That is not the case. They can talk to a therapist or someone at a sexual assault hotline. Below are resources to contact if you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault.

—Mady Whitnah
Teen author

Resources

Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

www.ocadsv.org

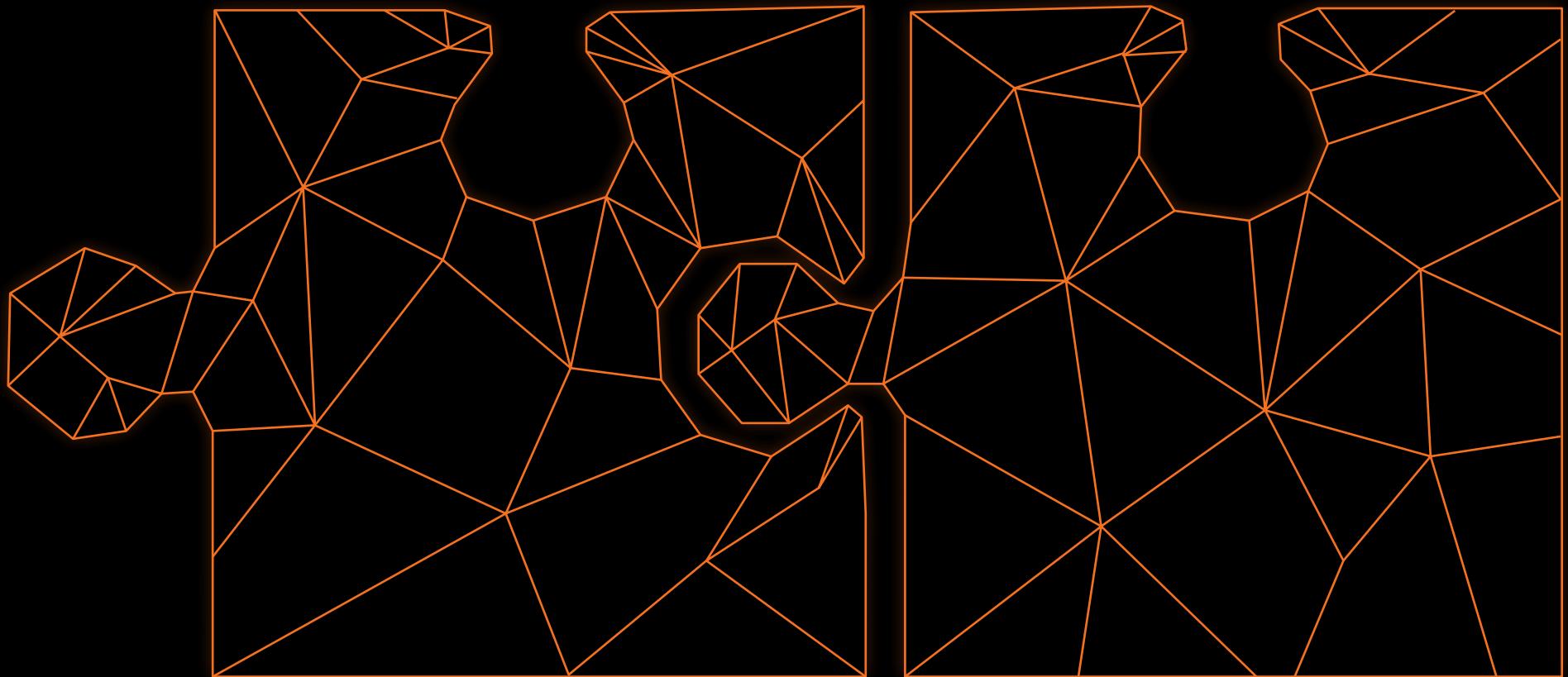
National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673)

Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force

www.oregonsatf.org

SEX



Who, what, when, why – or not at all

LOVE AND SEX – NOT RIGHT NOW, THANKS

My whole life I've never really been interested in the sex life or putting time into actually knowing what love means. My parents have told me the basics, but not like what I've learned in class. If I asked my parents about sex and love they would tell me, but I'm just not interested or don't care enough to ask them yet.

I don't usually have time for girlfriends or any of that because I'm doing a sport or training for a sport and, when I have free time, I like to spend it with my best friends.

However, sex and love are a huge part of most people's lives. You should do that type of stuff with the right person. I'm already seeing people younger than me having sex with a bunch of people and even getting pregnant. Being pregnant or having a child is a huge part of being a teen in school because now you have to focus on being a parent or whatever your plan is.

I'm not saying I won't be interested in love and sex later but, for now, I could care less about them. I am gonna start taking advantage of being a kid because I'm only gonna be this age once and I wanna make it count. In my opinion, I'm still too young to have sex or even think about it. It may not be too young for other people. If they think they are ready, then cool, but I'm not ready for that experience yet.

I want to save something that important for the right person that I think I'm gonna be with for a really long time.

—Braden Roemen
Teen author

Your first time ... what counts?

Several years ago, I set out to collect stories from women about their first sexual experiences.

My goal was simple. Let's be honest with each other. Let's share what sex is really like. Not the nuts-and-bolts descriptions from sex education classes. Not the rose-colored scenes in romantic comedies. Not the exaggerated encounters in pornography. **What if we told each other our true stories? — how we felt, what we did and what it meant?**

Turns out the question was not so simple after all.

One woman asked me if I wanted to know about the first time she gave a guy a blowjob or the first time she experienced penetration. Both had been meaningful. Both had been important, but the former had made her feel powerful.

Another told me that she had been sexually abused as a child. That was violence, not sex. Perhaps, she suggested, she could tell me about her first time with someone who actually loved her, an experience that felt like a newly discovered universe.

A lesbian told me about a secret rendezvous with another woman and admitted that it took her years to realize she had lost her virginity that night. Everything she knew about sex had come from old movies, which depicted relationships between men and women.

Even my own story was complicated. I had an intense, intimate encounter when I was 13 years old but didn't have penis-in-vagina sex until several years later. I remember wondering, "Did it count? Am I still a virgin?"

We approach sexual situations with a lot of preconceived notions, and one of the biggest is that virginity is a “thing” that can be lost or taken or given away, but as I talked to people about their actual experiences, the whole concept of “virgin” made less and less sense. Sexual behavior encompasses a whole range of activities from kissing to fingering to oral sex to penetrative sex. It’s not like there is a line in the sand between going down on someone and sliding on a condom and once you cross it you are suddenly a whole different person.

Every intimate encounter is unique.

Many behaviors count as sex.

The title of the book that came out of all these conversations is “The V-Word.” In my experience, the first word this title makes people think of is virgin or maybe vagina. In fact, what I learned from listening to the real experiences of women is that the important V-word is VOICE. We have to find our voice and use it to say yes, to say no, to share our stories, and to speak our truths.

As one woman told me, “Life is an endless roller coaster of first times, of lost virginities.” Each one is worth savoring.

—Amber J. Keyser

About the book

“The V-Word: True Stories about First-Time Sex,” by Amber J. Keyser, was published in 2016 by SimonPulse. It was selected for the 2017 Rainbow List, which recognizes excellent books on LGBTQ themes, and the 2017 Amelia Bloomer list, which honors feminist literature. The collection also appeared on the New York Public Library’s list, 50 Best Books for Teens 2016, and the Chicago Public Library’s list, Best Nonfiction for Teens 2016.

You can find out more about the collection and other books by Amber J. Keyser at www.amberjkeyser.com. Reach Amber on Twitter at @amberjkeyser.

PLAN AHEAD

Prevent unintended pregnancy by choosing one or more of these highly effective options



Not having sex (abstinence)



Implant



Intrauterine contraception



Shot

HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You choose not to have sex. Choose a partner who has made the same choice. Talk about other activities you want and those you don't want. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implant is a small rod inserted by a health care provider. It is put under the skin of the inner upper arm. Tiny amounts of the hormone are released for three years. Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping the egg's release. Hormones also thicken the cervical mucus to stop sperm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are made of metal, and intrauterine systems (IUSs) are made of plastic. Both are small implants. Both are put inside your uterus by a health care provider. IUDs have copper that kills sperm. IUSs have hormones that prevent pregnancy by stopping release of an egg. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A health care provider gives you the Depo-Provera® (or Depo) shot. Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for three months.
WHEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may decide not to have sex at any time in your life. If you change your mind, you can choose another birth control method. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implant is put in with a numbing medicine. It takes only a few minutes. The implant can be removed any time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An IUD/IUS can be put in the uterus at any time as long as you are not pregnant. You can get one even if you have never had a baby or if you are a teen. The IUD/IUS can be removed any time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depo can be started any time as long as you are not pregnant.
ADVANTAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abstinence is free and always available. It also protects you from pregnancy and HIV/sexually transmitted infections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implant is effective long-term birth control. It can make periods lighter and less painful. It is a private method not noticed by others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IUDs/IUSs are effective long-term birth control. They last between three and 12 years. Some IUDs/IUSs can make periods lighter and less painful. It is a private method not noticed by others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The shot works very well and lasts three months. It is a private method not noticed by others.



Talk with your health care provider to find the method that works best for you.

To find a clinic, visit www.ccare.oregon.gov. For more information on choosing a method, visit www.bedsider.org.

Don't forget!



Ring



Patch



Birth control pills



Condoms



Emergency contraceptive pills

- The vaginal ring is a soft, flexible ring that has hormones.
- You place the vaginal ring in your vagina.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping the egg's release. Hormones also thicken the cervical mucus to stop sperm.

- The birth control patch has hormones that enter your body through your skin.
- You can wear the patch on your buttocks, stomach or back.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping the egg's release. Hormones also thicken the cervical mucus to stop sperm.

- Take a birth control pill by mouth daily.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for as long as you take birth control pills.

- You leave the ring in place for three weeks.
- You remove it for one week before reinserting a new one.

- Put on a new patch each week on the same weekday for three weeks.
- You do not wear a patch during the fourth week.

- You must take a birth control pill at the same time of day every day.

- The ring is easy to use and works very well if used the right way.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

- The patch is small and thin and can be worn under your clothes. It sticks to your skin when you shower, swim or exercise.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

- Birth control pills are easy to use and effective if used consistently.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

- There are two types of condoms: One is put over an erect penis before the penis touches the vagina, anus or mouth. The other, an internal condom, is placed inside the vagina or anus.
- Latex, polyurethane or polyisoprene condoms create a barrier that provides protection against HIV/sexually transmitted infections.
- Sperm are trapped inside the condom.

- Follow package instructions for using a condom before sex.
- Use a new condom each time you have sex.

- Using a condom with another contraceptive method gives the best protection against unintended pregnancy.
- Condoms are the only method besides not having sex that provides protection against HIV and sexually transmitted infections.
- Condoms do not cost a lot or can be free.

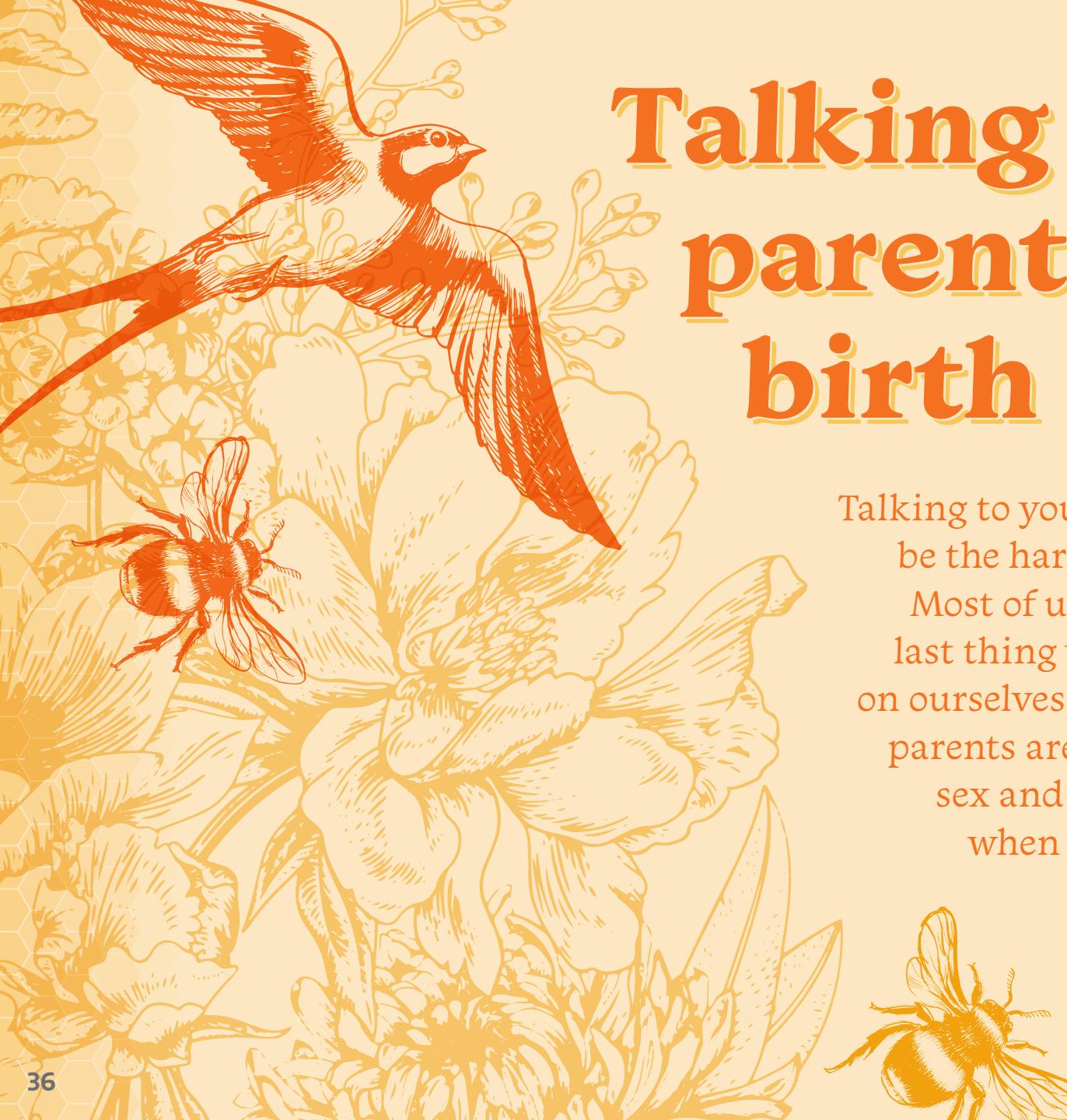
- Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) are used to prevent pregnancy after sex if birth control wasn't used or wasn't used in the right way.

- ECPs work better the sooner you take them, but they can work up to five days after sex.
- ECPs will not work if you are already pregnant.

- ECPs are the only pills to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or if another contraceptive method was not used in the right way.
- ECPs are very safe, do not cause abortion or lower your chance of getting pregnant in the future.

Condoms can be used with any of these methods to provide protection against HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Adapted from the Oregon Reproductive Health Program's contraceptive resources



Talking to your parents about birth control

Talking to your parents about sex can be the hardest part of growing up. Most of us fear “the talk,” and the last thing we want to do is bring it on ourselves. But surprisingly, many parents are receptive to discussing sex and birth control, especially when you show them that you want to act responsibly.

First, you need to have conversations and practice good communication with your parents. To start, you can talk about everyday things such as friends and sports or whatever interests you. That will make talking about the awkward and difficult things easier.

When you raise these difficult topics, here are some steps to take to make it a little easier:

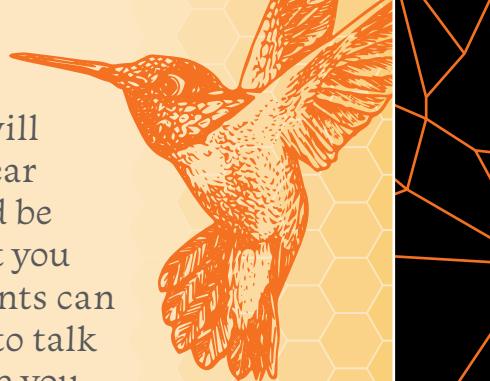
- 1** **Step 1:** Know what you want from the conversation. This can help you stay focused and relaxed when talking to your parents or any adult for that matter.
- 2** **Step 2:** Identify your feelings. If your parents know how you are feeling about the subject, they might be more prone to listen and identify their own feelings, leading to a deeper and more reasonable conversation.
- 3** **Step 3:** Pick a good time to talk. This is one of the most important steps because their moods and thoughts are easily disrupted if they are stressed with work or another situation at the same time as you want to talk. If you find them busy or stressed, you may want to wait for another opportunity or suggest another time to talk.

When talking to your parents, they will be prone to listen to you if you are clear and direct. They can listen better and be more helpful if they understand what you mean and what's going on. Your parents can be a reliable resource when wanting to talk about birth control; they can also give you information to talk to your doctor about what's right for you. Your health care practitioner can be a reliable source for information on both birth control and how to approach your parents if you haven't yet. See below for more information on doctor-patient confidentiality.

If you do plan to have sex, you must take the steps toward being safe. Although the birth control pill does prevent pregnancy, you will still need to use other methods to prevent STDs. It is important to know the consequences of each action and to be able to keep the window of communication open with your parents, guardians and doctors.

—Alex Van Laere
Teen author

For more information on access and consent to health care in Oregon for people under 18 years of age, search online for “minor rights and health care in Oregon” or go to <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/YOUTH/Documents/minor-rights.pdf>.



Resources

Connect with these resources for assistance, information and referral.

Oregon SafeNet/211info is the toll-free, health and social service helpline for Oregon. Referrals for most health care needs, including reproductive health services, vaccine information and STD testing, are available. Call 1-800-723-3638 or go to 211info.org.

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline provides resources for teens, parents, friends and family. All communication is confidential and anonymous. Call 1-866-331-9474 or go to www.loveisrespect.org.

National Sexual Assault Hotline provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services around the clock. Call 1-800-656-4673 or go to www.rainn.org.

National AIDS/STD Hotline provides information and referral on sexually transmitted infections. Call 1-800-232-4636.

Insights Teen Parent Services is one of the few nonprofit agencies in the United States that is devoted exclusively to the needs of young parents. Call 503-239-6996 or go to www.insightstpp.org.

Open Adoption & Family Services offers pregnancy option counseling and open adoption services. Call 1-800-772-1115 or go to www.openadopt.org.

Planned Parenthood offers health care services and information online about sex, relationships, your body and more. For more information, go to www.plannedparenthood.org or call 1-800-230-PLAN to find a health center.

Sexual & Gender Minority Youth Resource Center (SMYRC) creates safety and support for LGBTQQ youth in Oregon, through youth empowerment, community building, education and direct services. Call 503-872-9664 or go to www.smyrc.org.

Lines for Life is available 24/7. It is free and confidential. Highly trained staff can talk to you about everything from substance abuse, relationship problems, depression and mental health resources. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 1-888-628-9454 (en Español) or text "273Talk" to 839863 or go to www.linesforlife.org.

Your Life Your Voice is available 24/7. It is a free anonymous help line where you can call, online chat, email or text trained counselors. Spanish-speaking counselors and translation services are available for more than 140 languages, along with a TDD line (1-800-448-1833) for speech-impaired and deaf callers. Call 1-800-448-3000 or go to www.yourlifeyourvoice.org.

Credits

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Do you have something to share on identity, love, life or sex — knowledge, experience or artwork? Consider submitting to the next annual publication of the Rational Enquirer. Please email lindsay.weaver@dhsoha.state.or.us to make a submission or for more information.



RATIONAL ENQUIRER



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