

Let's Change the "Sex Talk"

Starting the Conversation Workbook

Tools, prompts, and reflections to support meaningful conversations with your child – no matter their age.



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To Will, Deacon, & Beckett,

Thank you for always being willing to have meaningful conversations. You remind me every day how important it is to listen, stay curious, and keep showing up for one another. This work is better because of you, and so am I.

A Little Note from Dr. Holman

If you're here, it likely means you care deeply about your child—and about doing your best to support their growth, health, and relationships. That matters more than saying everything “right.”

I've spent over 15+ years studying how families talk about growing up, bodies, relationships, and other topics that can feel awkward, emotional, or hard to navigate. I've also been personally learning, every day, for more than a decade how to have these conversations as a parent myself. I'm still learning. None of us are ever perfect at this.

What I know, both as a researcher and a parent, is this: these conversations aren't just about the topics themselves. They're about connection. They're about showing your child that you are a safe place, that their questions are welcome, and that their experiences matter.

This workbook isn't meant to give you a script or a single “right” way to talk. Instead, it offers guidance, prompts, and reflection to help you start—or continue—meaningful conversations at any age and stage. Some conversations will feel natural. Others might feel messy or incomplete. That's okay. What matters most is showing up, listening, and staying open.

Thank you for being here and for being willing to **change the talk**—one conversation at a time.

With care,
Amanda Holman, MA, PhD
Professor of Interpersonal, Family and Health Communication



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Introduction

Parenting doesn't come with a script, especially when it comes to talking about bodies, puberty, relationships, and sexual health. If you've ever wondered — *When should I start the conversation?*, *What if I say the wrong thing?*, or *What if my child isn't ready?*—you're not alone.

This workbook is not about having one perfect conversation. It's about opening a door. When we talk with our children about growing up, we're doing much more than sharing information. We're showing them:

- You can come to me with questions.
- Your body belongs to you.
- Your feelings matter.
- Your health and relationships are important to me.

As someone who has studied family communication about sex-related topics for 15+ years I promise these conversations build parent-child trust, create ongoing conversations, and empower young people to be competent and safe. They help children feel less alone as their bodies, emotions, and relationships change. And they send a powerful message:

“I care about who you are becoming and the relationships you are creating.”

You don't need all the answers. What matters most is your presence, your willingness to listen, and your openness to learning together. Connection matters more than perfection.

Why these conversations matter: Talking about bodies, puberty, relationships, and sexual health helps children:

- Make sense of changes before they feel scary.
- Develop healthy language for their bodies and feelings.
- Learn about boundaries, respect, and consent early.
- Build confidence asking questions and seeking support.
- Understand that relationships should feel safe and caring.

Just as importantly, these conversations help strengthen your relationship with your child.

They communicate care, availability, and trust—now and in the years ahead.

How to Use This Workbook

- You don't need to read this cover to cover.
- Start with your child's age—but trust your instincts and your child's cues.
- Use the prompts as conversation starters, not scripts.
- It's okay if conversations feel brief, awkward, or unfinished. That often means they're working.
- Conversations don't have to happen all at once, you can always come back to a topic anytime with your child(ren) or just check in.
- Take time to reflect after conversations. Notice what went well, what you might come back to, and what you learned about your child and yourself.
- You are doing more than you think, Simply by starting.

Before you Begin:

Take a few quiet moments to reflect on where you are right now. There's no right or wrong place to begin—just honesty and care.

Reflection Prompts:

- What hopes do I have for conversations with my child as they grow?
- What topics feel easiest for me to talk about? Which feel harder?
- What experiences, beliefs, or feelings might shape how I approach these conversations?
- When I think about my child right now, what do I want them to feel when they come to me with questions or concerns?

Notes

Family Communication Guide

Instructions: Every family conversation works best when everyone has a voice. The **FIVE themes** that follow are designed to support agency, boundaries, and openness—helping conversations feel collaborative rather than one-sided. Think of these as a starting point, not a finish line.

First...Create a Vibe

- 1** Find a space where you feel comfortable and able to talk openly.
- 2** Take your time moving through topics and questions in whatever way feels right to you and your child(ren).
- 3** There's no perfect way to have these conversations, this is simply a space to listen, share, and be present with one another.
- 4** It's not a one-time conversation. Take your time, keep it simple, and return to topics whenever you and your child(ren) are ready.
- 5** Check in with each other along the way, and notice how everyone is feeling.





**Developmental
Conversations by Age**

Early Childhood

Foundations of Body Awareness & Care



Ages 2-6

Focus Areas

- Naming body parts (using correct, respectful language)
- Understanding bodies are private and unique
- Learning bodily functions, basic hygiene, and body care
- Beginning conversations about feelings
- Modeling boundaries and consent
- Safe and unsafe touches

Key message to reinforce:

Your body belongs to you, and you can always talk to me about it.

Conversation Starters

- “Your body helps you do so many amazing things.”
- “Some parts of our bodies are private. Do you know what that means?”
- “What are some ways you can say ‘no’ with your words?”
- “Who are the adults you feel comfortable talking about your body or changes you notice?”
- “When do you feel the most loved?”
- “How do we show people we care about them?”



Caregiver Reminder

At this stage, curiosity is normal. Simple, calm answers build trust and normalize openness.

Recommended Readings

- **YES! NO!: A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONSENT**, MEGAN MADISON, JESSICA RALLI, & ISABEL ROXAS, 2022
- **BODIES ARE COOL**, TYLER FEDER, 2021



Try this week...

Option:

- 1 Read a body-positive children’s book together.
- 2 During bath time or getting dressed, casually name body parts and talk about privacy.
- 3 Offer choices for physical affection (hug, wave, fist bump).
- 4 Do a daily “feelings check-in” at dinner or bedtime.

Early Childhood

Reflection & Notes: After the Conversation(s)



Take a few minutes – now or later – to reflect. There are no right or wrong answers. This space is for noticing patterns, moments of connection, and places you may want to return. You don't need to write a lot. Even a few words count.

What went well?

What felt positive, easier than expected, or meaningful in this moment?

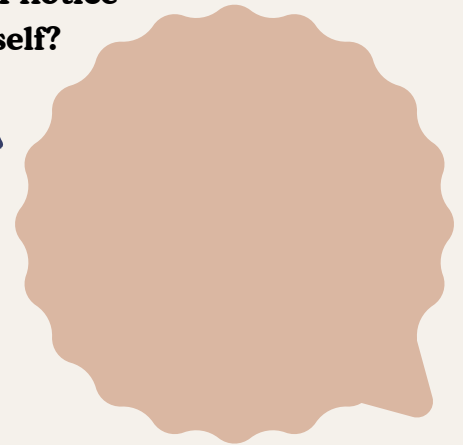
What is one gentle next step I want to take?

- Ask a follow-up question
- Listen more than talk next time
- Learn a bit more about a topic
- Simply stay open and available

What do I want to come back to?

Was there a question, topic, or moment that felt unfinished or worth revisiting later?

What did I notice about myself?

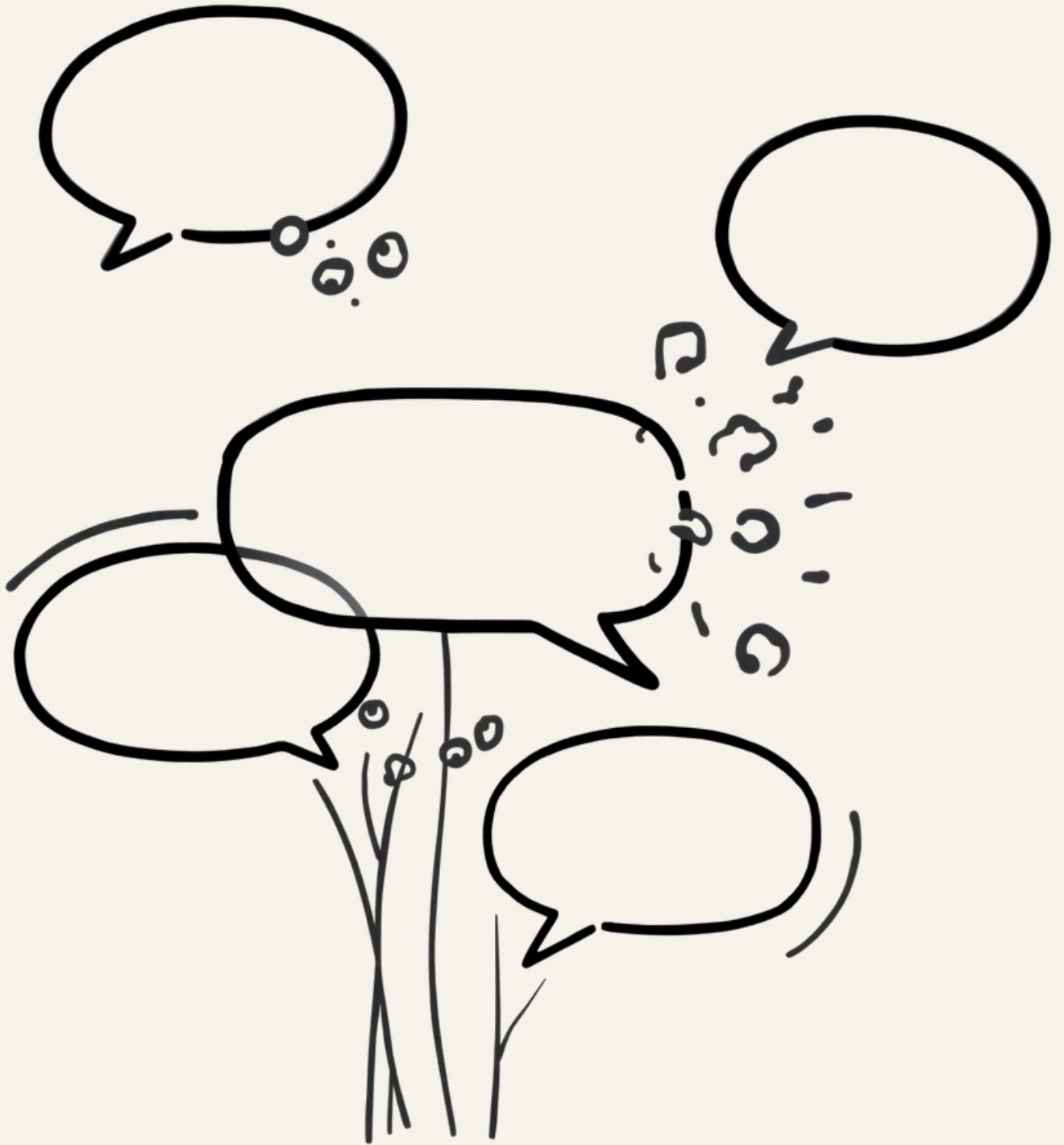


What did I notice about my child(ren)?



Notes





Middle Childhood

Preparing Without Overwhelming



Ages 7-9

Focus Areas

- Hygiene and self-care
- Normalizing changing bodies, emotions, and early puberty
- How pregnancy happens
- Peer interactions, friendship, inclusion, and kindness
- Privacy, secrets, and safety
- Identity and self-expression
- Digital awareness and media messages

Key message to reinforce:

Changes (body, emotions, friendships) is normal and you can always talk to me and ask me questions.

Conversation Starters

- “What do you think makes someone a good friend?”
- “When do you feel most like yourself?”
- “Have you noticed any changes in your body?”
- “What have you heard about growing up and puberty?”
- “What kinds of things do you see online or on screens that you have questions about?”
- “Have you ever heard the word period or menstruation before?”



Caregiver Reminder

This is often the window of openness. Gentle preparation now makes later conversations easier.

Recommended Readings

- **CELEBRATE YOUR BODY (AND ITS CHANGES TOO!): THE ULTIMATE PUBERTY GUIDE FOR GIRLS,**
Sonya Renee Taylor, 2018
- **GUY STUFF. THE BODY BOOK FOR BOYS, DR.**
CARA NATTERSON, 2017
- **IT'S SO AMAZING,**
ROBIE HARRIS, 2014

Try this week...

Option:

- 1 Share one simple fact about growing bodies during a casual moment (car ride, dinner).
- 2 Introduce a book about puberty and read it together. Allow them to ask questions and point out parts they find most interesting.
- 3 Ask about one positive friendship moment each day. Or share times you notice them being a good friend.
- 4 Create a family “online guide” together. Allow them to add their own rules to keep them safe and what to do if they see something that makes them uncomfortable.

Middle Childhood

Reflection & Notes: After the Conversation(s)



Take a few minutes – now or later – to reflect. There are no right or wrong answers. This space is for noticing patterns, moments of connection, and places you may want to return. You don't need to write a lot. Even a few words count.

What went well?

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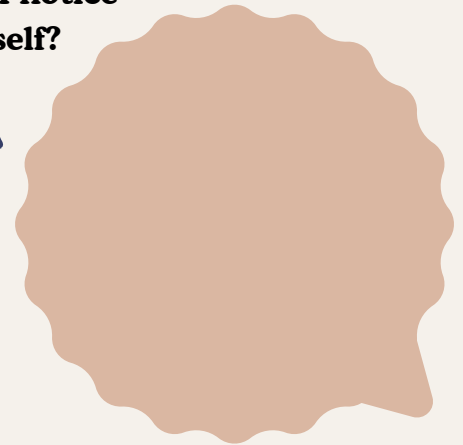
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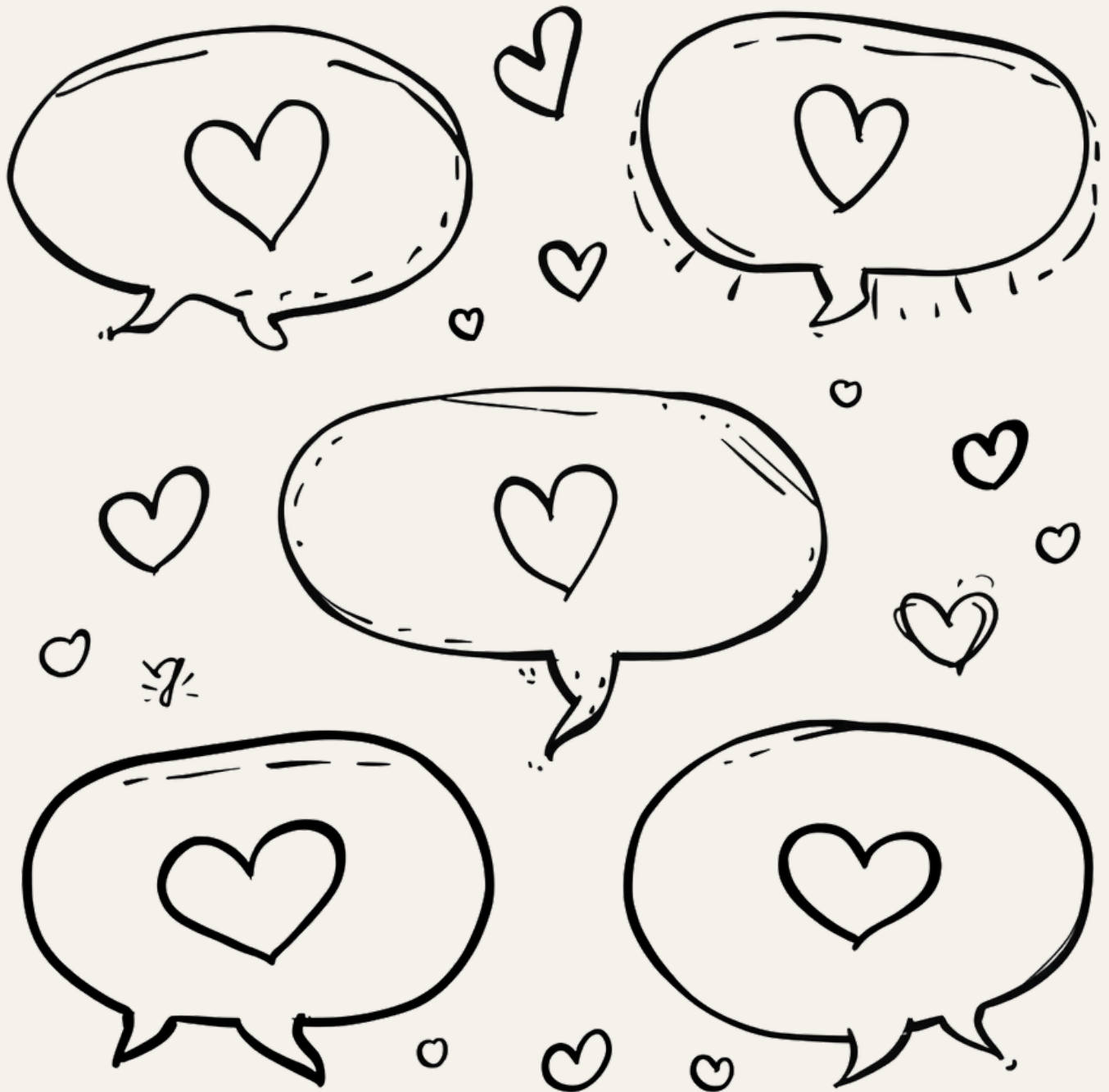


What did I notice about my child(ren)?



Notes





Pre-Teens

Puberty, Emotions, and Self-Understanding



Ages 10-12

Focus Areas

- Puberty in more detail (menstruation and period products, spontaneous erection, wet dreams, etc.)
- Identity, values, and self-concept
- Consent, social dynamics, peer pressure, and inclusion
- Digital life, social media, & messages about bodies and relationships
- Emotions, stress, and coping

Key message to reinforce:

You don't have to figure this out alone.

Conversation Starters

- “What have you heard from friends or school about puberty that you're unsure about?”
- “How would you describe yourself to someone new?”
- “What's been going well (or challenging) in your friendships lately?”
- “When do you feel most supported by me as your parent?”
- “What would you do if someone sent you something you didn't want?”



Caregiver Reminder

Listen more than you talk. Your calm response sets the tone for future conversations.

Recommended Reading

- **GROWING INTO YOU!: AN INCLUSIVE, SHAME-BURSTING, GET-REAL GUIDE TO YOUR CHANGING BODY AND MIND**, MELISSA PINTOR & BRIANNA GILMARTIN, 2025



Try this week...

Option:

- 1 Share one thing you wish you had known at their age.
- 2 Talk about phone use expectations and digital safety scenarios.
- 3 Ask them: Have you ever felt pressure to go along with something you weren't sure about?
- 4 Build a “go-to” list of coping tools together when things feel stressful or overwhelming.

Pre-Teens

Reflection & Notes: After the Conversation(s)



Take a few minutes - now or later - to reflect. There are no right or wrong answers. This space is for noticing patterns, moments of connection, and places you may want to return. You don't need to write a lot. Even a few words count.

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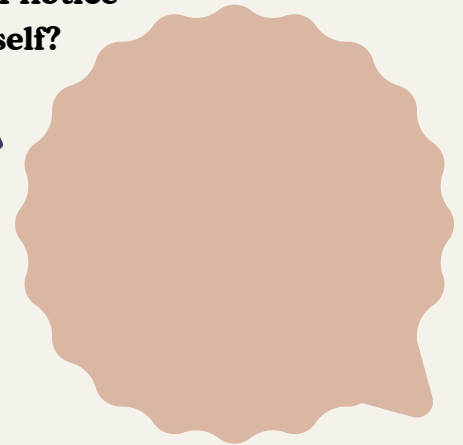
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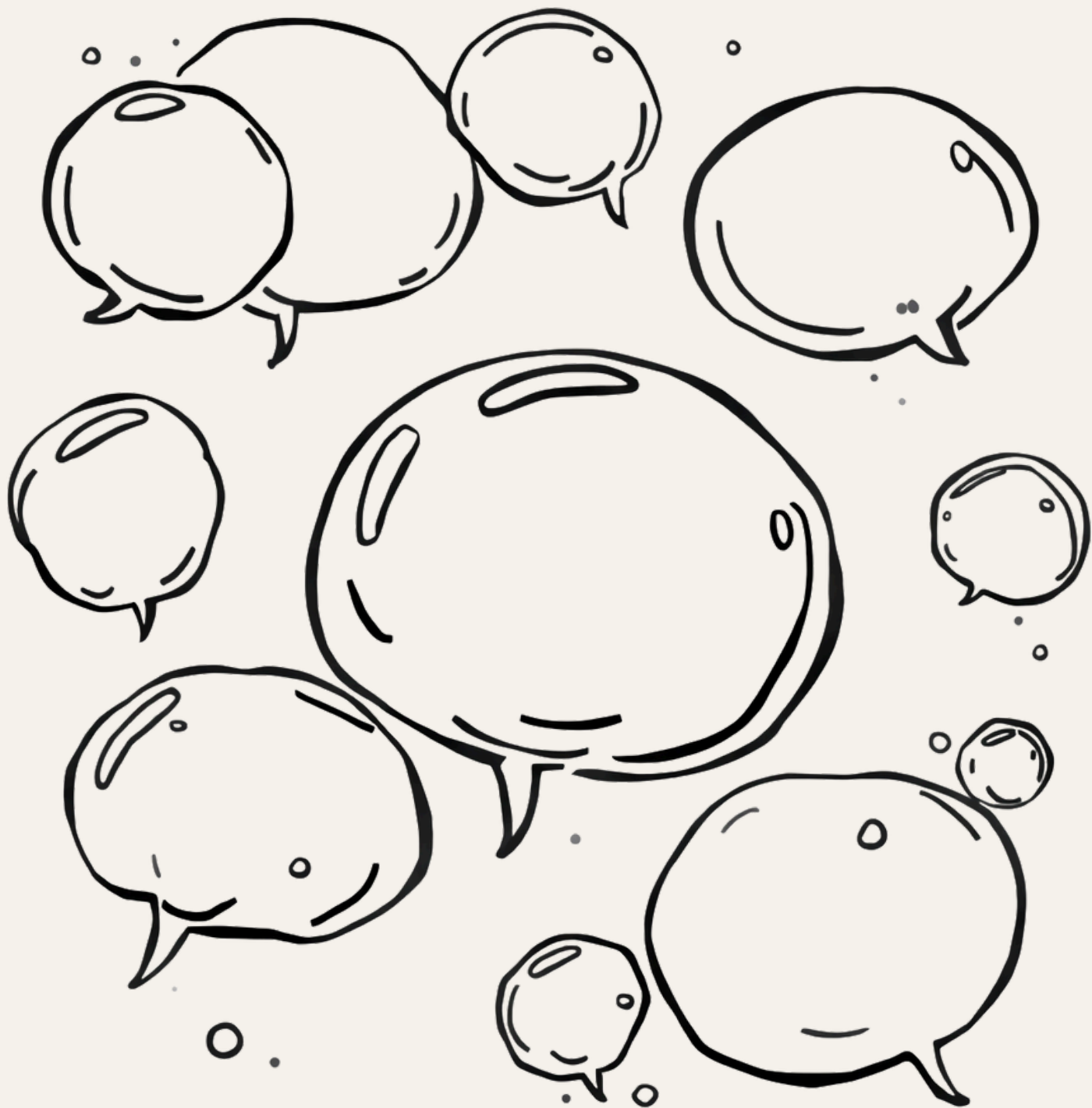


What did I notice about my child(ren)?



Notes





Teens

Healthy Relationships, Values, and Decision-Making ————— ♥♥ ————— Ages 13+

Focus Areas

- Relationships, dating, and emotional intimacy
- Identity, values, and self-esteem
- Communication, trust, pleasure, boundaries, coercion, sexual harassment, rape
- Safer sex (STIs, contraception, getting STI testing)
- Digital life, social media, and pornography
- Emotions, mental health, and coping

Key message to reinforce:

I trust you, and I'm here when you need me.

Conversation Starters

- “What do you think makes a relationship feel safe and healthy?”
- “How do you want others to see you? How do you see yourself?”
- “What would you do if someone sent you a sexual image or message?”
- “What roles do values play in your decision about sex?”
- “What questions do you have about safer sex?”
- “What does ‘being ready’ for sex mean to you - not just physically, but emotionally?”



Caregiver Reminder

Teens may not always show it, but consistent availability matters deeply.

Recommended Readings

- **LET’S TALK ABOUT IT: THE TEEN’S GUIDE TO SEX, RELATIONSHIPS, AND BEING A HUMAN**, ERIKA MOEN & MATTHEW NOLAN, 2021
- **CAN WE TALK ABOUT CONSENT?: A BOOK ABOUT FREEDOM, CHOICES, AND AGREEMENT**, JUSTIN HANCOCK, 2021

Try this week...

Option:

- 1 Share one thing you love about your teen’s effort or character, not appearance.
- 2 Ask: “Is there anything you’ve been curious about but unsure how to ask about sex?”
- 3 Co-create a “call me anytime, no questions asked” plan.
- 4 Together look up trusted health resources and discuss getting access to contraception or STIs testing, if and when needed.

Teens

Reflection & Notes: After the Conversation(s)



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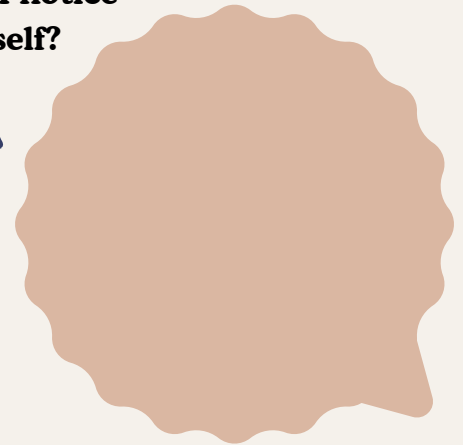
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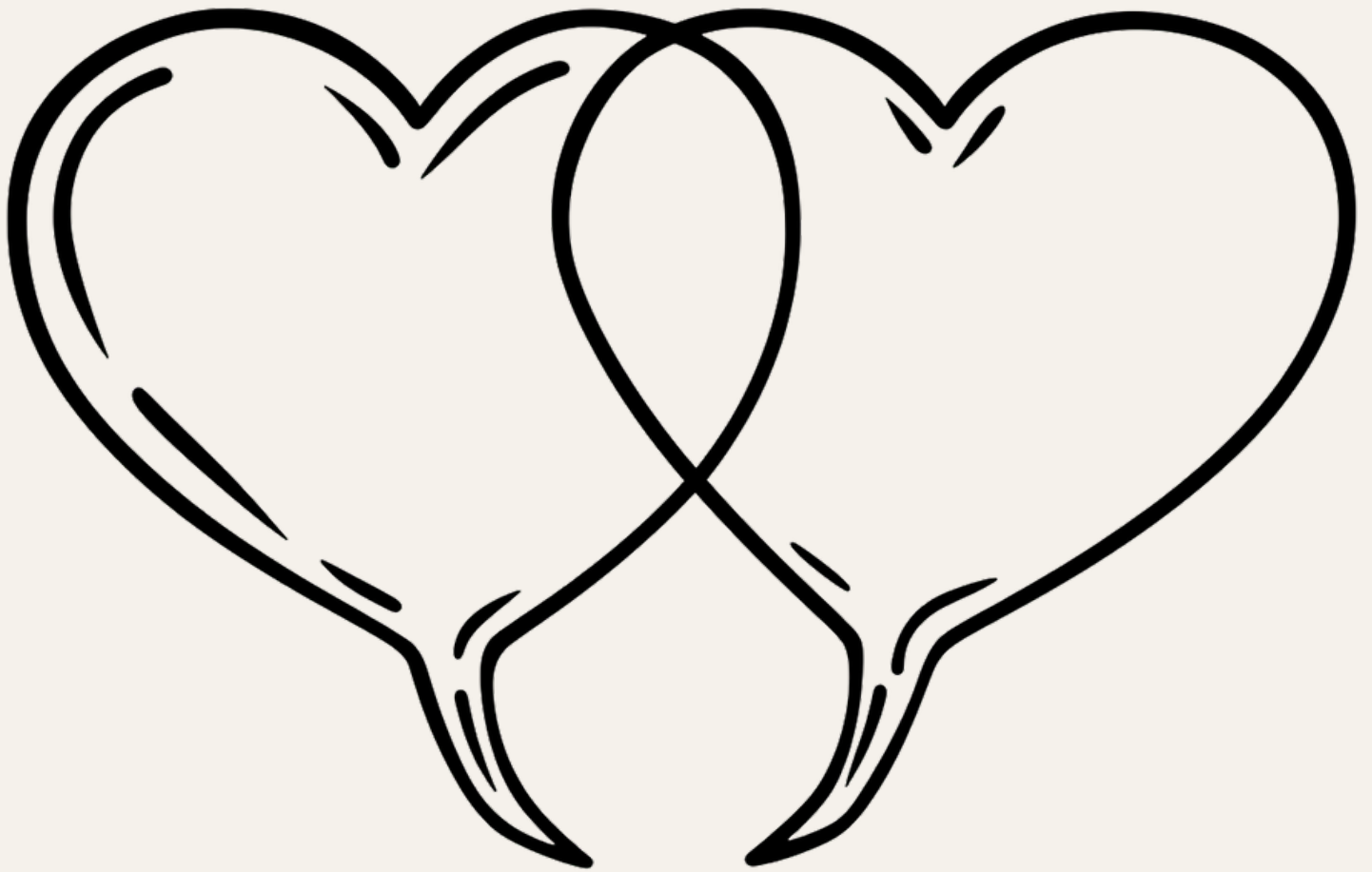


What did I notice about my child(ren)?



Notes





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Resources

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

EARLY CHILDHOOD

THE SCIENCE OF BABIES: A LITTLE BOOK FOR BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT BODIES, BIRTH, AND FAMILIES,
WILLIAM J. TAVERNER, 2025

YES! NO!: A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONSENT, MEGAN MADISON, JESSICA RALLI, & ISABEL ROXAS, 2022

WE ASK PERMISSION (WE SAY WHAT'S OKAY), LYDIA BOWERS & ISABEL MUÑOZ, 2022

WE CHECK IN WITH EACH OTHER,
LYDIA BOWERS, 2021

BODIES ARE COOL,
TYLER FEDER, 2021

BEING YOU: A FIRST CONVERSATION ABOUT GENDER, MEGAN MADISON, JESSICA RALLI, & ANNE/ANDY PASSCHIER, 2021

MY VULVA,
COURTNEY J. ANGERMEIER, 2021

YOUR WHOLE BODY,
LIZZIE DEYOUNG CHARBONNEAU, 2021

THIS IS MY BODY,
LIL CARLE & LIUBA SYROTIUK, 2020

MAKING A BABY,
RACHEL GREENER & CLARE OWEN, 2020

PINK IS FOR BOYS,
ROBB PEARLMAN, 2018

LET'S TALK ABOUT BODY BOUNDARIES, CONSENT, & RESPECT,
JAYNEEN SANDERS, 2018

FEMINIST BABY,
LORYN BRANTZ, 2017

MY BODY! WHAT I SAY GOES!,
JAYNEEN SANDERS, 2016

WHAT MAKES A BABY,
CORY SILVERBERG, 2012

IT'S NOT THE STORK: A BOOK ABOUT GIRLS, BOYS, BABIES, BODIES, FAMILIES, AND FRIENDS,
ROBIE H. HARRIS, 2006

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

A KIDS BOOK ABOUT BEAUTY,
ASHLEY GRAHAM, 2024

LET'S TALK ABOUT BODY, BOUNDARIES, CONSENT, & RESPECT,
JAYNEEN SANDERS, 2018

THESE ARE MY EYES, THIS IS MY NOSE, THIS IS MY VULVA, THESE ARE MY TOES,
DR. LEXX BROEN-JAMES, 2018

CELEBRATE YOUR BODY (AND ITS CHANGES TOO!): THE ULTIMATE PUBERTY GUIDE FOR GIRLS,
SONYA RENEE TAYLOR, 2018

THE HOUSE FOR EVERYONE: A STORY THAT HELPS CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION, JO HIRST, 2018

GUY STUFF. THE BODY BOOK FOR BOYS,
DR. CARA NATTERSON, 2017

THE CARE & KEEPING OF YOU: THE BODY BOOK FOR YOUNGER GIRLS. FROM THE AMERICAN GIRL SERIES,
VALORIE LEE SCHAEFER, 2012

IT'S SO AMAZING,
ROBIE HARRIS, 2014

INSIDE OUT! YOUR BODY IS AMAZING INSIDE AND OUT AND BELONGS ONLY TO YOU, DR. MAY JO PODGURSKI, 2012



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

PRE-TEENS

GROWING INTO YOU!: AN INCLUSIVE, SHAME-BURSTING, GET-REAL GUIDE TO YOUR CHANGING BODY AND MIND, MELISSA PINTOR & BRIANNA GILMARTIN, 2025

THE EVERY BODY BOOK: THE LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR KIDS ABOUT SEX, GENDER, BODIES, AND FAMILIES. RACHEL E. SIMON, 2020

THE CARE & KEEPING OF YOU: THE BODY BOOK FOR OLDER GIRLS. FROM THE AMERICAN GIRL SERIES, DR. CARA NATTERSON, 2018

THE BOY'S BODY BOOK (3RD EDITION), KELLI DUNHAM, 2015

SEX IS A FUNNY WORD, CORY SILVERBERG, 2015

IT'S PERFECTLY NORMAL, ROBIE HARRIS, 2014

ASKING ABOUT SEX AND GROWING UP, BILL THOMAS, 2009

TEENS & YOUNG ADULT

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: THE TEEN'S GUIDE TO SEX, RELATIONSHIPS, AND BEING A HUMAN, ERIKA MOEN & MATTHEW NOLAN, 2021

CAN WE TALK ABOUT CONSENT?: A BOOK ABOUT FREEDOM, CHOICES, AND AGREEMENT, JUSTIN HANCOCK, 2021

YOU DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING JILLY!, ALEX GINO, 2018

THE BODY IS NOT AN APOLOGY: THE POWER OF RADICAL SELF-LOVE, SONYA RENEE TAYLOR, 2018

DATING AND SEX: A GUIDE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY TEEN BOY, DR. ANDREW SMILER, 2016

S.E.X.: THE ALL-YOU-NEED-TO-KNOW PROGRESSIVE SEXUALITY GUIDE TO GETTING YOU THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE, HEATHER CORINNA 2016 (2ND EDITION).

30 DAYS OF SEX TALKS, EDUCATE AND EMPOWER KIDS, 2015

GEORGE, ALEX GINO, 2015

THIS BOOK IS GAY, JUNO DAWSON, 2015

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

SEX POSITIVE TALKS TO HAVE WITH KIDS: A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY, INFORMED, AND EMPOWERED YOUNG PEOPLE, MELISSA PINTOR CARNAGEY, 2020

THE ESSENTIAL SEX EDUCATION BOOK FOR PARENTS: GUIDED CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE WITH YOUR TWEENS AND TEENS, DANIEL RICE, 2022

For more information visit
letschangethetalk.com



Resources

WEBSITES



- **ACCESS PERIOD** (accessperiod.com) - Focused on increasing access to menstrual products and promoting period health and equality in Omaha, NE and surrounding areas.
- **AMAZE** (amaze.org) - Engaging, inclusive animated videos and digital content that help parents, children, and teens explore sexual health and feel more confident starting conversations.
- **BEDSIDER** (bedsider.org) - Birth control and contraception methods information and support.
- **COMMON SENSE MEDIA** (commonsensemedia.org) - Trusted media literacy tools and reviews for kids and families.
- **CYPERWISE** (cyberwise.org) - Resources for digital citizenship, internet safety, privacy, and online behavior to help kids use technology wisely.
- **GENDER SPECTRUM** (genderspectrum.org) - Resources and information to help families and professionals better understand and support gender diversity.
- **HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN** (hrc.org) - LGBTQ+ advocacy organization providing support and resources for queer youth, families, and allies.
- **KIDSHEALTH** (kidshealth.org) - Information on child development and sexual health for kids and families.
- **LET'S CHANGE THE TALK** (letschangethetalk.com) - *Our website* Practical, research-informed tools to support open, ongoing family conversations about relationships and sexual health.
- **LOVE IS RESPECT** (loveisrespect.org) - Education to help youth prevent and end dating abuse and unhealthy relationships.
- **PFLAG** (pflag.org) - National organization offering support, education, and advocacy for LGBTQ+ people, families, and allies.
- **PLANNED PARENTHOOD** (plannedparenthood.org) - Sexual health education, resources, and services, including Roo, a chatbot for youth ed questions.
- **PUT A CUP IN IT** (putacupinit.com) - Menstrual health education and interactive tools to find a menstrual health product that is right for each person.
- **SCARLETEEN** (scarleteen.com) - Supportive, inclusive education on sexual health and relationships for teens and emerging adults.
- **SEX POSITIVE FAMILIES** (sexpositivefamilies.com) - Inclusive resources to support family conversations about bodies, relationships, and sexual health.
- **SEX ETC** (sexetc.org) - Comprehensive sexual health information for teens and emerging adults.
- **SIECUS** (siecus.org) - Sexuality education advocacy, research, and resources.
- **SISTER SONG** (sistersong.net) - Reproductive justice organization supporting communities through advocacy, education, and resources.
- **THE TREVOR PROJECT** (thetrevorproject.org) - 24/7 crisis support and resources for LGPTQ+ youth and their families.



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*Thank you for using this workbook.
We are honored to be a small part of your family's conversations and growth. - Dr. Amanda Holman*



