

22. "The Birds and the Bees in 2022" Logan Levkoff ID 02:14

Okay. Welcome everybody today for this very exciting episode of Love and Libido. I am joined today by Dr. Logan Levkoff, who has been a colleague of mine for years at this point.

Logan is an internationally recognized expert on sexuality, parenting, and relationships. For two decades, she has been designing and implementing sexuality education programs in schools and organizations across the country. A thought leader in the field, Logan frequently appears on television and was the sexuality expert for the first three.

I'm going to probably just read this again on my own later. So we'll just skip it and go with it later. Okay.

Welcome Logan. And thank you so much for joining me today. Thank you for having me.

It's been a long time since I've seen your face either in person or via Zoom. I know. It's like we follow each other on social media and I know we've exchanged a few emails, but we used to bump elbows at conferences and obviously those have not been happening over the past few years.

And so it is really great to connect with you as well. Nice to be here. Yeah.

So Logan, I want to hear before we dive into this very important conversation, a little bit about what got you into the field of sex education and why that was such an interest for you. It's a good question. I mean, and we need to go back a long, long, long, long time.

Truth be told, I actually don't think like when I was a kid, I ever anticipated spending my life in the world of human sexuality. I thought I was going to be a lawyer. I was going to put my like big mouth to use lawyer, politics, something.

Um, but growing up in the early to mid 1990s and becoming a teen at that time, it was this really interesting moment culturally where, um, HIV and AIDS was all over the news. It was finally this moment where, um, it wasn't being talked about as solely something that impacted like certain groups of people in certain demographics. Uh, and, and my parents for whatever reason decided that they wanted to get involved, not just with HIV and AIDS fundraising, but education.

And my mom and her closest friend helped, um, alongside the, our local community hospital who had a, an infectious disease, um, program and had a big HIV population decided to get involved and create AIDS awareness programs in our town. And the idea was that, you know, if you were trained as a peer HIV and AIDS educator, you, you helped your own community, but also had the opportunity to go into other schools. So when I was in 10th grade, I found condoms and bananas on our dinner table one day.

And my parents said, this is how you use a condom. Next week, you're going to go to training to become a peer HIV and AIDS educator. And sort of that's the, that was the, you know, that was the entree into the field.

Um, but what I, what I found was that I had, and I hope it doesn't, this doesn't seem too narcissistic, but like I had this weird talent at making uncomfortable quite comfortable, uh, I didn't, I mean, I didn't think that sexuality was necessarily going to be the entry point for me, but I really loved it. And I found myself graduating from high school and going to college and finding that my peers and I, who were otherwise like really smart people, making really shitty decisions about sex. And I found myself yet again, stepping into the role of, you know, peer educator, not having any idea that that could actually be a career, but, you know, that's 20 years later, maybe a few more than 20 years.

You don't look it. Yeah, here we are. I think that is so cool. And so I think it's amazing that your parents were so open about sex.

And I think things have come full circle because now I see that you've involved your teenage son in some of your advocacy about sexual health. And can you talk about that a little bit? Yeah. So, you know, it's funny because I don't, I wouldn't necessarily say that my, my parents were so liberal that we were talking about sex all the time because really we weren't.

I mean, I remember the conversation my mom and I had about menstruation and where we were and what we were eating. And I remember those moments as like big individual moments. I don't remember there being lots of them, but interestingly enough, it was actually my dad that always told my sister and I how important sex and sexuality were in that, you know, whenever we were going to make decisions, he would be okay with them as long as it wasn't at the behest of others.

It was something we wanted to do and that we were emotionally and physically protected. And again, that wasn't like a heavy handed message. It didn't take place a lot, but it was clearly poignant enough that it, it, it stuck with us.

So I think that that's the, you know, that's the part that, that allowed them to, to, you know, be okay with having, you know, this conversation about HIV and AIDS. Right. My, you know, I, I having two children, one is very comfortable talking about all things publicly.

The other is sort of like a behind the scenes kind of, kind of kid. So you hear, if you hear stories about one and not the other, it's because one has given me consent to talk about him and the other one does not. And that's, that's perfectly okay.

Right. So yeah, my, my son Maverick has, you know, also really enjoys using his voice and, and talking about things that typically make people uncomfortable and had an

opportunity to be an AMAZE ambassador for two years and be one of their peer leaders. And, and he and I got to actually sit right here and do a podcast together, which was really fun.

I think it's amazing. Yeah. On how we, how we navigate these issues at home.

I would say that obviously our house is not a typical house and that all of the things people would never talk about at the dinner table, you know, we talk about pretty openly, you know, my kids have been in the, in the car with me while, you know, someone, someone calls and it's a, not in any like violation of privacy, but like products or things. And, and it's, I mean, it's quite funny that they just look at me like, I can't believe this is our life. Right.

Right. That is so funny. Yeah.

And I think I grew up to an extent, kind of similarly to you, my dad is an OBGYN. So sex was never really that taboo of a topic and kind of like your kids hearing you, I grew up in the backseat of the car, hearing him take calls from women with all kinds of, you know, pregnancy related, but also sexual issues. And, you know, at that time, I think it was just the car phone.

I don't think he had the option to like, take it to his ears so that we wouldn't hear what was happening on the other side. But I mean, I do think that that lends itself to a level of comfort around talking about sex because it is normalized. And so I think it's really cool that, you know, you grew up and I hear what you're saying that it's not like your parents were overly open when it came to sex, but I hear in your message that there was a lot of sex positivity, which at the time that, you know, we were coming of age is a lot more than a lot of people can say.

Yeah, very, very much so. And I look, I think the other piece of it is, is that I was raised with and I think probably because it was my sister and me, and, you know, we were, we were girls and there were no double standards in our home. So we were always told that, you know, whatever anyone else wanted to do, we could do too.

Right. There was, there was, there weren't different rules for us. And so that, that really translated into a nice amount of, you know, a nice amount of ego, a healthy amount of ego, which suggested that like, we, we, we could say or do anything.

And I think that we really ran with that. It never occurred to me that a teenager couldn't or shouldn't talk about sex. Like that, that, that never even crossed my mind.

I mean, I was, I was the kid. I don't share the story very often, but I, but I do love it. I have to say, I think it's one of my proudest moments.

I was a debater. I was part of model Congress. I loved it.

Like I just, I loved, I don't know. I love taking a side and running with it and making people think differently about issues. And there was one time, and I think it was, I'm pretty certain it was 10th grade.

I was at Cornell model Congress and like a general session with hundreds of teenagers from all over. And I went to a particularly small public high school where everyone, everyone knew each other and everyone knew each other's parents. And we, there was a bill being debated on gay marriage and imagine this is 1992, maybe.

So it was a different time. People forget the legality aspect. People didn't talk about, you know, any, any issues pertaining to sexual orientation and no one wanted to speak on for, for the bill in front of this entire group.

And so I raised my hand and I got up in front of these teenagers and faculty, and I proceeded to share a whole story that I was actually the product of two parents who loved each other platonically and were the best of friends, but were both gay. And, you know, if, if, if gay marriage was legalized, then my parents would be able to celebrate their relationships with their, with their loves. And my family would be represented and respected.

And I have to tell you, like, I, I got a standing ovation, the bill. Now you should know my parents are not gay. Like, Oh, okay.

They're not like, I mean, I just, I really, I wanted to make a statement and I wanted to think differently. And it, and it wasn't in a way of like trying to like appropriate anyone else's relationship. It was that I thought in my head that the only way I could possibly get people to understand was to make myself the, the, the voice like had to personalize it.

Yeah. And so anyway, the bill passed, but the, of course the, you know, this is way before cell phones. And I, I remember the bus pulling back into school two days later into my high school parking lot.

And they said, hi, how was your trip? Is there anything you want to tell us? And I said, no, I like what, what about, and they said, well, did you happen to tell everyone that we were gay? And I said, Oh, I did. We totally did. Like I got, yes, I did.

I said, but how on earth did you find out someone had used the pay phone called his parents, someone else's parents. So if you can get like, if I can pull that off and, you know, and my parents were like, yep, that's Logan. She's just doing her thing.

It lent itself very well to this career of ours. That is hilarious. Thank you so much for sharing that story.

And, you know, from what I know about you, I think that does paint a very accurate picture of who you are. Probably for good and bad, but yeah, for better or worse. Well,

that is awesome.

So Logan, let's talk about sex ed today because times they have changed. Um, and I think that, you know, when we were talking ahead of time about what some of the focus was going to be about today's episode, you said that we really need to talk to parents about not being an alarmist about kids having sex. And I was thinking about that.

And really, I think what we need to be a little alarmed by is the fact that they're not having that much sex. So can you talk about that and what trends we're seeing? Yeah, I think that's a great point and a really important point and a fairly bold point. And, you know, one that people, the side that people don't really want to take publicly very often, but I have to tell you, I agree with you.

You know, I am so dismayed in a lot of ways by how all of the trends in terms of sexual intimacy among young people, and that's, that's across the board, all behaviors, like not just one. Um, and, and when I use the word sex, obviously I mean, as broad as humanly possible, um, that, that all of the trends are, are downward that, that people are having young people in particular. And I don't mean like children, I mean, young adults, teenagers, you know, people who historically have had intimate experiences with other people are having far less or, you know, look in light of COVID, none, no experiences at all.

And I think that we tend to forget deliberately, inadvertently, whatever, um, that really the hallmark of adolescence is expressing your sexuality in some way, that that is literally so much a part of growing up. Who am I? How do I want to express myself to the world? How do I want to share that with someone else? Like, how do I navigate these feelings in my body? And, um, and that's really important. And those are the, the experiences that give us the skills, the tools, the resilience for becoming fully functioning adults in, in and out of relationships.

And I worry tremendously about this generation who, you know, whether it's lack of access to flirting and body language because of COVID, or the fact that they spend so much time online that they have no idea how to have vulnerable, intimate conversations with another person and thus, you know, can get, if even if they want it, right. Some don't even want it. Sexual pleasure, you know, by themselves without ever having to engage with another human being.

It's so true. And I see so many trends in my, so I don't work with kids at all. I only work with adults, but people who are, let's say coming in and they're in their mid to late twenties, I mean, the issues that they're bringing in, because they have, like you're saying no experience developing these relationship skills, the interpersonal skills, and the psychosexual skills that, you know, most of us had going through adolescence and they are riddled with anxiety and shame and a lot of fears and feelings of inadequacy, because I think that confidence comes from overcoming problems.

These kids or young adults didn't really go through a lot of the problems and therefore didn't develop a lot of the resiliency skills that you're talking about. Absolutely. We it's, there's, there's a question that's come up a lot amongst my students in the last five plus years.

And so I teach my, I mean, my youngest students, I mean, technically, if you count my own children have been age zero, but yeah, all through the lifespan, but, but I'm, I am in classrooms regularly, seven year olds, you know, literally up through adults. And I would say that the, the most common question that I get with middle and high school age people these days have to do with how do I do talk about, say, acknowledge certain things without being awkward. And I, I'm still fascinated by this term, (a) that awkward has become this, this word with a negative connotation.

So that's the piece of it. And, and, you know, I'm, I'm delighted that my students want to find ways to talk about these things, but I don't know whoever gave people the message that talking about sex and intimacy and feelings and pleasure and bodies and consent was easy. Right.

It's awkward. It's always been awkward. And that's, and even if you've been with someone 100 times, it still can be awkward and that's okay.

So it's, it's, I think at times that awkward, you know, awkward is prevented the fear of being awkward or experiencing awkward or being perceived as awkward is preventing them from even making an attempt to find intimacy, even just emotional intimacy with another person. And it's so funny. I wonder, I, you, you raise an interesting point.

I wonder when that changed because like, I have so many memories as a young adolescent, you know, going on a date or something when it was usually with a group of friends and early, early adolescence and you're at the movie theater, but awkward was exciting. Cause like you, I mean, I just have memories of being in the movie theater and you don't know if you're going to bump hands and if that's going to lead to handholding or potentially something more. And everyone knew it was going to be awkward, but there was a lot of excitement that was built up around that.

And what do you think happened? I, so much. So this is not, this is clearly not a scientific study. This is merely based on my own professional perspective.

I think the internet has changed a lot. I think that the way in which we have created and manufactured our own reality and made everything seem cool and perfect and filtered, or I, you know, deliberately ironic and not, you know, and not awkward has really helped to foster some of this, this fear of awkward. I mean, also I, I laugh.

I remember the first, the first go around with Gossip Girl in the early two thousands where, you know, I'm a, I'm a New York city dweller and I teach in that New York city

world. And I laughed every time I, like Chuck Bass talked with whomever about sex with so much prowess and confidence. Like what a fucking joke.

Like no one I know, no teenager I know talks like this because no, you don't have those skills yet. And they wouldn't do that. But there was a change after that, that the way in which we saw young people navigating sex online or in media just seemed a little over polished.

And if it was really awkward, then it was meant to be like the butt of a joke and not the average experience. And, and that's unfortunate because I think we miss all of those really beautifully complicated, awkward moments, which are really critically important to adulthood. Totally.

And I think this has, you know, it's not just a fear of awkwardness that I think is happening in teens and adolescents. It's something that is happening in adults as well, because I get the same questions in my adult clients. How do I talk to my partner about my likes and dislikes without it feeling awkward? And my answer to them is you don't, you talk about it, despite the fact that it's going to be a little awkward, knowing that going through that together as a couple is going to build intimacy and a feeling of closeness and, you know, maybe even something you laugh about down the line together.

Absolutely. It's a, it's a, it's a shame, really. I mean, that, that we've, we've, we've done this for, you know, for the next generations that we've, we've prevented people from embracing all of those uncomfortable, awkward moments.

I was, I was teaching a lot, and maybe not uncomfortable. We'll change that word for a second, but I was teaching a class of juniors last week. So they're, I mean, they're 17 year old, 17 year olds.

And we talked about what the biggest challenge was to just being a sexual human being in 2022. And we talked a little bit about the difference between feeling uncomfortable and feeling awkward that, you know, uncomfortable is your body's way of saying like, this is something that doesn't feel safe. This is something that I might regret.

This is something that like, doesn't feel good innately versus awkward, which is, you know, this is new and unfamiliar. And I'm not totally like, I'm, I'm, you know, I'm not sure I'm going to get it right, but I still want to want to be in it. Right.

And those are two very different things, but I think they've become synonymous for a lot of people. Totally. Totally.

And I think, yeah, you're doing a great job giving these teams the vocabulary for their feelings, because I know a lot of them aren't getting it at home. Well, I mean, yeah, sadly, I, I will say I, I really, I spend a lot of time working with parents and caregivers and

guardians trying to get them to, to, you know, take the reins on this, because let's be honest, any of us who are professionals in the sexuality space, whether it's therapy, whether it's education, you know, our time with the people we work with is very limited compared to the amount of time they spend with the people who they live with in their lives. Right.

So like I can see, I could see a particular student for a total of, I mean, less than eight hours during a year, right? Like that doesn't make up for all of the other time spent with the adults in their life. Right. Totally.

That supplement a piece of it. But just because we, we raise young people doesn't mean we feel equipped. And oftentimes with the changing landscape of gender and sexuality and language, adults often feel like they don't have the answers.

So they just stick their heads in the sand and say, you know, someone else will do it, but yeah, it's okay to admit that you don't have the answers. No, no one does. Right.

Right, exactly. Exactly. So you do a lot of education, not just to teens and to kids, but to parents as well.

Thank God. So can you talk a little bit more about why it's so concerning that kids aren't having sex? Because I think a lot of parents would read these statistics and think great. Why is it a problem? Well, it's a, I'm trying, there, there's so many, there's so many different reasons for why I think this is, this is an issue.

And again, like sexual experiences don't mean, you know, oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex, genital, genital sex, right. It means all of these little things that teach people how to navigate feelings, how to handle rejection, which by the way, I don't know anyone who can like exist in the world without acknowledging that feeling and finding tools to manage rejection because we all deal with it in lots of different ways throughout our lives. There are all of those little experiences that, that help us to become adults.

I often ask my, I often ask my adult participants, I'll say to them, you know, think back to all of the messages you got about sex as a young person. And, you know, they kind of look at me and I'll say, now think about how your life and how your experiences would have been different if the messages that you got were different. Right.

And, and it helps to frame all of these conversations that like, wow, you know, just saying don't do it or wait until some magical time, like that's never been sufficient. And it's actually prevented us from making good decisions because we, we haven't developed like the tools on how to evaluate whether or not a decision is a good one, because we've just been told to wait until some like magical moment where all of a sudden it's okay. I often, I feel so badly for teenagers these days.

I really do. And I say that having one and I've, you know, I've said it aloud many times

that there is so much fun and there is so much life experience that takes place when you navigate how to tell someone that you like them or that you're interested in them, you know, how to navigate, you know, consent and, and you know, what someone might like, what you might like. And particularly when they're still, you know, at home and there's a safety net for help on how to, how to navigate things.

Right. I hate the idea that we're going to have a generation of people who are going to leave their parents or some, some adults home into like the big world. And all of a sudden experiment possibly, right.

And have no safety net, have no way, like no one who's going to help them think about outcomes and options. And if something goes wrong, how to handle that. It's going to give them wisdom.

Yeah. They're not going to have wisdom to develop on just on your own. Right.

Right. No, we're not meant to do it on our own. None of this.

So I asked my followers to send in some questions for you in preparation for today's episode, because I get these questions all the time from people and I do my best to answer them, but you're the expert. So I'm going to throw some of those out there to you. That's okay.

All right. Okay. So one person wrote in and asking if parents are always the best people to provide sex education, or if sometimes it should be like a trusted friend or maybe an aunt or uncle, can you talk to talk about that a little bit? It's a great question.

The answer is it depends, which I know it's not a, it's not a satisfactory answer. So I'll give, I'll give a little context. I mean, parents in the sex education world, right.

I mean, for me as an educator, I'm there to give facts and to, to, you know, post lots of different perspectives and different opinions, right. Not to share my own value set with someone else. That's really, I mean, that's a parent's job to do.

And that's what sort of separates at, you know, at, at school or community organizations, sex ed, then sex ed that takes place in the home. That being said, I do think that there are times when parents are not necessarily the best people. But that, that requires a lot of self-reflection.

If you know that you are not the best person, because you cannot give information that will be helpful to young people. If you know that whether it's your own values or your own upbringing or role modeling may prevent you or your own experience. And lots of people have had certain kinds of traumatic experiences that prevent them from having conversations.

That's okay, but get a, but, you know, get a proxy. And I think having another trusted adult that, you know, loves your children unconditionally and that they love and trust is completely okay. But it does require looking inwards and thinking about, can I be that person? And if I can't, like where, where is the line for me? At what point is it, at what point am I going to hit a topic where I'm not the best person? But it's also okay not to, not to have all of the answers.

It's fine. I don't expect any, anyone to get any of these conversations perfectly, as long as we're willing to admit that we're human and to say, you know what, it's a great question. I don't have the answer because the language has changed a lot since I was your age, but I'm going to find the answer for you and then just follow through with it, right? No one is expecting you to know everything.

Right. And I think, you know, just like we were talking about awkwardness amongst teens, a lot of parents feel very awkward too. And a lot of times once I'm kind of wrapping up therapy with a client, they'll want to know then, okay, now that they feel better sexually, how can they talk to their kids about sex? And they'll say, I still feel really awkward talking to my kids.

And my first response to them is tell them that, tell them that this is an awkward conversation for you as well, but it's something that, you know, is important and that you value and that, you know, that that's okay. And so I think that parents can do a lot to model how to go through some of these. I know you don't like the word uncomfortable.

We'll go back to awkward feelings. No, no, no. Uncomfortable is fine.

Just, I was thinking more like uncomfortable, like awkward like this. Yes, yes, yes. Right.

Some of these uncomfortable conversations, just putting it out there. And I think that that takes a lot of the pressure off and, and, and I encourage them to say, it might be awkward for you too. And that's okay.

Like we'll figure it out together. And, you know, here's what I can talk to you about, and here's what you need to call your aunt or uncle or, you know, talk to your sex ed counselor about, um, instead. Yeah.

There's nothing wrong with saying that this conversation like doesn't happen organically or innately to you. That's totally fine. And I think that for parents to, to really, to show their, to show their humanity, to show that we are vulnerable and that we're not perfect.

Even to say my parents never had this conversation with me, but I know that it would have been so helpful if they would have. So I'm going to try and do it better. Right.

And I'm making this commitment to you. Um, I'm sure there's plenty that, you know, already, but when, and I say this a lot to parents, when someone says like, they don't

want to talk to me, my answer is always, well, that's too bad. Yeah.

Sorry. But the way, but the way I would, but the way I frame it and I, you know, in a, and I, and I mean it seriously, I'm also a bit, a bit snarky and sarcastic, but to say to, you know, in a moment that, that you find is right to say to your kids, look, I want to talk to you about something and it's okay. You can sit, you can listen, you can say nothing.

I'm sure, you know, a lot already. And I get it. But when I made a decision to raise children of my own, um, I made certain promises.

And one of those promises was that I was going to prepare my children with all the tools necessary to become successful adults. And this is just one of those conversations. So you can sit back and listen, but I'm doing this for me.

I'm checking the box. Everything I can do. And it's really hard for them to respond in a negative way.

Right. Because it's not about like what they need to know. It's what it puts the onus on us.

Like what is our responsibility? And in the end it is our responsibility. I mean, we, we totally have to like offload this all of the time and just, you know, say they have Google. So go for it because we all know how, how that goes in the end.

Right. Right. So we, for those of you listening, we are recording this episode on Valentine's day.

And I know by the time this episode airs, it will have been a few weeks, but you know, Valentine's day has me thinking about love, of course. And I think that really one of the most loving things we can do for our children is teach them how to love. And sex is a big part of that.

I think that so many parents without even realizing it separate the concepts of sex and love. And what we really want to try to do for our kids, I think is teach them not just what happens physically with the body, but also what's happening emotionally. Sometimes I think kids may feel ready for something physically, but maybe the emotions aren't quite there yet.

And so I think that we are really doing our kids a disservice not to talk to them about sexuality because it's part of love and connection and relationships as well. And I think for parents, when they think about it that way, maybe some of the stigma can, is minimized. Yeah.

And it requires, it requires really, really thinking about what, what are your own values? What are the values around sex, around love, around intimacy that you want to impart to

this next generation? And we don't always give ourselves the freedom to think about that. I mean, inevitably, like when we get asked a question, sometimes like we like, you know, vomit up the, the, like what we've been used to hearing. And all of a sudden we realize, wait a minute, that's not, that's, that is actually not at all what I want, what I wanted to say.

And I cannot believe that just came out of my mouth because I want to actually tell you the exact opposite. So think about it, give yourself the freedom. What is it that you really want for those young people in your life? Is it really that you want them to have zero sexual experiences until some magical age and some magical committed relationship? Or is it that you want them to have emotionally and physically, physically safe experiences with no long-term negative outcomes? Right.

Two very different things, right? Yeah. Very different. Yeah.

You have to ask yourself that first. And many of us don't do that. Yeah.

I have a group of friends from Sweden. I don't know why I somehow became friends with this group of girls from Sweden, but they were talking about, we were sitting one time talking about how different, you know, what they perceive to be the American experience of sex ed versus what they got in Sweden. And one of them was like, God, I wish I could do like a side-by-side comparison because what I hear from my American friends is a lot of their first sexual experiences are after a lot of alcohol on a scratchy field somewhere in the back of a car, half the time, they don't even really remember the experience versus like what me and my friends grew up with was us going to our parents saying, Hey, I think I'm ready to have sex now.

Them giving us condoms and saying, go enjoy yourselves. Yeah. Yeah.

There's, you know, there's a lot, this, the side-by-side would really, I would shock most people that this sex negative puritanical heterosexist misogynistic culture around, I mean, around a lot of, a lot of what young people are still getting in the sex ed space has actually never, I mean, has never had positive outcomes. That's the interesting thing. It's always like, we're going to say these things to prevent the negative from happening, but actually it is so counterintuitive to sexual health.

Like not giving information has never really helped making people feel guilt or shame about their feelings or their identity about their expression has certainly never helped. And also making consent, just conversations about sex and not about all aspects of our life and personal agency have also not necessarily helped. Right.

I often think that, you know, and I'm going to say this and I'm sure someone's going to have a reaction, like what is she, what did she just say? You know, like the no means no message is really important. And I'm by no means belittling that message. But if we only

give that message without teaching people how to evaluate the decision to say yes and what makes yes a good decision, then we have actually not really done our jobs.

Cause at some point the decision to say no, you know, becomes a yes. Like I, I want to do this this time. So how do I know if this is the right decision? And also how do I hear someone else's yes, whether or not I'm on the same page.

So, you know, I think that there's a lot, um, there's a lot of room for improvement. Totally. I think what a lot of people don't realize is we have some of the worst statistics compared by a long shot compared to other developed countries.

I mean, we have still some of the highest rates of teen pregnancies and the highest rates of STDs. And it's for these reasons that you're describing here, Logan, can you talk a little bit more about that? Cause I, I imagine that's something a lot of parents would want to know more. What, what would you say to your teen about how to say yes? Well, I would ask, I would ask all of us the lesson here over and over.

It should be like, think about yourself first. Um, think about what, what, and what kind of partnership would a yes be right. So I often frame to my students as, you know, what makes someone ready to say yes to something, right? Anything.

And I want them to think about it in terms of what do I need to feel? What do I need to be able to do? What do I need to be able to know? And like, what is that part? What does that other person, like what is the dynamic of that partnership need to look like? And that way you really start to, to have this holistic look at what makes the decision a good one. Like, am I feeling all the things I want to be feeling? Is this something I want to be doing? Am I prepared? Have I thought about all the outcomes? Like, do I know how to manage those outcomes to the best of my ability? Um, you know, do I know certain facts on how to protect myself? Have I thought about like, what happens to this? What happens to me afterwards? Like if people gossip, am I going to be okay with that? You know, what have I thought beyond it? And then also like, is my partnership one where I feel like I'm safe and respected and regardless of whether or not like someone is monogamous or dating or whatever, like, is this someone that I think I want to share this experience with? Um, and you know, we, we often make these questions around sex so simple and they're not really simple. Like they can be well thought out.

I, my, when I say to my students, how many of you've been told, wait to have sex until you're ready. Every single person will raise their hand, right? In some way. And then I'll ask them how many of you have been told what it means to be ready and maybe two people raise their hand.

So it's interesting. We throw out these lines that we perpetuate over and over again, like wait until you're ready, wait until you're ready. And then no one knows what that means.

Yeah, that's such, I've never really thought about it like that, but you're right. There's a lot of one-liners we threw out because we think that that's the right thing to say, but we don't really provide any context or go beyond the line. I mean, we have, I think it is, you're right.

It's, it's not simple. It's very complex. These are multifaceted issues.

There's your individual feelings. There's your feelings about the other person. There is where the other person is.

There's a lot to think about. And I think as parents, yeah, we have to talk to our kids about all of that. And we need to fill in the gaps.

I mean, you, you mentioned sex ed, I mean, there, there are a lot of problems with sexuality education in the United States. I mean, the inequities in sexuality education. And then, of course, this, just the idea that every state has different laws around sex education.

You know, what, what my students are getting is totally different than maybe someone down the block at a different school is getting. And so what happens is, is that you have an entire generation of young people who have not even really close to the same information, and then we send them off into the world and we expect everyone to make great decisions. But, you know, some have gotten guilt and shame and double standards and slut shaming.

And I hate that word with a passion. So I'm saying it like deliberately, you know, and others have this really great comprehensive, thought out, inclusive, equitable education. And, and, you know, it's not anyone's fault that they didn't get it.

It's society, it's the school board, it's the community. And so I think my, my message to parents and guardians is always, if you think, you know what your kids are getting, I guarantee you don't. And so it's really important to do a little research and find out what kind of education your kids are getting, because they might say they're getting sex ed.

The likelihood is, is that they're not getting what you think or what you want. Very true. So Logan, one of the reasons I reached out to you is because I was at a cocktail party, and as a sex therapist, and I'm sure this happens to you as a sex educator at cocktail parties, people tell us all kinds of things.

And so a woman came up to me and she said, I need your advice. And I said, okay, what's going on? And she said, well, my daughter is in high school and there is this group of kids who are furies at the high school. And they're, you know, coming to school in their furry costumes.

And, you know, so for people who don't know what that means, it usually is a kind of

sexual kink where people dress up like stuffed animals. And a lot of times there's a little bit of a power exchange and sometimes it's just role play. And she said, you know, I don't even know how to talk to my daughter about what that is.

And my response was, oh shit, like, I don't know what to tell you about that. And so, and then when I put the, and then I reached out to you and we scheduled this interview, and then I asked some of my followers to submit some questions and one person wrote in, is it wise to embrace kinks? And so I would just want to talk to you a little bit about that, because I don't really know what trends are happening these days with teens and kinks. And I imagine there's a lot there because of porn and internet use, but what are you seeing and what do we need to do about it? Well, I think there's a lot to unpack in the cocktail party situation.

The likelihood is that, you know, young people who are coming to school dressed as giant stuffed animals, for lack of a better term, that's not necessarily a sexual thing, right? It may not be. Yeah. Right.

That could simply, I mean, could it be rebellion? Sure. Could it be that this is part of like that whole anime culture world and cosplay? Yeah, very much so. So, I mean, I think we tend to make assumptions, right? Without really knowing like why people are doing things.

I think that's the first piece of it. And look, I do think that expression and cosplay and trying on different identities is a really, well, it's a big part of adolescence, but you know, also when you don't have a lot of other outlets right now with a pandemic going on, it's not really a surprise that you're like trying to control what you can and express yourself in ways that you can. So that's the first piece.

I wouldn't exactly panic just yet. I share the story a lot that when I was in high school, I spent one full year, now I wasn't dressing up, you know, in you know, in any kind of furry costume, but I spent one year wearing my grandfather's blazers and jeans every day for a full year. The next year I dressed head to toe in black.

The third year I wore dresses and skirts like as super femme as possible. And you would have never imagined that I was the same person from year to year. And that's because I was desperately trying to figure out like, who am I? How do I want to express myself in this moment in the world? Like what works for me? And I think that that's a lot of adolescence because it's the only thing the teens can control right now, right? They can control how they express themselves to the, you know, barring parental involvement.

So there is that. You know, I would say that I have been teaching young people like as a sexuality education professional, like beyond post my 15 year old experience for, I mean, 20 something years now. And I would tell you throughout those 20 something years, there have always been young people that ask about, I mean, they might not have the

language of the word furry, but they've always asked about kinks, right? And it's just because, I mean, it doesn't necessarily even have to be pornography.

I mean, you could turn on any kind of primetime show and something is referenced. So they don't necessarily, they have the language without necessarily understanding what that means. So there is a lot of, there've always been questions around these things and we can give them answers.

Like there are a lot of different ways that people explore their sexuality and things that people like and what people like and what feels good to their body is never going to be the same from person to person, right? And this is one way that people experience or express their sexuality. And maybe they will always, or maybe they're not, maybe they won't, right? Acknowledge where people are right in this moment. And of course, I'm sure there was something else I was going to say.

Oh, and pornography. And the piece on pornography, I find conversations around pornography to be so complicated because it's such a polarizing topic, right? I mean, I do remember the first piece of pornography I saw, it was in second grade. I was at my friend, Allie's house and she pried her way through her father's like locked, like to like pry up carpeting.

And there was like a safe around. I mean, I remember it like it was yesterday. And I remember seeing all of this stuff.

I didn't know, by the way, I had no idea what I was looking at for years. Like it took me decades to figure out that I think that was a cervix that I saw. I'm pretty sure.

What kind of porn was that? Like kink and heart, like okay. Medical. Yeah.

The worst. And again, like I just sort of filed it away with the rest of it. You know, the difference with pornography today is just that it's, you know, it's so accessible, right? It's not like, you know, we had to, when I was a young person, you know, if you didn't pay for the Playboy or Spice network, you didn't get it, right? You were like looking, squinting between the, you know, the static to like try to see something, but you didn't really have it.

Obviously now it's a little bit different, but I think that it's our responsibility to acknowledge that whether we like it or not, you know, sexually explicit media is a form of media. So what are you going to do about it? You can't pretend like it doesn't exist. You have to deal with it and you have to give young people the tools to navigate all forms of media, to critically look at it.

You know, to critically think about it, anything, you know, is its purpose to entertain? Is it to educate? You know, what's the agenda? What would this look like if it were in real life? Like, are, is there negotiation? Is there diversity of bodies? All of these things. So that

was a very long-winded answer that I'm not even sure actually answered. No, I think it did.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, what I'm hearing you say is that for a long time, kink has come up in conversation around teen sex.

And if that's something that we need to, you know, feel comfortable to talk to kids about and really tell them that there are different ways of expressing themselves and that this may be one of many ways. Yeah. I mean, I will say I don't, I've never, I've really never gotten the sense that a lot of teens are experimenting with kink.

I think that when those questions come up, they're really questions because they hear things. And oftentimes it's around BDSM and they can't figure out like that whole, like, why would someone want to hurt someone or why would someone enjoy that? And so it's, it's actually a far more, in my experience, those questions have always been rooted in far more, you know, innocent intellectual pursuits, like trying to understand like, why is it okay here, but why is it not okay here? Like how does that work? So I don't think those, I don't think those questions are, are new, but you know, in any evolving world, it's just our responsibility to dig a little bit deeper. And sometimes it's not a matter of us giving the answer.

You know, if someone, if, if one of my students said to me, like, you know, people are dressing up, why I would say, well, you tell, tell me what, you know, like, why do you think people would dress up? Well, where do you think someone gets that information from? We're so quick to unload instead of asking questions because it helps us craft our answers better. And maybe like, maybe our, what the direction we're going is very different. I think, I think that is, yeah, I think that is such a good sex ed tool is to always throw the question back at them.

Well, what do you think it means? Because you're right. A lot of times we may think they're coming in at like a 10, but really they have like information at a one or a two. And so we can give them a more appropriate response when we have an idea of what their understanding already is.

Yeah. And actually that's, that's really a far more eloquent way of saying my, my own personal sex ed mantra, particularly when it comes to parenting, which is age appropriateness refers to delivery, not content. There is nothing that a young person can't hear at any particular age about sex.

I'm sure some people will bristle at that idea, but if the kid has a question, it deserves an answer. If they're asking about a word, it's because they've heard it. So they deserve an answer.

When we talk about age appropriateness, it's more about how much information are we

giving them? You know, is it digestible? Do they understand like, what's the context in which we're giving it to them? It's not about the what. Right. And I think that, that, that phrase has been used age appropriateness has been used actually to gate keep information and has really prevented us from trusting our gut and having important conversations with young people because we're afraid we're going to mess it up in some way.

And there is like, again, like this arbitrary magical age in which like today, you get to hear what the words mean. Yeah. Well, one of the other questions someone put in was very broad.

It was what to say and how to teach. And that was the question. And what I want people hopefully to get from today's episode is that this is not a one-time conversation.

This is a conversation that you have from a very young age, you know, hopefully forever, your kids feel like that, that they can come to you with questions. Logan, I would love to get your assessment on how I answered my daughter's question about where do babies come from? So she's almost four now, but she started asking me about it probably around the age of three. And my response to her was, well, your dad has parts and I have parts and we put those parts together and we made a baby and you grew inside my tummy for a long time.

And then when you were ready to come out, I went to the hospital and the doctor said, push. And your dad helped catch you. And that's how you were born.

And about a week later, I go to pick her up from her preschool and her preschool teacher says, Ava shared her birth story with the class today. And I said, Oh, what did she say? And she had repeated exactly what I told her. And I said, Oh, were you guys talking about something baby related? She said, no, we were reading a book about the solar system, but she raised her hand and felt that that was important to share in that moment.

I said, okay. So what do you think? Not enough information, appropriate information. You're putting me on the spot.

I want you to give me like a B+, A-. I can't, I can't do that. What I would, first of all, I, I don't think there's a right or wrong to anything.

I think that we share what we're comfortable with. I think that one of the things I might do is say like, do you know what parts I'm talking about? Like, I would, I mean, I think there are always, and I'm not, by the way, I'm not critiquing you. I think in general, like these are the questions that I wonder like, yeah.

What parts do you think I have that doesn't have, or like, I just want to know like where, where they are at all times. You know, I would, I mean, personally, I also might use the

word uterus, not tummy, but that's just me. And I'm like wild about, about anatomically correct language just because, I mean, but, but again, take that with a grain of salt because like my kids always knew everything.

I remember my son went into, when I was pregnant with our daughter, Mav was three and his preschool teacher was pregnant at the time and his friends in the class, her mom was pregnant. And I go to pick him up, similar story, right? I go to pick him up one day and the teacher is cracking up. And she said, and I'm like, Oh, what did he say? Like, just, just what I know. What did he say? He said, well, I told the class that I was pregnant and I had a baby in my stomach and Maverick looked at everyone and said, did no one tell you it was called a uterus? And the friend said, you know, so, so, you know, she said, you're right. You're right. It is.

I use the wrong word. And then he and his friend had this whole conversation, these two little three-year-olds like about how babies come out. And Maverick said, babies come out of the vagina.

And you know, his friend said, well, not me. I was cut out of my mom. Like, okay.

And so I came home and I said, well, you know, she's right. And then he gave us an opportunity to talk about C-section. So capable of hearing this information.

You know, I, I, again, I think we tend to panic when they ask a question, like that we give so much or we don't give enough, or we just assume we know where that question is coming from. I will tell you, and I'll, I'll try and I'll try and keep it like really brief, but hopefully it'll help someone, someone listening. So when, when, when I was pregnant with, with our daughter, with Memphis, Mav said to me one day, what ingredients make a baby? And I was blown away at how brilliant I thought this was just because like the whole framing of it made so much sense to me.

Yeah. Like, what do you need? Like, what are the tools? What are the ingredients? And so I said, well, I said, you need something called sperm and egg. I said, and you know, sperm is produced in the testicles.

I said, you know, where those are? Yes. I said, and you know, and I have something in my body called eggs, not like the one I, we eat, but eggs and when sperm and egg come together, they can create a pregnancy And he's like, I have sperm. And I said, well, not yet, but eventually one day.

And I said, do you want to know, like, do you want to know anything else? And he said, no. So that's like where the conversation fast forward, no joke, a year and a half. Okay.

So we're back. He's about to go to bed. His sister's already born.

And he, he, it's a Sunday night, like right before kindergarten. And he comes into my bed

and says, I have a question. And I said, okay.

He said, I had this thought. What if daddy put his penis in your vulva and vagina? I said, that is a great thought. I said, we should, we should, we should talk about that.

I said, how did you, like, how did you think about that? Like, had that come up? And he's like, I don't know. Now I'm not gonna lie. There was part of me that thought that perhaps he was a sex prodigy, but in reality, there was like a discovery life series on like the mating habits of sea creatures and life.

And I'm sure that like, it's just, you put it together. Yeah. And so I said, such a great question.

I said, let's talk about it. I said, what do you remember about what ingredients make a baby? And he said, sperm and egg. I said, well, do you know how sperm and egg typically meet? He said, no.

I said, someone puts their penis in someone's vulva and vagina, and that's how sperm and egg typically meet. I said, that's something that, you know, grownups do that, you know, when they really care about each other and it's a big deal. I said, any, you know, we, and we sort of ended it there.

I said, any other questions? No. I said, but you were right. Like you got, you figured it out.

Like, I was like beaming with pride. He goes to bed. My mom happens to call.

I tell her the story. And of course, as the worried grandmother goes into a panic that this kid is going to run to kindergarten the next day and just like on low. And so at breakfast the next morning, I said, you know, I love the conversation we had last night.

And I'm so impressed that you came to me with it, you know, and I want you always to come to me first before you share information because parents really like telling their kids stuff for the first time. So if like your friends have questions, like before you answer, like ask me first. He said, great.

I said, you have any other questions? He said, no. Yes. And he looked at me and this is the truth, honest to God truth.

And it's the thing that character like that I carry with me every day. He said to me, when you were a little girl, did your mom answer all of your questions for you? And to this day, it is the reminder that I want to share with other people that it's not about what you tell them. It has nothing to with whether it's a benign conversation or a really provocative one.

Kids just want to know that the person they love and trust is going to be there to answer

their questions. That is it. That is literally it.

That's all they want. And so you have, we have the ability to do that, right? We have to get past our own stuff and just remember, they just want someone who they love to be there to answer questions. I think that is so true and so beautiful.

I want to thank you so much for sharing your story. I know to an extent, this was a personal conversation, you know, for me too, because I think about my own children and the messages that I want to instill in them and the feelings that I hope that they have about their sexuality. And so thank you so much for sharing your story.

Of course. I think that it's, it's a, I share that story a lot because I think it's, it's, it just highlighted for me really what all of this is, is about. We as adults get so worked up.

It's about sex. It's really not about sex at all. It has nothing to do with sex.

It's just about how, how am I going to navigate life? Like who's going to help me? Right. It's being a secure attachment figure for them, which is the most important thing. So Logan, thank you so much.

I am so glad we had this conversation. I learned something new every time I talk to you, where can people find more information about you? And also you've written some books. So talk about those too and where people can find them.

Yes. So I've, I have two parenting books out there. I mean, they've been out for a little while.

One is called, one is written with a friend of mine, Dr. Jennifer Wider. It's called got teens, the doctor mom's guide to sexuality, social media, and other adolescent realities. I don't know why they make subtitles so long, but apparently they do.

One is called third base ain't what it used to be, which is older than that. But you really can find me and my rants typically on social media at Logan Levkoff at on Instagram and Twitter and at Dr. Logan, Dr. Logan Levkoff on TikTok, which really is not my main platform, but it gave me some, gave me some great material. When I told my kids that I was on TikTok, see their reaction.

Yes. Yes. Well, you have amazing rants.

So I hope everyone goes and follows Logan for more sex edit advice. Logan, thank you again so much. And until next time, thank you, Emily.