



# PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

## Episode 5: Girls Resist

with Dr. Sara Crann



University  
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,  
Resistance, and Support

### **Prevent Resist Support Podcast**

### **Season 2 Episode 5: Girls Resist with Dr. Sara Crann**

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and you're listening to Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support

Anne: Today our guest is Dr. Sara Crann. Sara is associated with the Girls Resist Study, which is a project to adapt the Flip the Script program for high school aged girls, which is really exciting. So we'll be talking with Sara about this project today. Sara did her PhD in applied social psychology from the University of Guelph, and then did her postdoc here at the University of Windsor working with Dr. Charlene Senn. On this awesome project. Dr. Charlene Senn is the guest from one of our podcast episodes from season one. So if you'd like to listen to that one, you can just pop back on our website or your podcast app and check that out too. As always, I just want to give you our support reminder before we get into our episode today. So if you'd like to reach out to our office, you can find us at our website [www.uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support](http://www.uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support) or you can email us at [svsupport@uwindsor.ca](mailto:svsupport@uwindsor.ca). If you're not a member of our University of Windsor community, you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres to find support near you. Their website is [sexualassaultsupport.ca](http://sexualassaultsupport.ca). And as always, just a reminder that we put all

the links to the things we chat about in our episode description. And we also provide an accessible transcript on our website, so you can check that out if you would like to. So now we're gonna pop over to our chat with Sara.

Transition music

Anne: Hi, Sara, thanks so much for joining us today.

Dr. Sara Crann: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Anne: So I'm super excited to chat with you about some of the work that we've done, or that you've done. One of the biggest questions that we get in relation to our Bystander and Flip the Script programs is, why aren't you doing this in high school? So can we talk about that, but first, let's start with a quick run through of the Flip the Script program, what are the four sessions? What's the core of the program? And then maybe you can tell me a little bit about the study that you've been working on?

Sara: Yeah, sure. So before I give sort of a quick overview of the program, I just want to note that everything that I'm about to say about the program is actually true for both the University version, as well as the newly developed program for teens, which we can talk about more in a moment. But Flip the Script with EAAA, which I'll just call flip. The script, for brevity, is an interactive education program designed to give young women knowledge, skills and confidence to help them effectively resist sexual assault in a way that doesn't limit their personal freedom or their choices and doesn't hold them responsible for sexual assault. So, you know, as you know, and many of your listeners probably know, the program is 12 hours long, it's split into four three hour units. It's facilitated by two very highly trained young women facilitators. And they run the program with about 15 to 20 young women at a time. So it's a really small intimate group. And so the four units that that women go through are Assess, Acknowledge, Act, and Relationships and Sexuality. So in Assess, the young woman learned to recognize risk for sexual assault, particularly from guys that they know, and they come up with strategies to reduce that risk those perpetrator advantages, and then in the Acknowledge unit, they learn to more quickly acknowledge when a situation that they're in has turned coercive, and they explore

different ways to overcome the emotional barriers to resisting unwanted sexual behaviors from guys that they know guys that they might like, and they have a chance to practice resisting verbal coercion in that unit. And then in the next unit, they take an adapted version of Wen-Do women's self defense, and they learn to fight back using verbal and physical self defense strategies and like the entire program, this unit really focuses on those those most common situations that women are going to encounter with with acquaintances so the physical self defense is really focused on the types of situations they would be in, like trying to get out of a chokehold, which is really common in intimate partner violence or getting out from under somebody who's on top of you on a bed. And then in the Relationships and Sexuality unit, we're integrating all of the content from the first three units into young woman's sexual lives by providing them with some information on sexual health and sexuality and really just offering them a space to explore their own sexual attitudes and values and desires and help develop strategies for sexual communication. And this last unit is based on the Our Whole Lives Sexuality Curriculum, and really just just focused on increasing young women's competence to trust themselves. And to be able to more quickly when, recognize recognize when, when situations they're in have turned coercive. And yep, so that's kind of an overview of the program. It's intentionally designed to be inclusive of cis and trans women with a range of different sexual identities, abilities, and sexual assault histories. And we know from research on the program, that it works, it's very effective at reducing victimization, and that young women generally really enjoy taking a program have a lot of fun in it, when they do take it.

Anne: What an awesome overview of the program. I'm wondering if I can ask Do you have a favourite unit?

Sara: Oh, yeah, I mean, Relationships and Sexuality is, is always a good time. You know, it is for anyone that has taken that unit or seen that unit in action. It is, it is a lot of fun. And it's very different from the first three units. And then Act, of course, is you know, a nice, a nice opportunity to, to get moving, but to feel your, your own power, right, your own strength. I know Deb Chard talks about that a lot, right, you're able to

actually feel that you have the capacity to do these things. And so yeah, I think I think those would be my two faves.

Anne: Love that I think Act is my favorite. I really like the Wen-Do components that have been worked into it. So yeah

Sara: Yeah it's really good.

Anne: That is so awesome. And then the really cool part of the work that you have been doing is adapting this program for high school aged girls. So can you tell us a little bit about the girl study?

Sara: Sure. So Dr. Charlene Senn, who I know was recently on an episode of this podcast and who developed Flip the Script. We are both co principal investigators on a five year grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada to do this adaptation work. So adapt the program and then evaluate it for Teen Girls. And so the the teen program, as we'll call it is designed for anyone who identifies as a girl or a young woman who's between the ages of 14 and 18, and hasn't yet graduated high school, right, so a 17 year olds might actually be first year university. So this version of the program wouldn't be for her. But it would be for a 17, or an 18 year old who was still in high school. I also just want to acknowledge that we're really intentional that this is not only a program for girls who are in high school, so when we know that the program works a couple years down the road, and we're working on getting it out into the community, so girls can actually take it, we want it to be both available to girls through their schools, you know, as an after school program, for example. But we also want it to be available to them through other places in their community, like through their sexual assault crisis centre, for example, or their public health unit. We don't want access or sorry, access to the program to be based on their current enrollment status or attendance status at their high school. So just, you know, we often refer to it as like the high school program, but trying to try to make sure that it's for high school aged girls, but you know, your enrollment doesn't doesn't matter. So the the five year project has these two phases. First phase was to adapt the program. And then the second phase is to evaluate this adaptive program to make sure that it is at least as effective as we know, the university version of the program is. And then there's really a third piece where

we're going to focus on disseminating the program out into the community scaling up actually getting it to the communities where girls are able to take it. So phase one is finished, it was about two and a half years of work. We conducted two research studies with about 90 teen girls across four different communities in the province. And I can go into sort of the details of the studies that we did, but we knew Dr. Senn and I knew and when we started out the work to adapt this program that the first thing that we needed to do was actually talk to teenage girls like Charlene and I might have the background in sexual assault prevention, theory and research but we needed to actually talk to girls who are experts in their own lives. And we really wanted to make sure that this version of the program reflected their experiences, their perspectives, their voices. And so the first thing that we did was a focus group study where we we just sat down and talk to girls about their perspectives on relationships, primarily romantic and sexual relationships with guys their age. We talked about their views on sexual assault and coercion and consent. We talked about their thoughts on sexual assault resistance and that study really helped inform some of the very initial changes that we made to the program. So just as a quick example, we learned very quickly that the language of dating doesn't really mean all that much to adolescent girls. So we incorporated other language like friends with benefits and talking and hanging out and wheeling into the program so that when girls heard that language, they knew what what was being asked of them, or they knew what what information was being shared with them.

Anne: Oh, my gosh, really quick, what was the last one?

Sara: Wheeling? It's, it's similar to like just talking to or hanging, like just just basically just like texting with and getting to know somebody. And that one's kind of interesting, because we ran these different focus groups in different regions and in Windsor, that was not language that the girls were at all familiar with. But in London and Simcoe, that was like, the most common language like, oh, yeah, like you're wheeling. So that was new to me. Yeah, so some very interesting regional differences in the language. But things like friends with benefits was, you know, kind of common across across the groups. So, once we finished that study, then we needed to get actual feedback on the program. So we had this

sort of lightly adapted version. And we ran a second study where we actually ran the program with small groups of teen girls. And we had them give us feedback after each unit. So we really assess the unit. And then we stopped for a bit and we had about a 30 minute focus group. We asked them what they liked, what they didn't like, you know, what, what was relevant or relatable to them, what wasn't? Did they have suggestions for how we could do this stuff better? We got activity or, sorry, we got feedback on the activities, the videos, the materials that they were exposed to. And then we moved on to Acknowledge and we repeated this process. And we also audio recorded all of these programs, so that I was able to act like a little bit of a fly on the wall, and hear how the delivery actually happened in real time. So you know, what kind of questions did the girls ask? How were the facilitators able to handle those questions? You know, were they different than what the university women typically ask? How do the activities go when we explained the instructions? Was it? You know, could you tell on the audio recording that it made sense to the girls and they they knew what they were doing? Or do we may we need to revise some of these these instructions or the way that we're presenting the material? So that was also a really helpful way to look at how the program was working for these girls. And then, yeah, so we had these these two studies of data that we collected from from teens, we also had some survey data that we collected from them. We also at the same time, had a Youth Advisory Committee of about eight young women from across the province who were helping to support the research and consulting on the adaptations. We also have some community partnerships with different organizations across the province, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres is one of the partners. And they've been able to provide some support for some consults on on sort of the research pieces, but also on on the program adaptations. And so all of that information together helped us really work on fully adapting the program, which we, which we now have, and is very exciting. And then we were just about to move into phase two, when we would actually evaluate the program. And then COVID happened, and you know, everything shutdowns. So things are still on hold for this next phase. And I, I wish I was able to say, when we were starting up again, you know, like, like everything that we've been doing, we have a plan, and then we have to wait and revise it. Confident that we'll be able to

start collecting data within the next year. Once it's safer for us to do things in person again. And so that study is going to involve about 900 young women from across the province, we're going to give half of the girls the program right away. We're going to give the other half of the girls the program six months later, and in the meantime, they'll get a brief info session and resources while they're waiting for the program. And then we follow them up for a year. And we look at differences in in the groups and over time. And the key thing that we're interested in is does the program lead to reductions in sexual assault victimization? So yeah, that is a very long winded answer to your question about kind of what what we're doing for the girls study.

Anne: No, I think it's so cool, because I think that folks don't realize how much work goes into this kind of a project. I think that when folks say, Well, why aren't we doing that in high schools? The idea is that we could just show about a high school and they'll be like, Like, yeah, let's do this program or you know that we can just easily adapt content that we've created for university aged folks, for folks in high school. And it's really not that easy from what I've learned about it from you and from Charlene. And so the next thing I would love to talk about are, what are some of the barriers that you faced with bringing this content to a younger group of girls?

Sara: Yeah, so I have to say, We recruited for the first two studies, and we'll recruit for this this forthcoming evaluation study, primarily through social media. And so we didn't go through the school boards. And so so far, we haven't had to face a lot of the barriers that we are likely to face in the future, either with the sort of forthcoming evaluation study, or once we know the program works, and we're actually trying to disseminate it and scale it up in the community. We got a lot of very positive feedback from, from parents who saw our ads on social media, from teen girls who saw our ads from teachers, and overall pretty positive feedback about the research that we're doing and about the program. So that was really very nice and encouraging. That being said, there are of course, you know, additional barriers and considerations that you have to think through when you're doing research. And when you're developing programs for youth particularly on on sensitive topics, like sexual assaults, and sexuality. So the big one that, that you have to deal with is parent guardian consent, right. And so the teens who are in

our research and will be in our research, they do consent for themselves. So that, you know, they're not being forced to participate in the research if they don't want to, but they also need consent from their parent or guardian to participate in the research and to take the program as part of the research. And for many teens, that's not a problem at all, they just asked their parents and their parent has no problem signing off on the consent and letting them take the program. And like I said, we've heard from lots of parents that they're really excited about the opportunity for their teen to take the program, which is wonderful. But of course, there are teens who don't have easy access to a parent or a guardian to sign the form, or the teen might want to participate in the research and take the program, but their parent doesn't want them to, for whatever reason. You know, it could be any number of things, the content, it could just be the sort of logistics of getting that that child to, you know, this, this location for the weekend. So, parent guardian consent is obviously there for very good reason. But it does create that barrier can create a barrier in reaching girls who want to take the program but are unable to because they can't, they can't get that consent. Whether or not parent guardian consent is going to be required once the program is no longer part of a research study will really depend on the protocols of the organization or the school board that's actually implementing the program. But as of right now, because it's part of research, we do require parental consent for the 14 and 15 year old girls, but because the age of consent for sexual activity in Canada 16, we don't actually require it for the 16 and 17 year olds. And then all of this gets a little bit murkier when you're working with school boards who require parental consent for anyone participating in research, who's a student, so anyone that we recruit through the schools would require parental consent, regardless of their age. So it's not like the most interesting information. I know. But it is, it is, it is a barrier to getting access to girls who really do want to take the program who might really benefit from the program, but who just aren't able to get to get that consent. And then a related barrier is getting buy in from parents and guardians and from schools and school boards for the program. So as I said, we haven't really had to come up against this yet, because we haven't been doing our recruitment through the schools. But once we once we start doing that we will need to get research ethics approval through the school boards



and then permission from individual principals to actually talk to their teachers and then we need buy in from the teachers to actually talk to the girls in their in their classrooms. So we do have some strategies for reducing these barriers, making sure we can reach as many girls as possible. One of those things is simply to offer presentations and conversations with folks who were trying to get on board and get invested in the program because we find that having conversations being able to explain what the program is and is not, answer questions and concerns sort of in the moment is a really effective way at getting people to understand the program and get on board with it. And then we also have things like one pagers that we've created that sort of present information about the about the research and the program to to parents. And teachers and youth in what we hope is a pretty easy to understand and engaging way.

Anne: That is awesome. I actually don't think that that's boring information at all, I think this is great. Because you know, when we have students that are working with our office on campus, there's a lot of interest in bringing the content that we're doing with Flip the Script or with Bystander or even just the pub ed that we're doing to younger populations. And I think it's so important because obviously, we should be having these conversations younger. But it is a bit of a process. So hopefully, if you're listening, and this is something you want to do, hopefully Sara's info has given you a couple things to think about and some places to maybe start doing some of that work. So thank you so much for walking us through that. One of the things I would love to know about is the changes that you've had to make to the programming. So what is different about the program that is for girls? And what are some things that you've had to think about that are differences between teenage girls experiences and the experiences that university aged women have?

Sara: Yeah, so I listened to the episode very recently that you did with Charlene, where she talked through kind of the best evidence that we have on sexual assault prevention. And as she said in her episode, the theory and the evidence that underlies effective sexual assault prevention programs really hasn't changed over time. So the things like being able to accurately detect risk, overcoming emotional obstacles

for resistance, those verbal and physical self defense skills, these are the things that we know work for resistance. And so we knew going into this adaptation, that those pieces weren't going to change, they are core to the effectiveness of the program. But the nuances of how they're presented to girls or the specifics, in terms of like the activities, or the scenarios we present, or the materials or the content, those pieces might be adapted to be more relevant or relatable to teens. But beyond that, we kind of had no idea what what a teen version of Flip the Script might look like, both in terms of the content and the format. And we're really open to, you know, making the program what it needed to be well, while keeping these core pieces in place. So now that we finished the adaptation research, I can say that the teen program looks very similar to the university version of the program with with some differences. So it uses the same format of small group sessions, it has lots of interactive, active activities, it's still 12 hours long, it still has the four units in that same order, we still have the facilitation done by the two young women. This worked really well for teens. And so there was no need to change it. But some of the things that we have changed include updating the materials and the scenarios to be more contemporary, more relatable to teens. So sort of similar to what I said before, we've changed some of the scenarios. So they're not like formal dates where you know, someone's going out to a restaurant, but instead might be something like just hanging out at a guy's house that you like,

Anna: or wheeling.

Sara: Yeah. So in general, we sort of have moved away from talking about dating as this idea of like formal courting, where you would go on a date with a person to these more casual hangout situations. And I think that that's probably true for university students as well, especially the younger ones. But it's certainly true true for the high school students who, you know, often don't drive don't have jobs, they don't have money, disposable income to go to restaurants and things like that. We also added some new content that the young woman wanted to know more about. So we've added a new section on online coercion and the pressure to send nudes, again, that probably is very relevant to university women as well. But it came up in our research with teens

over and over and over again, that they, they wanted information on it, and they they weren't getting it in other places in their lives. So we've added that piece, we've added a bit more information on date rape drugs, more information on sexual harassment in the workplace, and at schools. And again, these things like this new content isn't going to change the efficacy of the program. But it's key information that that young women want, and we have an opportunity to provide it for them. And so we're able to do that and then direct them to resources to find out more if they still have questions or are interested. And then I think the place where we have the largest number of changes in the Relationships and Sexuality unit. So the university version draws on the Our Whole Lives curriculum that is grade 10 to 12. And I believe it's called either a young adult or adult curriculum. And so we we drew a lot on the grade seven to nine curriculum to help us make the sexuality content a bit more age appropriate and relevant to younger girls. So just as an example of one of our new activities, it's it's called Creating your Bottom Line Message. And it is focused on giving girls space to think about, you know, where they currently stand at this moment in their life on having sexual intercourse of any kind with any partner. And so we, you know, we literally give them about five minutes and a worksheet to just in private work through thinking about, you know, where they stand on this activity right now, and to answer some prompts on this worksheet to help them come up with a plan for how to communicate that bottom line message to someone in their life so that they've thought a little bit about it beforehand. So when they find themselves if they find themselves in a situation where somebody's saying, hey, let's have sex. They know, you know what, no, I've decided that I don't want to do this right now. And I know what I'm going to say to this person, or Yeah, I do want to do this. But under these conditions, or whatever, you know, their bottom line is. So that's not in the university program. But we thought it was really important to give up space to younger girls who, you know, many of them have not had any sort of sexual relationship before. They haven't had intercourse and, and we wanted to make sure that they had an opportunity to think through these things in advance. And then the last thing I'll just say about some of the changes that we made is, so this is all sort of been about changes to content. But we've also made a few changes to the delivery of the program. So we've simplified a lot of the language, we've added in more

interactive components to help get the girls up and moving around. Because what we heard from them was that they found that piece really difficult and because in our university work, like university students are so used to sitting in a lecture hall for three hours, and listening to someone talk to them. But that's not the type of education experience that that teens are used to. And so even though the program is already quite interactive to begin with, it turns out that it needed to be more interactive. So we've added in additional pieces where they can get up and move around and interact with the other girls who are taking the program.

Anne: That's amazing. And then, okay, if I'm putting you on the spot, I'm so sorry. And I will cut this out. But one of the things that you told me that you edited in the program was some scripted responses for facilitators for answering questions that, you know, if we're sitting at home, we might be like, Yeah, I know how to answer that question. But then when someone asks you on the spot, we don't know how to answer that question. And so I'm really curious, because you told me that sometimes the younger girls will ask what is an orgasm? I think you know, that university aged women also might ask that question, and then I realized that I don't know how to describe that in a succinct answer so I'm curious if you would share that answer for us.

Sara: So we took the definition from the Our Whole Lives curriculum. And we have it written into the script. So facilitators can easily access the definition when if and when it comes up. So we say that an orgasm is an intense pleasurable release of sexual tension, accompanied by contractions of the genital muscles that sometimes happens during sexual activity, either alone or with another person, it's sometimes called coming or climaxing.

Anne: That is great. Oh, that is a great definition.

Sara: We, we realized in running the program with teens as part of our second study in the adaptation phase, that things like language like orgasm, clitoris, erection, language and terminology that, you know, as most like older adult women, we, we kind of assume that everyone has a general understanding of what these terms mean, that we couldn't make those assumptions with, with the younger girls, because sex education is, you

know, so varied. Depending on where you live, what school you go to, the education that you get in your home or in your community is very different around these things. And so we realized it was really important to have some of that sort of basic terminology available to the facilitators to use, if and when it came up, like if they if the facilitators can kind of get a sense that like, oh, maybe there's some girls in the group who like aren't quite sure about that. And so we've just built it in so that everyone is getting the same base knowledge right off the bat. And so we've added into Relationships and Sexuality right at the beginning of the unit before we do anything else, an overview of sort of typical anatomy for folks assigned female at birth. And so we go over, you know, what is the vulva what is the labia what is the clitoris and you know, various other parts that everyone has just sort of like a basic working knowledge of that anatomy.

Anne: This like actually flows so well into our next section because I think that sex ed is super variable. I know that when I talk to friends about sex ed, like we all have had such different experiences, I had a high school class where half of the class talked about drugs with and they did like presentations on different drugs with the like, gym teacher, and then the other half did presentations on STIs in high school, and that was all we got it. And then I remember in grade school, like filling out these diagrams, you know, like a penis, and all the things that are attached to a penis. And then I remember filling out a diagram of a uterus, like there was no vulva diagram, there was no labeling of the clitoris, and then someone that I know, actually did the activity in high school where they passed around the flower. And everybody, like touched the flower, and it got all crumpled up. And then, you know, the person teaching that section was like, Who wants this flower now that everyone has touched? And so I think that we have this idea that sex ed is getting better. And I think it's still very variable that young folks get. So in your words, why is it important for us to talk about sex ed with teenage girls?

Sara: Yeah, I mean, the flower thing is just horrible.

Anna: Oh I know.

Sara: I think because if it's done well, Sex Ed has the potential to shift things like gender norms and expectations in intimate and sexual relationships, the ways that we think about pleasure and intimacy, and like it really has the capacity to make safe sex safer and more equitable and more pleasurable for everyone involved. And, you know, that seems like a really good thing. So we, we need comprehensive sex ed approaches that go beyond the biology and the anatomy, stuff that go beyond the STIs and the contraception, right. And we kind of seem to think that, like, if we're getting all of those things, we're getting good sex ed, because as you said, you know, some people get pieces of it, and other people get different pieces. And all of that, that stuff, you know, the STIs the anatomy, all of those things are very important, but it's not sufficient, because sex and sexuality is not only biological, right? It's relational. It's psychological. And we're doing a disservice to young people when we talk about sex and sexuality as if it's only about the mechanics of penile vaginal intercourse, and male orgasm, which just not only reinforces this very male centric view of sex, but it's heteronormative. It's cis normative. It's just not good. It's not sufficient in any way. And I think that sex ed in elementary and high schools, is in this really unique position to be able to reach large numbers of young people, when they're at a critical juncture in their lives when they're exploring their sexuality when they're experimenting relationships. And, you know, there's this opportunity to provide young people with accurate and empowering information and skills around things like different types of sexual activity and sexual communication and negotiation. I mean, I just think about how much more fulfilling sexual and intimate relationships could be for everyone, but especially young women, if young people had just more knowledge, more sex positive and inclusive knowledge about sex and sexuality. So I do I do see it as sort of like a vehicle for disrupting some of the these very problematic ideas about about gender and sex and sexuality. And it can offer a counter narrative to what teens are seeing in other places in their life, right. What they're seeing on porn, if you have, if you have comprehensive sex positive, inclusive sex ed at school, and then you're watching porn, you're going to be in a better position to view that porn very critically, and be able to see that oh, actually, this is this is perhaps problematic, and be able to like apply a critical lens to it, instead of a lot

of the sex ed that kids are currently getting, which is just reinforcing that that's what you know, normal hetero sex looks like.

Anne: I love that you that was so thorough, I love that you touched on the psychological component, the social component, the biological component. And I think, yeah, like, if you're not teaching children and teenagers about these things, then they're getting that education from pornography, they're getting that education from their peers. And I think it even would have just been revolutionary for girls in high school when I was in high school to be told, you know, you don't have to do all the things your boyfriend wants to do. So I love that you're having these conversations with young women. I think it's so important.

Sara: Yeah, and we hear from and I'm sure you do, too, at the university level, but we hear we heard from the teams that you know, they really love the Relationships and Sexuality unit, it's, you know, their favorite unit for the most part. And that, you know, for many of them, it was just really transformative to to think about these things for the first time and that, for me is just so lovely to hear that you know if they take nothing else away from it know that like, you have choices and options. And sex can be different, and it can look different and it can feel good. And, you know, that's like, that might sound so basic, but that's such a transformative thing to learn for so many young people.

Anne: Yes. And I think one of the things that really came up for me when I was facilitating the program was that, you know, when I was in first year, second year of university, I really would have said that we all have a shared knowledge about sex and reproductive biology and sexual health and consent, like we're all pretty much on the same page. And then when I started teaching this program to like university aged women, like we're not on the same page, people come from such a wide array of backgrounds, and we've already kind of touched on the idea that folks are coming from, like, such a different background in terms of the sex ed that they get. And so like, No, we don't all show up to Flip the Script in university having the same, the same understandings of body parts or what consent looks like, or, like any of these topics that we cover.

Sara: Yeah, that's, that's so true. And I that's especially true, I think, for for the younger, the younger cohort of girls as well. One of the questions that Charlene and I had when we started thinking about adopting the program was, you know, do we need two versions of the program? Do we need a version for the younger girls, the 14/15 year olds, and then another version for the older girls, the 16/17/18 year olds? And we thought, you know, we sort of naively assumed that age would map map nicely onto sexual knowledge and experience. And we also sort of assumed that, you know, among university women, the developmental and the social differences between a tw- and you know, 20 year old versus a 22 year old, are probably quite a bit smaller than those differences between like, a 14 year old and a 17 year old, and I think, you know, to some extent that that is true. But we did we had this question around, you know, do we need? Do we need two versions of the program? And so we, you know, we analyzed our data. And the very clear answer was that, no, we did not need two versions of the program, because age didn't really, it was not a good indicator of what someone knew, or what kinds of experiences they had. And we couldn't make assumptions based on age. And so, you know, through this process, we realize, you know, we needed to include the anatomy piece at the beginning of Relationships and Sexuality, we needed to include definitions for erection and orgasm, and things, you know, terminology like that, so that everyone had the same knowledge because some girls are really open about what they know and don't know. And so girls in our research study, you know, 17 year olds would say, like, I know, I'm supposed to know this, but I actually have no idea what an orgasm is. And the facilitators would, you know, everyone kind of laughed, and it was easy, breezy. But of course, there would be other girls who would never want to admit that, or, you know, girls who are younger, who actually have a lot of knowledge, but wouldn't want to admit that at out of fear of, you know, other people thinking that they're too advanced or a slut or something like that. So we figured the best course of action was to just make sure that everyone is given that same level of knowledge coming into it. And if they already know it, that's okay. It serves as a great refresher. And if they don't know what, it's new to them, then that's great, too.



Anne: That's amazing. And I think one of the really cool things about the program is that we talk about women's sexual desires, which is, as you've already mentioned, not talked about enough, and especially for Teen Girls, you know, I think that that's not talked about enough. And so why is it important that we talk about, like sexual desires with teen girls about their own sexual desires, rather than the sexual desires of a partner, and especially like a male partner? Because that's often the messaging that we get.

Sara: Yeah, I mean, when, you know, lots of women probably have this experience. When I talk to friends or other adult women in my life, about the things that we wish we had known when we were teens. This always comes up and someone always says, you know, how transformative would it have been if someone had said to us, oh, did you know that your your desire and your pleasure matters, and that your partner, whoever they are, should care about it? And if they don't care about it, you actually don't have to be with that person? Like, wouldn't that have been the most important thing to know as a young person? And. And, yeah, so I mean, I don't think we can overstate the importance of talking to girls and young women, about their own sexual desire, right? We're subjected to these forces of socialization that teach us from very early on in childhood that you know, as girls and women, we are supposed to value the feelings and the needs of other people before our own. That the most important thing for us to do is maintain relationships, especially romantic relationships with men, that we need to be perceived as likeable and agreeable. It's sort of any cost to ourselves. We're also subjected to these really deeply ingrained cultural ideas about men's and women's sexuality and and hetero sex and like what that looks like. So, you know, the I like the male sex drive discourse like this idea that men are always ready and able and willing to have sex or what's called the coital imperative, which is sort of a goal that penile vaginal intercourse is, with, like, a male orgasm is kind of the gold standard that everyone should be striving for when it comes to sex. And then, and then also the complete absence of conversations, discussions around women's pleasure, and I think that that is changing. I think we're having more conversations around around women's pleasure, which is, of course, great. But it is it is slow. And I think we're still kind of in this very, in the in this context where we're not, there isn't

enough of those conversations. And so girls and women are engaging in sex and sexual activities, that really isn't about them at all, right? We're not encouraged to think about what we might want or not want in a sexual encounter. And so the first time that we're having these conversations with ourselves, like is this something that I actually want to do is, in the moment, when a partner has either suggested that we do it, or they've just started to do it, and we have to react or not react. And sometimes that's okay, because it's something we want, but sometimes it's not okay, because it's not something that we want. And we, you know, we have to make those those decisions in the moment. And especially for teens who, you know, don't, for the most part, like don't have as much sexual experience, or relationship experience as, as you know, older people do. Trying to work through the complexities of sexual desire, like in the moment as a teenager is just really not the ideal time to do it. But I think it's an experience that's so common to so many of us. And some of the research that I've done with teen girls, on their relationships with boys and men really echoes these same, these very same issues. They talked a lot about nudes, and feeling this constant pressure from guys in their life to send nudes when they didn't want to, they were also acutely aware that their desires and needs rarely mattered in their romantic and sexual relationships with with, you know, guys that they're dating or, or sleeping with, which was not surprising to hear. But it was very disappointing to hear sort of the extent that that young girls, young women are still dealing with these issues. And, yeah, so I just, you know, if we talk, if we talk to a young woman about desire, if we let them know that they have permission to, to think about these things to want to have desirable, pleasurable, safe, empowering sex, that it's an option for them. That should be, you know, available to them. And if a partner is not also interested in that, then, then that partner is perhaps somebody that they they want to be with.

Anne: Yes. I love all of those pieces that you touched on. The heteronormity, the cis-normativity, it is so important to think through, like what are the standards that we are telling young girls about their own sexual desires and how are we not talking about it, or what are we telling them is important and not important. So just a couple last questions here for you, Sara. If you know a teenage girl, how can you talk with her about

sexual consent, how can you talk with her about it in a way that is accurate, free from blame, and empowering?

Sara: So I am not a clinical psychologist or a sex educator, but I have spent a lot of time in the last couple of years talking to teen girls about their needs and experiences when it comes to um consent and assault and accessing resources and information on these topics. So, this is sort of based on what I have heard from them. But I think the first step is for adults no matter what their comfort level is, what their experience with these topics is in talking to youth is to do some research first. To make sure that the information they are bringing to a conversation with the young person on these topics is accurate because language changes overtime, how we think about gender and sexuality changes overtime, how we think about consent and you know assault changes over time, and for the most part that is all very good that it is changing. But it is important, it is so very important to have accurate knowledge when you are coming into these conversations to use inclusive language, to know how to have these conversations in way that isn't victim blaming. To make sure that you are not doing more harm to this person than if you hadn't had the conversation at all. And there are so any great resources online for parents for teens, and not just parents but adults in talking to and how to talk to, to young people about these things. There's lots of great books. I just bought two books. One is called Consent: The New Rules for Sex Education, and it is aimed at teens broadly, and then I have another one called Girl: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You, it is aimed for teen girls. And these would be great starting points for conversations because adults can read them and then pass them off to you know the teen in their life and say, you know, I am here, let's have a talk about this. So I think do your research, make sure that the adult in the conversation feels confident in what they are doing and knowledgeable in what they are about to say, and then the second step would be letting that young person know that you are actually a safe adult in their life that they can talk to. What I heard over and over again in my research with teen girls was that they they want information, they want resources, they want support from adults, and they are just not getting it and they don't know how to get it. And I think it would just be so powerful to get adults to reach out to the teens in their lives and say hey, you know, I am here to have conversations

with you in a totally nonjudgmental way, in an honest and open way, I will answer any questions you have and and sort of open the door so to speak, for those conversations to happen. And you know, even better yet, you can take a really active role and give them the resources like the pamphlets, the books, whatever on sexual assault, sexuality, and consent, and sexual health, and all the things they might have questions about, teen dating violence, before they even ask, and then use that as a foot in the door to start having those conversations. And then, the last piece I think is really sort of putting into practice what you promise. So if you promised nonjudgmental, open and honest conversation, make sure that is what you are having. And this can take practice and that is perfectly ok. The Flip the Script facilitators you know are trained to respond to young women's questions and comments in a nonjudgmental way, right, like to not show in their body language or in their face that they are surprised about a question that has been asked or any sort of judgment about a question being asked. And so it is a skill that can be learned and I think it's it is just really important for any adult who's having these conversations with with young people to make sure that they're not that they're sort of you know walking the talk, in in how they're they're having these conversations. So yeah

Anne: Yeah

Sara: It's not easy, but it is important.

Anne: Yeah. You don't want your teen girl made to feel like you tricked them into sharing with you and now they're facing all of this like judgment and blame and like consequences for opening up about it.

Sara: Yeah absolutely. And the consequences is such an important piece. Like if you are going to ask your daughter, your teen daughter, to be really open with you about her experiences in life, then you can't then turn around and you know reprimand her, punish her, for you know, admitting that she, I don't know, is drinking with friends or something. So, yeah that piece is super important.

Anne: Love that. And so, our last question, which is maybe going to be one of my favourites. But, what message would you love to share with teen girls who might be listening?

Sara: Yeah. It's, so my answer to this question whenever I get it is always the same because it is the message that I wish that I had as a teenager. Which is that there's so much power in listening to and trusting yourself. That you you already know what you want and what you need, you know what is best for you in any situation, you know what you like and don't like. And you can trust that's sort of self-knowledge that you have and if you are able to keep it kind of in the back of your mind so that when someone is trying to gaslight you or tell you that you're wrong, or that you want something different than what you do, then you you know your own truth. I think that girls and women, like we are so often taught to ignore our intuition and like I said, sort of push the feelings and needs of other people, particularly men, over our own. And that self-knowledge that that we have about what we want and what feels good or feels right often gets overridden a bit for what he wants, what would he likes, what would feel good for him. And so, we get quiet, and we get small, and we don't want to offend or take space or be perceived as needy or emotional or high maintenance or dramatic, or you know, whatever. Whatever, you know, what term you want to throw at us. So this applies to sexual situations, but I also think it applies more broadly to non-sexual situations too. And that's what I love so much about Flip the Script is it offers, you know, so much valuable knowledge and skills to young women. But one of the most important things is that it does give girls and women permission to listen to and to trust themselves and then it provides them with the knowledge and the skills to act when someone isn't listening or respecting their boundaries. And you know, it is such a simple message, trust your gut, but it is really amazing when you can actually start implementing that in your own life.

Anne: I love that, trust your gut is one of my favourite messages. If you have listened to the podcast you know I have talked about that with Deb Chard, I think I talked about that with Charlene, now I am talking about that with Sara. We actually made a sticker for the office that said trust your gut on it recently. So

Sara: That's amazing.

Anne: Yeah.

Sara: Yeah.

Anne: I think centralizing that is so important.

Sara: I think it. It just speaks volumes that, you know, no matter who you are speaking to, that's that is kind of a core message that that older women want younger women to know and I think for so many of us it's because we didn't have that message, we didn't trust our gut, we ended up in situations and maybe things would've looked a little bit different if we had been able to say you know what, actually no. This doesn't feel right. And I'm going to listen to myself because I know I know what feels good and what doesn't, and this doesn't. I just you know I just want for all the young women in the world to have that. I just think you know what an amazing way to live life.

Anne: Yes. It's my fave. I love that it is your fave. This has been so great. Thank you so much for spending some time chatting with us. I'm just so grateful to have all of your thoughts about, you know, sex ed and resistance for young women. I think that, you know, we just want the younger versions of ourselves to have what we didn't have. And so, I think that it's a really hopeful message. I am really looking forward to when you folks get to actually finish that work after COVID.

Sara: Yes, me too. And thank you, Anne, so much for the chance to chat. I always love speaking to you about these things. And I will just point folks, you know who are teens or who know teens who might be interested in participating in the next phase of our research when we are able to be up and running to our social media because that's where we are going to be posting our project because that's where we are going to be posting information about the study and how to learn more and enroll. So we're @girls.resist on Instagram and @girls\_resist on Twitter. Our media accounts have been a little quiet lately because there hasn't been too much going on. But we will have information up there about the new study in the next little while.

Anne: Amazing. Thanks so much.

Sara: Yeah, thanks Anne.

Transition music

Anne: So that was our chat with Dr. Sara Crann and it's always so lovely to chat with her and hear about the awesome work she has been doing. If you are interested in learning more about the work that she's been up to, check out the episode description for more info. And as always, if you need support you can reach us at [svsupport@uwindsor.ca](mailto:svsupport@uwindsor.ca) or you can check out [sexualassaultsupport.ca](http://sexualassaultsupport.ca) for the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Thank you so much for listening and if you are into this podcast, don't forget to like and subscribe. Thanks so much, folks.