

In light of Kavanaugh and Cosby, it's time to rethink sex-ed

By **Heidi Stevens** Chicago Tribune

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My hope — as Christine Blasey Ford testifies in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Bill Cosby heads to prison and our conversations continue to dive into sex, power and truth — is that we can point our children in a better direction.

My hope is that we're finally ready to say enough. Enough with a culture that treats sex as a conquest, that says boys can't be contained, that says girls can't be believed.



U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh has been accused of sexual assault by Christine Blasey Ford, an allegation being investigated by the FBI. (Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP)

My hope is that we do our absolute best — our absolute best — to teach the kids in our lives to regard other people's bodies, safety, autonomy and pleasure as highly as their own.

My hope is that we get serious about including comprehensive sex education in schools.

"Real sex education could create a new generation of young people who value sex as a mutually satisfying intimacy, and who have no tolerance for anyone who insists on using it as a means to dominate or compete," author and educator Jaclyn Friedman wrote in a recent op-ed.

"It would do that by teaching communication skills, and helping young people

develop the emotional resiliency to handle the rejection that sometimes comes when you express a desire," Friedman wrote. "And it would teach all kids to expect that sex should be safe and enjoyable for everyone involved."

My hope is that we also offer sex education at home.

"Sex is complicated because people are complicated," Chicago-based sex education instructor Kim Cavill told me. "It has to be an ongoing conversation, done in little parts, rather than a half-hour scheduled talk at age X and then you're done."

Cavill educates middle and high school students about safe sex and consent. She's also the mom of two young boys. I called her recently to ask her what we should be saying to kids to guide them toward a better path than the one we've been travelling.

"The thing I wish more middle and high school kids heard is that consent is the beginning," she said. "It's a conversation starter, not the end point of the process. Consent makes sex legal; it doesn't make it good."

Because the goal, as Friedman writes, is "young people who value sex as a mutually satisfying intimacy, and who have no tolerance for anyone who insists on using it as a means to dominate or compete."

"I tell my high school students, 'Consent is the entry you pay to get into the fair, but you still have to get tickets for each of the rides,'" Cavill said.

She coaches students to sincerely ask each other, when they're being intimate, "Do you want me?" And, as a followup, "How do you want me?"

("Is this OK?" "How about this?" also work.)

"If the other person can't answer those questions, for whatever reason — drugs,

alcohol, insecurity, general confusion about what they want in that moment — it's in everybody's best interest to walk away," Cavill said. "If you don't get a clear, confident yes, it's best for everyone involved to walk away."

Cavill said movies, TV shows and pop songs are great conversation starters.

"Parents can talk to kids about some of the different reasons people have sex and which of those reasons are good reasons and which of them aren't," Cavill said. "Which are reasons I would feel good about for a long time afterward, and which are reasons I wouldn't feel good about for a long time afterward."

Our kids should approach their intimate relationships with a good idea what they want to experience and what they don't, Cavill said.

They should also approach them with a clear, unwavering commitment to honouring what their partners want to experience and what they don't.

"We can help kids walk through their value system in a way that very practically influences their decision-making," she said. "We can help them get a clear view of what they want and what they certainly don't want, in advance, so they're not making these decisions in the moment."

They're decisions, after all, that will affect them for a lifetime.