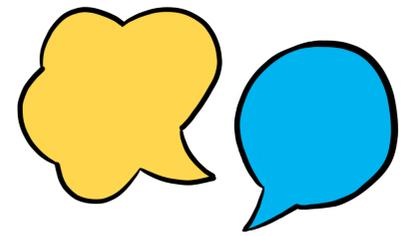


sexualized song lyrics



SMART
THINGS
TO SAY

*with Saleema Noon
Sexual Health Educators*

Be proactive

In a perfect world, our kids wouldn't hear songs with sexualized, demeaning or misogynistic lyrics. But at some point, they're going to hear these songs and will probably also watch the videos that go with them. While parents can delay this to some extent at home, we have little control over what they're watching on their devices, on their friends' devices, and on TikTok. The first step in damage control is to have open, honest conversations about the music they listen to and how to think critically about the media they consume. This includes talking about sex, bodies, relationships, consent and respect even earlier than you might think you need to. So, when you hear that a new song like Cardi B. and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" is out, have a look at the lyrics, watch the video and be ready to dive in with your kids (rather than cross your fingers it won't be on their radar).

Take a minute

When your child asks what a "WAP" ("wet ass pussy") is, it's OK to say, "I'm so glad that you asked me this question, let me think about how best to answer it for you. Can we talk about it before bed?" This will give you a chance to pull yourself together, call your sister, and answer when you're feeling more prepared (and less flustered). Following up will show your child that you're a reliable source of information. And that's super important.

Take a stand

With preteens and teens, you might say, "I have a big problem with songs that glamorize violence of objectify women. I worry that if you listen to these songs, you'll become desensitized to their message." Or "When we sing along or even listen to a song that has violent, discriminatory or demeaning lyrics, we're showing our support for these ideas and beliefs. This is obviously not OK."

Keep it at their level

The conversation we need to have with young children is different than the one we need to have with preteens and teens. For example, when littles sing lyrics that have the word "sexy" in them, we can explain that the word "sexy" is an adult word. Maybe they can think of another word to substitute in, like "happy" or "funny", instead. With preteens, we can expand the conversation to include thoughts on how "sexy" is used in the song and the message it conveys.

Call for backup

Does your child have an older sibling they look up to? They can play a valuable role in reinforcing your message. Not in a "You're too young to listen to this song." kind of way, but in a "I get where mom is coming from and here's why." kind of way. Older siblings often embrace a request for help from parents around this stuff because it tells them that their voice is influential in the family.

Break it down

Let's stick with the WAP example. You could say, "Some people use slang words for body parts, and "pussy" is a slang word for the vagina. Sometimes people find these nick names to be rude or offensive, but others don't. In our family we use scientific words for body parts, but adults can use whatever words they want." Then say, "The vagina makes a natural moisture called lubricant when someone is sexually aroused. Cardi B. and Megan Thee Stallion's song is referring to a lubricated vagina, which they call a 'wet ass pussy' or 'WAP' for short." Whew!

Look for the good stuff

WAP provides a great opportunity to talk about celebrating sexuality and, more specifically, the vagina. Talk with your child about the damaging misconception (perpetuated mostly by people without vaginas) in our society that the vagina is a smelly and dirty organ and that vaginal lubrication is problematic. Lubrication is important because it makes sex feel good. Although exaggerated (it's entertainment, after all), Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion embrace their "wet and gushy" vaginas and in doing so, celebrate their sexual feelings, their sexual health and their freedom of sexual expression. Now that's something to talk about!