

Having "The Talk", Role Reversal: A Sex Talk With my Dad

By Colleen Lord, Education Manager for Union County, CFLE

Reprinted with Permission from

Sexually Smarter - The Place for Sex Ed

A blog by the Center for Family Life Education (CFLE) of Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey.

<http://www.sexuallysmarter.blogspot.com/>

"I know you're not ready yet. At least, I hope you're not. But when you are ready to have sex, I really hope you'll come to me first."

My dad and I are sitting at his dining room table for this "less-than-comfortable" conversation. One might think that I was on the receiving end of "the talk." You'd be wrong.

"I won't take a shower with a raincoat," he grumbles. I sigh and shake my head. I wasn't expecting that reaction when I started this talk, but I guess I should have known better. My father isn't one to mince words.

Having the sex talk with my dad is difficult on many levels. My poor father lost the love of his lifetime just a month ago. My folks met in Catholic school in Newark, NJ when he was 13 and my mom was 12. He took her to the movies on their first date. He paid full price for my mom and a child's fare for himself on account of his height. Life wasn't always easy for them, but they stuck together for 59 years and enjoyed a deeply loving and intimate marriage.

Damn cancer.

My dad shared with me not too long ago that through my mother's illness, their connection to each other was strengthened exponentially. It figures. Just when they reached new heights in their relationship, her cancer would spread and we would lose her.

It's hard to think about my dad starting over. I don't know that he'll ever find that same magic he had with my mother with someone else. But I know that eventually he will be ready to share his life with someone again. And with that, and as a sexuality educator, comes my need to prepare him for the world of dating and safer sex. My 72-year-old dad has never had to think about getting an HIV test, didn't really use birth control (I was raised Catholic and I am one of six) and he probably still thinks that condoms are for sailors.

Perhaps this view about condoms and the lack of sexual education for the retired set are some of the reasons we've seen increased rates of HIV/AIDS among seniors. I recently read in our new manual, *Older, Wiser, Sexually Smarter*, that about a quarter of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the United States in 2005 was age 50 and over, representing a 17% increase from 2001.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), persons over 50 accounted for 15% of all new HIV/AIDS cases. It is projected that the majority of those living with HIV/AIDS by 2015 will be 50 and older. Additionally, persons over 50 account for 35% of all deaths from AIDS. Often, this age set is less knowledgeable or does not practice safer sex, and health care professionals may underestimate the need for education among this age set. But, seniors, like the *Sexually Smarter* website says, still want to be fulfilled in the second half of their life.

I'm sure the statistics and words have passed through my lips in my career as a sexuality educator, but looking at my dad at the dining room table gave all those numbers a face.

"I think you'll find that condoms have changed a whole lot over time, Dad," I say. "I bet I can help you find some that you like when the time is right."

I wish that this talk wasn't necessary. I wish for a miracle cure for cancer and a rewind button. But, I'm also grateful to be in a position to help my Dad navigate this new world. I have my work cut out for me—he's a tough cookie.

But I'm up for the challenge. I'll be breaking out a copy of our [new manual](#) and hoping that others will have "the talk" with their loved ones. I know it's important for my dad to have this information – to be prepared and have information on protection. Despite the level of discomfort it brings, I hope more people like me, whose parents experience a loss, can have this talk with their parents and find the resources, like our manual, to move past the discomfort. For more information on sexuality education that blasts through the age barrier, see our [website](#).