

Indiana

By Gina Musto

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.  
-Margaret Mead

Time: 2017 in Trump's America.

Setting: School board meeting in Warsaw, Indiana.

### Characters

Barbara Ash (mid 50s) – School board chair

Peter Skelley (50s-60s) – Warsaw West High School principal

Katherine Romo (40s) – superintendent

Ellie (Eleanor) Callis (late 20s/ early 30s) – health teacher

Nick (Nicholas) Bailey (30s/40s) – hockey coach and biology teacher

Justin Kramer (16) - student

Rachel Kramer (40s) – Justin's mother

Caleb Engle (late 20s/ early 30s) – former teacher

Avery Ferrera (17) – student

Casting should be diverse in regards to race, ethnicity, and ability.

*A school boardroom. Florescent lights and uncomfortable furniture. Three board members sit at a table at the head of the room. A faded American flag stands in a corner and the school board's logo is printed on a sign hanging behind the table. The room feels like it is stuck in the early 1990s even though its occupants are not. Six community members sit in the room – four adults and two students. The board chair, Barbara Ash, begins the meeting*

BARBARA

Good evening and welcome to the Warsaw Area Public Schools board meeting. My name is Barbara Ash and as the board chair, I would like to call the meeting to order. I invite our audience members to please join us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

*Those in attendance recite the Pledge. The board members are dutiful and recite it precisely. Ellie, Nick, and Rachel, and both students rise. Rachel may be a little overly dramatic in her recitation. Caleb Engle does not stand and does not recite. The students and Ellie appear uncomfortable as they mouth the words.*

BARBARA

Thank you. Principal Peter Skelley of Warsaw West High School and Superintendent Katherine Romo have joined us this evening. We are here to discuss the alleged law and policy breeches of a health educator at Warsaw West High. The Indiana Department of Education dictates an abstinence-only approach must be taught in sexual education classes. Teacher Eleanor Callis has been accused by a student and a staff member that she has not been complying. We will investigate these allegations, beginning with Principal Skelley. Peter, if you will.

PETER

Thank you, Barbara. Just under a month ago, Justin Kramer, a sophomore at West, spoke to me about his discomfort in Ellie Callis's class. He complained that during class, Ms. Callis strayed from the abstinence-only approach and instructed on several birth control methods, including condoms, the pill, and diaphragms. Justin also reported that Ms. Callis included minority identities such as homosexuality and lesbianism in the instruction.

BARBARA

Ellie, we've had a private conversation about these accusations. Would you like to repeat them now for the record and for our audience?

ELLIE

Yes, Barbara. I would.

*Lights shift. Focus on Ellie.*

ELLIE

I am so fucking guilty. I am. I know what I did goes against Indiana state policy and I'm glad. I spent so many years trying to comply, then it hit me that I didn't know a damn

thing about my own body until I studied human sexuality in college. I used to be terrified of my body. My periods had always grossed me out. I was concerned about my own sex drive. I may or may not have had a huge crush on one of my best female friends. I didn't know anything about being human and – then the world opened up for me. There was all this knowledge out there I didn't even know existed. I've had it bottled up inside me, wanting to share it with a bunch of kids who needed it, and I couldn't. It practically drove me insane.

*Lights shift back to school board room.*

ELLIE

I have not violated these policies.

RACHEL

Excuse me?

ELLIE

I have not taught anything that's prohibited. I let my students ask questions, but the focus is always –

RACHEL

No wait just a moment –

BARBARA

Please, Rachel, I'm sure you and your son have plenty to say, but we need to keep this orderly.

RACHEL

I know you mean well, Barbara, but she's lying.

*A moment to focus on Rachel. She's a Hoosier housewife, conservative both in appearance and politics.*

RACHEL

This is not the first time these complaints have come up in this district.

BARBARA

*(impatient)*

Rachel, if you don't want to listen, step out of the room. This is an investigation, not a witch-hunt. Innocent until proven guilty.

*Caleb laughs. It's loud, sarcastic. Those in the room glance his way. He's slouched in his chair, visibly out of place. Like a punk at a Barry Manilow concert.*

CALEB

What? It's funny.

*Uncomfortable silence. Rachel might give Caleb a nice long glare here.*

BARBARA

Ellie, can you describe for us how you instruct the sex education unit in your classes?

ELLIE

Yes. As you know, our curriculum, uh, provides two weeks in the sophomore year for reproductive and sexual health. There are two chapters in the textbook that focus on these issues. Throughout the unit, I allow student to ask any questions that they might have and I answer them best I can with the materials available in class.

BARBARA

You seem dissatisfied with what's available to you.

ELLIE

My personal feelings are not relevant.

PETER

Ellie, they are highly relevant. If you are presenting personal biases to your students –

ELLIE

I assure you, Peter, if I state my opinion in class, I make it very clear it's opinion and not fact. I don't mislead my students.

PETER

So they know you're unhappy with the curriculum.

ELLIE

No... but, I mean, they certainly don't hide that they hate it -

KATHERINE

And why is that?

ELLIE

They find it boring. Condescending. Poorly written.

KATHERINE

And you allow them to express these complaints?

ELLIE

Yes. I... allow my students to think for themselves in my class.

NICK

You're the only one that does.

BARBARA

Nick, now is not the time -

NICK

Oh, now is exactly the time. We're investigating Ellie fully here. Her teaching methods are a part of that.

PETER

Of course they are -

NICK

We're just sitting here listening to you throw questions at her. I've got loads of questions about her teaching, the curriculum. Why is it that Ellie lets her students run the class when -

BARBARA

Nicholas, in a courtroom proceeding, there is a particular order and -

NICK

This isn't a courtroom! This is a school board. I have questions and I don't like being silenced by my own peers. I have questions about what our teaching standards are and -

PETER

Nick, drop it. I'll let you have your say. Just not now.

BARBARA

Now, Ellie, the concern has come from Justin Kramer that you allowed students to ask questions which led to instruction on outside topics. Can you tell me how these sessions are run?

ELLIE

It's... it's not that exceptional. Students have a lot of questions. At the beginning of the sex-ed unit, I set out a box. I tell them the box has the answers to everything they want to know about sex, but I can't tell them what's in it. They have to ask the right questions. So I let them ask whatever they want, and I answer what I can.

BARBARA

Justin, could you please come to the front?

*Justin stands and shuffles towards the podium.*

BARBARA

Do you agree with Ms. Callis's description of her class?

JUSTIN

Yeah. I guess.

PETER

"You guess?"

JUSTIN

I mean... it feels different than it sounds. Being in that room.

PETER

Can you tell us what you said to me about Ms. Callis' teaching?

JUSTIN

That Ms. Callis was teaching us inappropriate things in her class. Things my mom told me were sinful.

CALEB

Oh my God...

PETER

Can you elaborate for me?

JUSTIN

I... um....

*He looks towards his mother.*

RACHEL

It's okay. Tell him what she taught you, honey.

*Lights shift. Ellie stands and turns away from the audience. Sexy music starts to play. She turns around, her blouse partially unbuttoned, standing in the posture of every sexy teacher fantasy/ Halloween costume ever created.*

JUSTIN

She taught us... she taught us about... about... condoms.

ELLIE

*(in a seductive, pornographic voice)*

Condoms are sexy.

JUSTIN

There was a question about them.... She told us how they were... were used, what their purpose was...for. That they were used for birth... umm, birth... control, like during premarital...uhh... sex –

PETER

Did she demonstrate how they were used?

JUSTIN

Not... that day. Later was a question about how... how they went on and Ms. Callis demonstrated on ... on a banana. She had the... the, uhh... condom and a banana in the... in the box she'd set out.

*Ellie pulls out a banana from her purse and touches it seductively, miming putting a condom on.*

RACHEL

That's not even the worst part. Tell him the rest, hon.

JUSTIN

Do I have to?

*Rachel gives him a look.*

JUSTIN

Ms. Callis told us about...about gay...uh.... gay people after there was a question about how... umm...lesbians....uh... had sex.

*Ellie begins to dance provocatively. Either a chair dance or using the flag pole as a stripper pole.*

PETER

And what did she say specifically?

JUSTIN

Lots of things. Stuff...about people being...diverse... and um, sexual identity. I asked...about... homosexuality being a violation in God's eyes and she... she told me she wasn't... wasn't the right person to talk about God, but that all people are valid and that God doesn't hate the homosexuals, uh... and that we should accept people, not hate them for being different. I asked her about... about...um, about sodomy? And she told me that word has a particular history that, uh, stigmatized different kinds of sex acts and that we have a... a lot preju -preju –

*Ellie's projected female identity ends. She snaps back to herself, shirt buttoned up, her usual posture to correct her student.*



ELLIE

Prejudices.

JUSTIN

About sex. And a question asked about trans... transgender. And she told us that there's more than just male and female genetically, let alone mentally. And that we shouldn't be afraid of people who feel differently about their bodies or who... aren't normal. And I told her that transsexuals –

ELLIE

Transgender people –

JUSTIN

Are perverted and going against the way they were made. And I told her that my mother would be upset at her trying to promote the homosexual movement. And I left the class.

RACHEL

*(under her breath)*

That's my boy.

KATHERINE

So... this isn't just about straying from abstinence instruction?

JUSTIN

No ma'am. This is about... about Ms. Callis using us to spread her propaganda.

CALEB

He's just parroting his parents' political views.

RACHEL

My son can think for himself. Don't you -

CALEB

I didn't -

I just don't think you should -

RACHEL

You act like you've raised a kid -

In this world with everything that's going on...

KATHERINE AND BARBARA

Quiet!

*The room silences. There is an uncomfortable look between Barbara and Katherine. Katherine speaks before Barbara can.*

KATHERINE

I'm sorry, you two know each other?

RACHEL

I wish we didn't.

CALEB

We have a habit of running into each other at school board meetings. I used to work in the district. Caleb Engle. Former English teacher at Warsaw West.

KATHERINE

I see.

RACHEL

He was fired. After the Walter Stevens fiasco.

KATHERINE

Walter Stevens?

BARBARA

It was before your time, Katherine.

CALEB

I wasn't fired. I quit. I work in Indianapolis now.

RACHEL

Then why are you here?

BARBARA

Caleb, Rachel, please. If you don't control yourselves, we'll have to ask you to both leave. Now, Justin, can you tell me more about the answers Ms. Callis gave in regards to sex and abstinence?

JUSTIN

She... she talked about premarital sex. How people have it. And that... while abstinence is the only way to prevent pregnancy and STIs one hundred percent, she said that sex can be good and healthy. And that if we find ourselves in a situation where we wanted to have sex, there were things we could do to keep ourselves safe.

KATHERINE

But she did say that abstinence was the only way to prevent pregnancy and STIs?

JUSTIN

Yes.

KATHERINE

Well, there we are. Case closed.

PETER

What?

RACHEL

Excuse me?

KATHERINE

Doesn't that sum it up? She didn't violate the law. The law states that abstinence-only ed must be stressed. She did that.

PETER

But there's proof that she strayed from the curriculum. With this discussion of gender and homosexuality... We need a full conversation about this. Right, Barbara?

BARBARA

Given these new revelations, perhaps we should take a brief recess and talk amongst the three of us for how best to proceed.

RACHEL

Now wait a moment –

BARBARA

Rachel, please -

RACHEL

You said you'd let me say my piece.

BARBARA

We've heard your son's account and we need to validate – uh, think about what he's said.

RACHEL

Can't you see this woman is a danger to our community? With what she's telling our kids? She's –

PETER

Rachel. We'll let you speak before we leave here today. But right now we need to discuss our further agenda.

BARBARA

If you all would like to step out for a moment, we'll reconvene shortly.

*All but Barbara, Peter, and Katherine exit.*

BARBARA

You shouldn't have said that, Peter. Promising to let Rachel have the floor.

PETER

We held this meeting to let everyone speak their mind. We should let them have that at least.

KATHERINE

But wasn't this to find out if Ellie had violated school policy? Clearly she hasn't. Can we just wrap things up and get out of here?

PETER

You sure seem like you're in a hurry to go home, Katherine.

KATHERINE

If there are issues outside of this, we can deal with them at another time. I want to go home and see my daughter. She hasn't been feeling well lately.

PETER

As much as we'd all love to go home, we have work here that needs to be done. I'm deeply concerned about what's been raised about Eleanor's teaching and I don't like that I don't know what's going on in my own classrooms.

KATHERINE

C'mon, Peter, she's been teaching in the district for, what, five years now, and this is the first time we have a problem? This is one kid with a complaint.

PETER

There are others.

KATHERINE

Well then we should get their accounts and find another time when they can be present.

PETER

What are your thoughts, Barbara? Think we should just turn a blind eye and wrap this up and head home?

BARBARA

I think...well, I think Justin's problem with Ellie is leading us into issues that don't violate any school policy. And knowing Rachel, she's apt to turn mountains from molehills. I mean, she might be exaggerating the issues slightly. But we should let the parents and students talk. This is one of the few chances we get to be in the same room with them, you know.

PETER

Fine. But I want to get to the bottom of what exactly Ellie is teaching. Should I let everyone know we're starting up again?

BARBARA

Yes please. Thank you, Peter.

*Peter exits.*

KATHERINE

Excuse me for a moment. I just need to make a phone call.

BARBARA

Of course.

*Katherine walks to the other end of the room. She dials on her cell, speaking quietly enough that Barbara cannot hear her.*

KATHERINE

Hey honey, it's Mom.... Yeah, I'm still at the meeting. I'm going to be here for a while, so if you need anything, call Dad.... Oh no, I'm sorry to hear that. The nausea's not too bad, is it?.... Yes, I know they call it morning sickness but it's a misnomer. That's normal... Well, don't move around too much then. If you need anything, bug your dad or your sister. Okay? Talk to you later, love you.

*Katherine rejoins Barbara.*

KATHERINE

All set. Barbara... who was Walter Stevens?

BARBARA

He was an English teacher who some extreme... some parents took issue with for the novels he was teaching in class. Caleb Engle was a good friend of his.

KATHERINE

Oh. I see. I didn't realize there was previous bad blood in the room –

BARBARA

Well, you weren't part of the board.

*Peter reenters before Katherine can respond.*

PETER

They're on their way back in.

*Avery enters.*

AVERY

Excuse me... Before we get started, I wanted to make sure that I get a chance to speak.

BARBARA

Of course, Avery. Do you have something to say about Ms. Callis?

AVERY

Yes. But it's different than what Justin was saying. Ms. Callis is a great teacher. It's Mr. Bailey I have an issue with.

BARBARA

Mr. Bailey?

AVERY

Yes.

BARBARA

What kinds of issues?

AVERY

He spreads misinformation.

BARBARA

How so?

*Lights shift. A flashback. Nick enters, standing as if before a classroom of students that includes Avery.*

NICK

Now we know that AIDS can be transmitted through certain body fluids – blood, semen, so on, the one's we've discussed. But we don't know everything about it. We don't know that HIV can't be spread through saliva. It could be.

AVERY

Excuse me, Mr. Bailey, we do know.

NICK

Excuse me?

AVERY

We do know. It would take tons and tons of saliva. It's not a concern. This isn't the 1980s anymore.

NICK

Avery, are you contradicting me?

AVERY

I'm correcting you. And those fluids need to come in contact with mucus membranes, damaged tissue, or –

NICK

Avery, stop. I am the teacher here. You don't know what you're talking about.

AVERY

Yes I do. Literally every HIV prevention website will tell you you're wrong.

NICK

The Internet can be mistaken. We have to take precautions and any HIV positive or gay person should be treated with caution.

AVERY

Mr. Bailey. I'm gay. And I strongly recommend you treat me with caution.

*Lights shift. Back to the present, in the boardroom.*

BARBARA

What class was this in?

AVERY

Biology. Second period.

PETER

I already know about your feelings, Avery. You made them quite clear when Mr. Bailey sent you down to my office after this incident.

KATHERINE

This got her sent to your office?

PETER

Of course it did. She was being belligerent and sarcastic to a teacher. We don't stand for that in our classrooms.

KATHERINE

Really? Because that sounds exactly like what Justin Kramer has been doing.

PETER

Excuse me, I don't see –

BARBARA

Peter, we all know you go to church with the Kramers. Don't turn a – ahem, you shouldn't let it affect your judgment. Thank you, Avery. Would you like this added to the record?

AVERY

Actually, I'd like to make a public statement if I could.

*By this point, all of the attendees have returned to the room.*

PETER

(sarcastic)

Great.

BARBARA

Of course you can. We'll have you up next.

*Avery nods nervously and returns to her seat.*

KATHERINE

I thought we were going to keep this short, Barbara.

BARBARA

We are. Just give the girl a chance to speak.

(to the room)

Thank you for patience. In order to get a better – uh, larger perspective on this issue, we'd like to invite Avery Ferrera to speak. Avery, if you would.

*Barbara gestures Avery forward. Avery steps up to the podium.*

AVERY

I wanted to give a different perspective from what Justin is telling. It's not that he's wrong it's... well, I see it differently.

RACHEL

You don't say.

AVERY

I have class with Mr. Bailey. There have been instances where I've doubted his credibility with information. Such as –

*Lights shift. Nick stands up, facing audience as if addressing a classroom.*

NICK

We don't know you can't get AIDS from saliva.

AVERY

And...



NICK

There's no logical reason why homosexuals should exist in nature. They don't procreate or add to the betterment of the species.

AVERY

And...

NICK

Women are the weaker sex, based on muscle structure.

AVERY

And this –

NICK

Women can't get pregnant from rape.

AVERY

This one is my favorite.

NICK

In the past, natural selection took out the weak and stupid, as well as those whose bodies weren't fit to survive alone. We didn't have to worry about the handicapped and mentally ill because they weren't around.

*Lights shift back to boardroom setting.*

AVERY

I feel I should have the ability to speak out against Mr. Bailey's inherent prejudices in his teaching and not be criticized as talking back or being unruly.

NICK

This is taken out of context and paraphrased. And half of those recollections –

PETER

Nick –

NICK

Can I not defend myself? This isn't even supposed to be about me, this is supposed to be about Ellie and –

PETER

Nick – let me handle this.

NICK

I don't want your help.

PETER

Of course you do.

NICK

Peter, you asked me here as another perspective on the district curriculum and this –

PETER

Nick. Trust me. Avery, I understand you're upset with some of Mr. Bailey's vernacular, but you must understand that he is the trained professional in the classroom.

CALEB

Oh my God...

PETER

After all, you're not without your own biases. Your sexuality is known throughout the district.

ELLIE

Peter, you can't say that about a student.

CALEB

How does that have anything to do -

PETER

*(cutting them off)*

You don't have the floor.

AVERY

Yes, I am open about the fact that I am a lesbian. But I don't think that vocalizing my status as a marginalized person and fighting to have a voice is biased.

PETER

Avery, what you fail to understand here is that you are part of an outside group that is distracting students -

CALEB

Distracting students?

ELLIE

*(concerned whisper)*

Don't push him.

CALEB

I can't stay silent –

PETER

This isn't your time to speak.

CALEB

So you're saying a young woman, who is being very honest and bold by making her opinion known, regardless of how unpopular it might be, is a distraction to other students?

PETER

Perhaps you've forgotten, no longer being a teacher, what the importance of keeping a focused classroom is.

CALEB

Sounds more like censored. Like you're picking and choosing what you want your students to see and validate.

ELLIE

Caleb...

PETER

Excuse me, I don't see what authority you have to tell me how to run things.

CALEB

As an educator affiliated with -

ELLIE

Caleb, please. Pick your battles.

CALEB

I have.

PETER

Why are you here, Caleb?

ELLIE

*(responding before Caleb can)*

He's an old friend, Peter. I wanted his support and knowledge on this issue.

PETER

I don't like that you're "censoring" your friend here, Ellie. Go on, Caleb. Say what you had on your mind.

*Ellie gives Caleb a look as if to say, "Don't take the bait."*

CALEB

I'm tired. I'm tired of hearing this over and over again from Ellie what's happening in this town. *(anger builds)* I'm tired of... of backward towns telling people how to think, of making kids feel like they don't belong. Of making them afraid. And I'm sick to death of people who don't know their urethra from their asshole telling us what we can fucking teach!

ELLIE

Fuuuuu....

PETER

This is a school board assembly and that language –

AVERY

Fuck that, I like it. Swear all you want.

PETER

Avery!

AVERY

What? It's not like we haven't heard it before.

RACHEL

Did you hear what this man just  
said about our town? You don't live  
here, you don't even know –  
You were the one making a mess,  
along with that awful friend of yours

CALEB

I did live here, long enough to know  
what a mess –

Walter Stevens was brilliant.

ELLIE

Don't -

CALEB

And you got him fired just for teaching *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

RACHEL

It was an offensive book. And not on the approved reading list by the district.

CALEB

It's by Kurt Vonnegut! He's a Hoosier author!

ELLIE

Can we not do this - not now -

RACHEL

You have no idea what is suitable to put in front of children and it's a wonder you ever  
taught here at all. I see why they fired you.

CALEB

I left after Stevens was let go for teaching a thought-provoking, brilliant book. This  
district has its head so far up its own ass that -

ELLIE  
CALEB! SHUT UP.

*Silence.*

ELLIE  
(*quietly, to Caleb*)  
I had Barbara invite you here on my behalf for moral support. Not to argue about Kurt Vonnegut and yell about Warsaw.

CALEB  
Ellie, I –

ELLIE  
We don't need to bring up the issue with Walter. We don't need that hanging over us.

CALEB  
It's going to be there, no matter what.

ELLIE  
Yes, but we don't –

CALEB  
I don't want what happened to him to happen to you.

*They share a look.*

PETER  
If you two are done whispering, I'd like to pose a question. I didn't realize we were extending invitations to guests in this meeting, Barbara.

BARBARA  
You wanted Nick here.

PETER  
As an inside perspective on curriculum.

BARBARA  
I thought it was fair that Ellie have the same advantages you have.

PETER  
Witnesses for the defense, eh?

BARBARA  
If you insist on thinking of it as a courtroom, then yes, I suppose so.

RACHEL  
I'm sorry, did you invite this obscene man?

BARBARA

In a way, yes.

RACHEL

This is ridiculous. We are supposed to be having a fair and impartial conversation and with this loony here, you are showing clear preference to leftist views.

BARBARA

I am not – *(pauses)* If you think for a second I'm showing preference by allowing Caleb here, I'd ask you to reconsider. Katherine approved this and I would like to make sure we consider all perspectives available to us.

PETER

Really, Barbara, there's no need for this. We're considering whether or not Ellie violated the policy in place in our district. That's a yes or no answer. Black and white.

BARBARA

Is it? Katherine, would you please read what the Indiana legislature has to say about sex ed in our state?

KATHERINE

Uh... one second.

*She rifles through papers.*

KATHERINE

There's... there's different parts to the provisions...

BARBARA

Just read the part I highlighted. On sexual education policies.

*A tense pause.*

KATHERINE

Throughout instruction on human sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases, an accredited school must: require a teacher to teach abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children; include in the instruction that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, STDs and other associated health problems; include in the instruction that the best way to avoid STDs and other associated health problems is to establish a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage.

BARBARA

Thank you. In other words -

*Lights shift. 1950s style music plays as Nick and Ellie stand. They are the narrators of a campy 1950s educational film.*

NICK

How to teach abstinence only education, as approved by the state of Indiana.

ELLIE

Step one: Be informed. Read the latest studies on STDs -

*Caleb interjects. He's not drinking the 1950s Kool-Aid.*

CALEB

They're STIs now. Sexually transmitted infections. It's more accurate.

*Ellie moves to respond. Nick shakes his head. They ignore Caleb and continue on with the 1950s style.*

ELLIE

STDs and marriage rates. Focus on marriage. Marriage is good. Marriage is where sex should happen.

NICK

Premarital sex is wrong and sinful. This is the foundation of understanding abstinence education.

CALEB

Do you know what percentage of high school students have sex? 34%. You know how many of them are married? Point zero zero zero – actually, just round up to zero.

NICK

You must understand that much of the information comes from bad sources. Bad people. *(He glares at Caleb.)* They want to misinform and tell you lies.

ELLIE

Stick to information provided to you in textbooks and provided by your district. Focus on data about STDs, the spread of AIDS, and the dangers of unprotected sex.

NICK

Step two: remember that students are experiencing a great deal of change. Do not treat them like equals. They need leadership and authority. You know more than them. Act like it.

ELLIE

Step three: Do not discuss your own personal relationships as examples. This can be uncomfortable if you have made mistakes in your past. Many a teacher has had this awkward encounter from a student:

*Justin stands, roleplaying a 1950s student.*

JUSTIN

Do you and your fiancé sleep in the same bed?

ELLIE

So avoid bringing the subject into the room at all costs. If the question does arise, tell your students it is not appropriate to discuss your personal life or ask about someone else's personal life.

NICK

Step four. Under no circumstances should you widely discuss birth control methods.

ELLIE

Students may ask.

NICK

And your answers should be curt, simple and quickly answered.

ELLIE

Do not lie to them but do not encourage them to try these methods. Assure them that abstinence is the only 100% effective method.

CALEB

And what about the 34% already having sex? Hmm?

NICK

Step five: do not encourage sex in any way.

ELLIE

Do not discuss its health benefits.

NICK

Or how it feels.

ELLIE

Or if you have it.

NICK

Do not present yourself as a sexual being.

*They glare at Caleb.*



NICK

If your students have specific questions about sex, try to answer them technically but do not provide too much detail.

ELLIE

Introducing ideas from *Teen Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan* is the worst thing you can do to your students, as portrayals of sex in popular culture are dangerous.

CALEB

How do I make this stop? Where is the stop button?

NICK

Step six: healthy behavior and good moral thinking is the foundation for a good life. Stress good decision-making and not giving in to pressure from a boyfriend. Or, perhaps in a rare instance, a girlfriend?

ELLIE

This can be a good way to link other units in the course, such as drugs and peer pressure.

NICK

Show examples of what bad decision making can do.

*Nick nods at Ellie. She moves reluctantly to Caleb.*

CALEB

No, oh no....

*Ellie drags Caleb over to Nick, forcing a script in his hand, and makes him read it.*

CALEB

I.... was a drug user and had too much sex. I had sex with.... eighty different partners...in a month. I didn't use protection and I was in so much pain I couldn't walk. I went to the doctor because.... Because my penis had turned green. They had to surgically remove it. (to Ellie) This is horrendous.

ELLIE

Never underestimate the power of scare tactics.

*Lights shift back to the boardroom. Caleb, Ellie, and Nick return to their seats.*

PETER

There. Seems pretty cut and dried to me.

BARBARA

You're missing the point. The legislation says that abstinence should be taught as the "only certain way" to prevent pregnancy, not the only method to be taught.

PETER

What are you saying, Barbara?

BARBARA

The law is... restrictive, so to speak, but it presents certain grey areas. As long as Ellie taught abstinence only as the best method but discussed other methods, she isn't violating any laws.

KATHERINE

So it would seem the law is vague.

PETER

Vague? I find it abundantly clear.

RACHEL

As do I. Why are we arguing this? We know that abstinence is the only thing that's 100% effective at preventing pregnancy and STDs. It's the moral choice for unwed couples. And it works –

CALEB  
Actually –

AVERY  
Not so much.

ELLIE  
Welllll...

RACHEL

Are we going to argue this God-given fact too?

AVERY

It's not a God-given fact, Mrs. Kramer. Multiple studies show that abstinence only education doesn't work.

RACHEL

Excuse me?

AVERY

Kids don't avoid sex, they just have it without any idea of what they're doing or how it works or what the risks are.

RACHEL

Oh, they have to know what the risks are. God punishes those who-

CALEB

Can we keep God out of this? Given that They aren't present, it seems wrong to put words in Their mouth.

RACHEL

How can you -

JUSTIN

He's just trying to rile you up, Mom. Calm down.

RACHEL

I – You're right, sweetie. Avery, I know you mean well, but I'm worried what sort of junk you're hearing that says abstinence education doesn't work.

AVERY

It's not junk. It's scientifically proven.

RACHEL

Scientifically – Avery, my dear, it's so easy to manipulate numbers.

AVERY

But –

RACHEL

As someone who's already uncomfortable letting the government decide what we can teach children about sex – I'd much rather prefer it be taught by the parents –

AVERY

That's -

RACHEL

BUT I know that not all parents have the time or the information they need... or the right moral compass to guide them. I trusted that this education could be handled by Warsaw schools. It seems I was wrong.

PETER

Rachel –

If you'll just listen.

RACHEL

No, Peter, I think that -

RACHEL

I am through with being interrupted by you all.

AVERY

*(under her breath)*

You've done your fair share of interrupting.

RACHEL

I have worked far too long to get my voice heard in this community. This meeting was supposed to be about Ellie Callis but it seems we've put our sex ed system under attack

instead. And I am sick and tired of trying to make the world see the sinfulness of our oversexed, lustful world.

NICK

Maybe now would be a good time to talk about the curriculum we have in the district? Since we've heard it in such... colorful detail.

PETER

If you would like to explain what sort of work we put into choosing the curriculum, perhaps?

NICK

The board decides on the curriculum. We're just the conduit for the information. What... what Avery protests me saying is... well, it's taken out of context.

AVERY

It is not!

NICK

I'm frustrated that I don't have the luxury to talk about outside material like Ellie. I get handed a sheet that I have to read to the class and I don't have a say in the matter. I don't get to argue with what's on there unless I want to contradict myself. I'm a man of faith, but I don't believe in creationism –

AVERY

You don't?

PETER

Nicholas, what are you –

NICK

I don't have a choice. It's what I'm told to teach.

*Nick stands taller, as if a burden has just fallen away. Ellie looks at him, incredulous.*

ELLIE

Dammit, all those days in the break room, you argued and disagreed with me. And this is what you really think?

NICK

I've learned something since then.

PETER

Nick, what are you saying?

NICK

You asked me here to defend the district, Peter and... you never gave me the chance to explain. It's hard to balance. To toe the line.

PETER

Excuse me for a moment.

*Peter pulls Nick aside.*

PETER

I asked you here for your support.

NICK

You asked me here for my opinion.

PETER

Yes but this is not what I expected. Whatever problems you have, we can talk about it later, but this is embarrassing. Don't embarrass me, Nick.

*Peter returns to his seat.*

RACHEL

Nick said it himself – Ellie's been teaching outside material.

NICK

That's not what I –

RACHEL

I don't understand what's going with your teachers, Peter, but I know that you all are responsible for teaching my son. And this is obscene.

PETER  
Rachel –

ELLIE  
How is any of this obscene?

RACHEL

The union of man and woman to create a child is beautiful but what you have been teaching -

ELLIE

What do you think sex is for?

RACHEL

Procreation to continue God's –

ELLIE

If that's the case, why don't we go into heat like other animals? Why do we feel the urge to have it when we're not ovulating? Why in the hell do we have a clitoris?!

*The room erupts in noise.*

BARBARA

Quiet down. QUIET!

*The room silences.*

PETER

Are you asking to get fired now, Ellie?

CALEB

What?

ELLIE

I... I don't mean to go off the handle, but –

PETER

It's too late, Eleanor. You're revealed your true colors here and –

ELLIE

If you're going to fire me for mentioning the clitoris, Peter, I'd have to object and –

PETER

Arguing with me is not going to save your job and we have found -

KATHERINE

Who is this "we" you speak of?

PETER

I – I'm speaking for the board, of course.

KATHERINE

You don't speak for the board.

PETER

This is a moral issue of great importance in which Ellie has clearly violated –

KATHERINE

I don't particularly feel that anything is clear here, Peter.

PETER

I think it's very clear what the state of Indiana mandates in their policy of abstinence-only and if we keep going in circles –

KATHERINE

It's getting late, why are we still arguing about this? Please, my daughter is pregnant –

*She stops herself, realizing what she's said.*

PETER  
Excuse me?

KATHERINE  
Oh no.

PETER  
Did you –

BARBARA  
Were you –

KATHERINE  
Oh no. I can't believe I just said that, I...

*She stops, tries to breathe.*

BARBARA  
Katherine, you –

KATHERINE  
Please don't say anything. I just... I need a moment.

*Silence.*

KATHERINE  
I... I would ask that this information not leave the room. My daughter... my daughter is emotionally fragile right now and... it would be... it would be difficult for her...

BARBARA  
Katherine, if you need –

KATHERINE  
I am not a pawn. Not like you're using Justin or Avery here.

RACHEL  
Excuse me, but -

AVERY  
I am not a pawn!

KATHERINE  
She is my daughter, not a statistic. She... excuse me.

*Katherine exits the room.*

BARBARA  
Everyone... everyone hold tight. I'll be right back.

*She exits.*

PETER  
Nancy Romo pregnant. I never.

RACHEL  
You know the company she keeps.

JUSTIN  
Mom, I have calc with her. She's -

RACHEL  
A girl who dresses like that...

CALEB  
Like what?

ELLIE  
Caleb, it's okay.

CALEB  
No, it's not.

CALEB  
This is why I had to get out of this town. I don't know how you stay here, Ellie, and listen to parents who... who don't even believe in basic ideas of feminism and consent. Do you want to know where I work, Rachel?

ELLIE  
Caleb, I –

CALEB  
I'm an educator now at Planned Parenthood.

RACHEL  
(*revolted*)  
Planned Parenthood?!

CALEB  
Yes. I see young women come in with absolutely no idea how their body works, or with misinformation that's worse than... than knowing nothing. We do such harm, Ellie, not telling our students the truth.

ELLIE  
We do our best, Caleb. We always have. And when we taught, we both... we both tried. As hard as we could.

CALEB  
It isn't enough. It's never enough.  
(*to the room*)



If... If I shared numbers, statistics, would you understand why I'm so angry?

RACHEL

We all know why you're angry.

CALEB

No. No, you don't.

RACHEL

You're angry because you can't always be right.

CALEB

I'm angry, because Indiana has the 8<sup>th</sup> highest form of infant mortality in the US.

PETER

I'm sorry, what does this –

CALEB

6,277 teens gave birth in 2014.

*Ellie pulls out a notebook and stands next to him.*

ELLIE

*(reading from notebook)*

One out of ten teens report being physically hurt by a partner and one out of six high school students are assaulted before turning 18.

*(to Caleb)*

I'm angry too.

NICK

You tell 'em.

*Rapidly now, a barrage of facts.*

CALEB

Indiana is fourth worst in air quality.

ELLIE

Fourth unhappiest.

CALEB

Third highest for sexual violence.

*Pause. Ellie and Caleb breath.*

CALEB

Something is wrong in Indiana. Knowing this, and knowing that 34% of high schoolers are sexually active, it's clear that we need to change –

RACHEL

No. Data is so easily manipulated. Where did you pull those numbers from? Your baby-killing friends at Planned Parenthood?

*Caleb starts to respond angrily. He stops himself, breathes, and then responds.*

CALEB

They're from the Department of Health.

RACHEL

That doesn't make them free from manipulation. You know the government –

ELLIE

Why do you argue against what's proven? There are facts out there that –

RACHEL

How dare you, treating me like one of your students, like a child.

ELLIE

I don't think of my students as children. I think of them as equals.

RACHEL

They are not your equals. They're naive and innocent. Maybe if you recognized the differences between you and them, you'd be better at your job.

ELLIE

I don't understand what I have to make you see –

RACHEL

I don't owe you any answers.

ELLIE

No... but you owe my students answers.

RACHEL

I don't –

ELLIE

Students who don't get to learn about people who feel like them.

RACHEL

That is not my –

ELLIE

People like your son. Who follows up every question he has with an apology and each of my answers with a forced explanation that God thinks my idea are wrong.

RACHEL

How dare you lie to me about my son.

PETER

Eleanor –

ELLIE

I'm not lying. You can ask Justin. He's right there. Ask him about how, the day before he complained about me, he stayed after to class to ask me about... about some things.

RACHEL

You think you know my son? You think you can just tell me about him like –

ELLIE

That's not what I meant, I –

JUSTIN

Mom, stop. I... I did stay after class.

RACHEL

Well, if you did, I'm sure it was to argue how immoral Ms. Callis's teaching is.

JUSTIN

Mom, I –

ELLIE

My teaching is immoral?

RACHEL

You teach sex. Outside of creating children, it's dirty and foul.

ELLIE

How can you think that –

RACHEL

You're not listening. We put too much focus on material things and physical pleasures – my parents taught me that at a young age. Clearly you never learned there's more than our physical existence.

ELLIE

You mean the spiritual. But what if the physical were spiritual?

RACHEL

That's not –

ELLIE

The Bible is one source - one flawed source - of perspective on sex and bodies.

CALEB

Written by some dead guys who didn't like women very much.

AVERY

Amen.

*Light shift around Rachel and Ellie. It is warm, glowing, like a chapel during Sunday service.*

RACHEL

Have you actually read the Bible? It teaches us to respect our bodies. First Corinthians, 3:16-17 – “Don't you know that your yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred and you together are that temple.”

ELLIE

I agree that our bodies are temples, but shouldn't we use these bodies God gave us to their full advantages? Enjoy the spiritual and the physical?

RACHEL

Use them for sex you mean? The Bible considers sex immoral. Galatians, 5:19 – “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery.” First Corinthians, 6:18 – “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own bodies.” First Thessalonians, 4:3-5 –

ELLIE

What about just in regards to sex in general? How about Song of Songs, 7:6-10 – “How beautiful you are, how pleasing, my love, my delight! Your very figure like a palm tree, your breasts are like clusters. I said: I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches. Now let your breasts be like clusters of the vine and the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like an excellent wine that flows smoothly for my lover, spreading over the lips and the teeth. I belong to my lover and for me he yearns.”

CALEB

Holy shit, since when can you quote the Bible?

RACHEL

That is a metaphor, about how God loves us as a man loves his bride.

ELLIE

Is it? What about Sirach 40:20, “Wine and music delight the soul, but better than either, conjugal love.”

RACHEL

What? That can’t be right.

ELLIE

That’s what it is.

*Lights shift back to the board room. Rachel rifles through her purse.*

RACHEL

What was it again?

ELLIE

Sirach, 40:20.

AVERY

*(whispering to Justin)*

What is happening right now?

*Justin shrugs, but he looks fascinated.*

RACHEL

There is no Sirach in the Bible.

NICK

It’s Ecclesiasticus in the King James.

*Rachel stares at him.*

NICK

What? She said she was raised Catholic. She’s got the New American Bible.

*Rachel finds the passage.*

RACHEL

You’re wrong. “Wine and music rejoice the heart, but the love of wisdom is above them both.” You can’t say that’s accurate if you’re using –

ELLIE

What about Romans, 13:10 – “Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.” It shouldn’t vary too much in King James.

*Rachel finds it.*

RACHEL

You can’t prove that it’s about sexual love.

ELLIE

No, but it is all about letting your neighbor live their life as long as they aren’t harming anyone. We should allow our bodies to celebrate themselves. Sex is good and we don’t need to punish ourselves for it. Life is punishing enough.

PETER

Sex is good? How can you possibly say that when we’re constantly bombarded by it? You really think our lust-filled society is healthy for children?

ELLIE

That's not what we're discussing. We're discussing -

PETER

You think that porn being everywhere and so easily accessible... and these half-naked celebrities being on every magazine cover and lust and temptation available at the click of a button is good for kids?

ELLIE

I... I don’t think...

PETER

If kids hear about how people have sex, they'll want to do it. And they're not emotionally prepared to handle that at their age. Because sex is portrayed as cool and popular and glamorous. When really it’s one of the most dangerous things on earth.

CALEB

It can be dangerous, but the problem is when you condemn a whole thing. It’s more dangerous when students don’t know –

PETER

You really think it’s okay for our kids to watch porn? To see what kind of acts they perform?

CALEB

No. The violence of it is ghastly.

ELLIE

But there is feminist porn that –

PETER

Oh good God, feminist porn? Please.

ELLIE

Look, sex is a natural part of life. Teens are going to have sex. You can't stop them from wanting it and you can't hide it –

PETER

How the hell did you ever get hired in our district? You're a disgrace.

ELLIE

You don't have to agree with everything a teacher believes in. You just have to believe they can do their job.

PETER

Have you done your job?

RACHEL

Clearly she hasn't. Anyone who refuses to see the facts of sexual immorality is... mad.

*Lights shift. Caleb and Ellie step forward, dancing provocatively as gogo music plays.*

CALEB and ELLIE

Sexxxxxxx

RACHEL

You see those magazine covers in supermarkets.

CALEB

Twenty ways to make your man come

ELLIE

To wax or not to wax?

CALEB

Everything you need to know about oral.

RACHEL

You know how easy it is to access por...pornography.

CALEB and ELLIE  
*(illicit whisper)*

Porno...

RACHEL  
There's so much raunchiness on TV and in films. It's everywhere. We're saturated in it.  
It's all materialism.

CALEB  
Sexy laundry.

ELLIE  
Sexy chewing gum.

CALEB  
Sexy chap stick.

ELLIE  
Sexy fig newtons.

RACHEL  
My parents always treated it as something shameful, because it is. It's a shameful thing.  
Too close, too intimate. We give in to our weak bodies and we... we...

CALEB and ELLIE  
Fuuuucckkkk.

RACHEL  
Shut up!

*Caleb and Ellie step back. Lights shift back to the boardroom.*

RACHEL  
I just want one moment without seeing someone's boobs trying to sell something. It's so senseless. Our bodies are flawed, uncomfortable things - God made us this way so we wouldn't get too attached to them. But he made us in his image, so deep down we have to strive to be what he wants us to be. We have to be our best selves. As flawed as I am, I can be good enough for him.

ELLIE  
But – if our bodies are temples, how can we be flawed? I don't understand.

RACHEL  
We are temples, but there is temptation in the world that leads us away from Him. We have sin within us, planted by the Devil. It wants us to ruin ourselves.



ELLIE

I think you've been taught to be ashamed of your body. There's a lot of sexist claims about women and –

RACHEL

I've been taught just fine, thank you. Don't try to discount my education just because you don't agree with it.

ELLIE

I... I wasn't... I'm sorry. But you have such negative views of your body. If –

RACHEL

There is more to life than our bodies. There's more to life than sex.

AVERY

Some people find sex liberating though. A way to express themselves.

ELLIE

Avery –

AVERY

No, I'm tired of listening to this. You think I'm so outspoken but... I'm not. Do you know what it's like to go to class everyday and never see your sexuality represented at all? You're fighting about abstinence, but I'm fighting just to show I exist.

ELLIE

I know that –

AVERY

When it comes time for me to have sex, the most accessible resource for me is porn. Is that ideal? Or safe?

RACHEL

I can't believe I'm listening to this, I – where are your parents?

AVERY

Not here.

RACHEL

Obviously. I meant that... I mean don't you think it's their responsibility to look after you?

AVERY

They don't really care about me. So no, I guess not.

RACHEL

I... Oh. I'm sorry.

AVERY

Are you? Or are you just saying that?

RACHEL

I am, I... why are you so angry?

AVERY

I have plenty of reasons to be angry at you. And at Mr. Bailey, for how he teaches. But I'm always angry now. There's only so much I can take. *(to Ellie)* Maybe I should have spoken out sooner. Discussed the books I've read. Do you know the impact of not teaching students about LGBT people? What that does to students who are LGBT?

ELLIE

Yes. I do.

AVERY

Then why aren't we talking about this?

CALEB

Trust me, Avery, we are talking about it. Ellie and I –

AVERY

Well, it's not enough, is it? What if something happens to me? What I get hurt or raped? What if I'm the one in six kids who get assaulted before they even turn eighteen?

ELLIE

I am a terrible teacher.

CALEB

Don't say that. Don't ever say that.

*(stepping towards Avery)*

I remember what it's like to be a teenager in this town. Ellie and I know what it's like to go through this school system and walk out into the world confused and afraid by what we saw on the other side because we didn't learn what we needed to know. You deserve better. We know you deserve better.

AVERY

But it isn't enough.

JUSTIN

None of it is enough. If you hadn't...

*Justin looks at his mother and stops himself.*

AVERY

What?

*Peter is staring at Caleb and Ellie and speaks before Justin can respond.*

PETER

Caleb, what exactly is the nature of your relationship with Ellie Callis?

CALEB

We've been friends since high school. We've been through a lot and supported each other through some tough times.

PETER

Are you... um...

*Caleb sighs, realizing.*

CALEB

Are we sleeping together?

ELLIE

Oh my God.

PETER

As a conflict of interest, I was um... yes, that is my question. Are you?

CALEB

No, we are not. Nor have we ever.

PETER

I... uh... was just wondering if you two were... eh... romantically involved.

RACHEL

Oh, haven't you heard the rumors? Ellie Callis isn't interested in men.

JUSTIN

Mom, don't –

RACHEL

My son came home hearing that his teacher was a man-hating... lesbian.

JUSTIN

They were just rumors - I - I don't know...

ELLIE

I'm not a lesbian. I'm bisexual. I'm attracted to all genders.

PETER

What?

ELLIE

I stayed closeted because it was easier. Because I was afraid, despite the fact that it might have helped my mental health if I had come out. Though part of me felt I should do it for my students. Show them representation. But what would have kept me from getting fired? Nothing.

*The room is silent.*

AVERY

I wish I'd known. I wish I'd known sooner. That's wonderful.

RACHEL

That is not wonderful. It's horrendous, it's -

PETER

I had no idea when we hired you -

RACHEL

I can't believe that we let you teach our children -

PETER

That you were that way -

RACHEL

I can't believe we left you alone with our children -

PETER

Because if we had known -

RACHEL

You sex-obsessed, poisonous -

PETER

We never would have hired -

RACHEL

A slutty, dangerous -

ELLIE

SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP.

*The room falls silent. Caleb moves to comfort Ellie.*

CALEB

I told you this would happen.

ELLIE

You want me to tell you that you were right?

CALEB

No, I just... I just want you to know you can't win this fight. You don't have to do this to yourself. You can just walk out of here and end it. End the nights you can't sleep because you're so anxious about saying the wrong thing. Ever since I moved to Indy, I feel like I can breathe again. Like I'm actually educating and making change. You don't have to stay here.

ELLIE

But I do.

CALEB

No, you don't.

ELLIE

I have to try –

CALEB

You don't have to sacrifice yourself to this. Don't you understand how this town sees us?

*Light shift to a garish, lewd look. Ellie and Caleb stand uncomfortably.*

CALEB

We're always going to be the bad guys in their minds. Even though we say the lies they want us to tell to their students. They make us say -

ELLIE

Abstinence is proven to be the best method to prevent pregnancy.

CALEB

Condoms may give you cancer.

ELLIE

Women are like furnaces and men are like rubber bands in their sex drives. Science and psychology tells us this. Men can't control their desire - it just springs, like rubber bands. Women have control and are slow to warm up.

CALEB

Signing an abstinence pledge card is a great way to show you're worth waiting for.

*Lights shift back to the boardroom.*

CALEB

But we argue with them and question them. And because we don't accept their agenda, we look dangerous and harmful and sinful. We can't win. We can't change their minds. It's this place that's bad. Indiana is bad. There's pockets where we can go, places that are better... but this whole goddamn state is a mess.

ELLIE

It's my home, it's so much more than that... If I leave, I can't change things here. I know you're doing good, Caleb but... my kids don't even know what Planned Parenthood is. And if they do, they think the worst of it. I want to be here for them. Show them there's more to the world. If I leave, who does that? I just wanted to do better.

*Katherine and Barbara enter.*

RACHEL

Do better? Better? What you've done is the worst possible harm.

BARBARA

What's going on?

RACHEL

*(pointing at Ellie)*

This woman is a bisexual!

BARBARA

Okay.

RACHEL

Okay? OKAY? Is that all you've got to say?

BARBARA

Yes.

ELLIE

I just came out to an entire roomful of people...

RACHEL

She has been teaching our children, she has had access to their minds -

BARBARA

Is she a mind reader as well?

RACHEL

I do not appreciate your humor. I am trying to explain -

BARBARA

We've all been trying to explain a lot of things this evening. And it's made me very tired. Katherine has a few things she would like to say and then I think we should try to wrap up and get home. It's getting late.

RACHEL

Now see here, my son has been -

KATHERINE

My daughter has been in this education system for seventeen years. I trusted that what we were doing was the right thing. I trusted that she would understand how pregnancy worked. I trusted she would be able to make up her own mind about things. And now she's scared and pregnant and doesn't know what to do.

PETER

I don't see -

KATHERINE

My husband is furious. I'm... I'm so lost. I don't know how to be a parent anymore. The school has failed her. And I failed her. I didn't teach her what she needed to know - I barely told her anything about her body. And what I did tell her was what I learned as a student in Warsaw. Why did I tell her that her body was like an oven and that one day someone would warm her up inside and she would know he was the person she would love? I told her things that weren't true. Because I wanted to protect her.

PETER

Katherine...

KATHERINE

She... she didn't know that she could say no. She didn't know that she could tell her boyfriend he had to put on a condom or she wouldn't have sex with him. All she knew was sex and no sex. Nothing in between. Nothing that didn't make her feel afraid and ashamed and bad about herself.

PETER

I understand that you are -

KATHERINE

You don't understand anything. Do you know how difficult it is to be a mother? Do you?

PETER

As a parent myself, I -

*Katherine, Barbara, and Rachel all give him a look. He stops.*

PETER

I don't know what it's like to be a mother.

KATHERINE

Then you have no idea how difficult it is to talk to her about sex.

PETER

I've –

KATHERINE

No, it's different. Women are always at a disadvantage. We're portrayed as the weaker, the more fragile, the –

ELLIE

Submissives.

KATHERINE

Yes. Society doesn't give us a lot of power over our sexuality. How are we supposed to talk about something we have no power in?

BARBARA

I dreaded the talk with my son. It was so uncomfortable. Especially because his father... oh, well, you know. A man's man. But that's not important –

KATHERINE

I was afraid to talk to my daughter about puberty. I had a terrible time as a kid and... I was afraid she would be angry at me, like I was at my mother.

RACHEL

I had no idea how to talk to Justin. There's so much I don't know because I never learned it –

*Rachel and the rest of the room realize she's spoken. They sit with it for a moment.*

JUSTIN

Mom...

PETER

I understand that this must be difficult for you -

KATHERINE

No. You don't understand anything. You have no idea what it's like to be a teenager –

PETER

You don't know what I deal with –



KATHERINE

You have no idea the pressure our kids are under. How many girls have come into your office, crying, upset about teasing or harassment or judgment about them? How many of those girls have you sent out of your office with a stern pat on the back and telling them they need to be tougher? My daughter was one of those girls and you did nothing.

PETER

Excuse me but I -

KATHERINE

And I did nothing. But you're the one still trying to pin the blame to anyone but yourself. We're all guilty here.

BARBARA

*(banging on the table)*

STOP. You're squabbling like children. We're here to investigate, to understand. Not attack.

NICK

It's been an attack from the very beginning.

PETER

Nick, I swear -

NICK

No Peter, let me talk. As possibly the only still-working teacher at Warsaw West here, I think we should acknowledge a few points. First, I may not get along with Ellie Callis. I may not like her teaching styles. But until now she's been the only person willing to speak up about the issues in the curriculum.

PETER

This is not -

NICK

Second, we should recognize how outdated our material is. How I'm forced to teach from old textbooks -

PETER

We don't -

NICK

We withhold information from our students. I'm supposed to teach science but instead I spend half of my class trying to toe the line with conservative Christian philosophy that thinks the earth is only a few thousand years old and that evolution is a fraud.

PETER

Nick, I'm warning you –

NICK

I feel like a failure. I want to do better, as much as Ellie. But I can't take the risks she does. You told me once that because I was a man of faith, even though we go to different churches, that I could show my students the balance between a religious way of life and a scientific one. But I haven't gotten that chance with the curriculum I –

PETER

Stop. You can be angry with me, but... this is not what you think.

NICK

I think you're manipulating what the district can teach.

PETER

Do you remember when I went to that conference in Indianapolis a few years back?

NICK

The conference on education with the... vice president?

PETER

Governor, at the time. I met him. We talked about our district. You might have heard about his plans for sex ed?

NICK  
No.

ELLIE and CALEB  
Yes.

PETER

He wanted to re-appropriate funding... he wanted to defund AIDS education and ... use that money for... conversion therapy.

NICK  
What?

AVERY  
Oh my God.

RACHEL

What's conversion therapy?

PETER

It's... it's a form of counseling.

ELLIE

Manipulating homosexuals to turn straight.

RACHEL

What do you mean manipulating? I thought –

CALEB

It's totally fraudulent. And considered highly unethical.

PETER

Nevertheless... our governor had that in his educational plans for the state. At the conference, he made it abundantly clear that there were certain... philosophies he wouldn't tolerate.

BARBARA

Peter –

PETER

Afterwards, I spoke with the governor's staff between sessions and asked what that would mean for students who were not tolerated... and the staff member told me...if we were found teaching alternative philosophies, our school would be shut down.

KATHERINE

What are you saying?

PETER

I've never succeeded in keeping my opinion out of the way I run the school. Ellie, I think you're bullheaded and irritating but... if it comes down to you losing your job or the whole school getting shut down and all of us out of jobs... you have to go.

ELLIE

No. You could have stood up for me. For Nick. For Caleb and Walter Stevens –

PETER

I couldn't! You don't understand what I'm responsible for. I carry that whole school on my back –

ELLIE

You are not the sole voice of that school –

PETER

And you don't know what it's like to do things because you have to, not because you want to do them.

ELLIE

No, that's something I understand very well.

PETER

Then you should understand why when Justin made those accusations I had no choice –

ELLIE

You've always had a choice. We all have, we just didn't –

PETER

You don't know what you're talking about! Running a school is like running a business. You have to worry about the balance of things, and right now, I'm really worried. I'm all about making deals and I made a deal with the state legislature that we would follow their policies. Because the repercussions if we didn't... we'd be gone. All of us. And then where would our kids go? Where's the next closest school? Tippecanoe Valley? How are we supposed to get our kids there? How much sleep are they going to lose to take the bus there? How –

BARBARA

You're spiraling into worst-case scenario, Peter.

PETER

I wish I was, I really wish I was. None of you saw the email I got during the Walter Stevens case. You didn't see the remarks I got from the state. If I didn't do something, they were going to step in and... and...

*(He stops, trying to steady his breath.)*

It's much easier for me to pretend that I'm doing what I want than... than show you how little choice I have. Do I want to teach our children about homosexuality in school? Not exactly. Do I want to teach them anything other than abstinence? Maybe I'm not so certain about that. I wish I could be trusted to do what I need to do to run this school instead of constantly being monitored by the state board of education. But after everything that's happened here...

BARBARA

Peter, I understand you are in a difficult position but you are supposed to be representing our district and our values and –

PETER

I'm looking after my school. Not playing at being an unbiased figurehead like you.

BARBARA

I... I don't...

KATHERINE

This is a disaster.

BARBARA

Katherine, please. We are working to serve our students best and –

KATHERINE

You can stop trying to defend the district. My daughter is proof that this isn't working.

PETER

Excuse me you can't -

KATHERINE

What? I can't what? Have my own opinion? Have a view that's different than yours? I haven't done a very good job of acting as superintendent tonight. Often I let my more experienced colleagues take the reins but now... now I'm a concerned parent. I'm scared. And I'm not going to stay silent anymore. (*She looks to Caleb and Ellie again.*) Tell us what your idea of sex ed would include.

RACHEL

I don't -

PETER

That isn't an option.

KATHERINE

We're supposed to listen to all sides. It doesn't mean we're accepting it. Go ahead.

CALEB

Well, it... Ellie, you should start.

ELLIE

What?

CALEB

You're the one who's dreamed about being able to talk about this. Do it.

ELLIE

Uh... well... where do I even begin? It's.... It's so much.

CALEB

That's the thing. We don't take into account how large sex ed really is. It's huge.

ELLIE

We argue about it all the time.

CALEB

What we'd teach, what we'd include, when we'd do certain units.

ELLIE

But it's all ever been hypothetical. So... Okay. First off, sex ed is about more than sex. It's about relationships. It's about human communication and contact. Ideally, for me, sex ed starts in kindergarten -

RACHEL

WHAT.

*Lights shift. The world begins to fall away. This is Ellie and Caleb in their element, brainstorming and debating.*

ELLIE

With very basic anatomy. And basic ideas of consent. “Yes, I want a hug. No, I don’t want a hug. No, I don’t like hugs.” Kids should have some autonomy over their bodies. We don’t give them that.

CALEB

Late elementary school and again in middle school is the puberty unit.

ELLIE

And more on consent. Right now we don’t teach it, but if we did, we’d understand that we have to control our bodies in some capacity. Sex is fine, but only if our partners are happy and willing. Instead we think we’re either celibate or we’re overcome by sex drives. That’s not true.

CALEB

All people feel desire and sex drives in different ways. But we’re all responsible for what we do with those drives.

ELLIE

Instructors should shy away from judgment and fear. Sex ed started from the need to prevent venereal disease but it’s spiraled into fear-mongering sessions for too long.

CALEB

High school focuses heavily on consent. And interpersonal relationships.

ELLIE

It should come sooner. Elementary school at least. We don’t focus enough on other kinds of relationships. We should teach interpersonal skills about friendships and family. That’ll give a good foundation for later conversations about dating.

CALEB

Good point.

ELLIE

There should be frank conversations about bodies and bodily functions. Understanding. Honesty. Openness.

CALEB

And inclusion.

ELLIE

Absolutely. To gender - all genders not just two, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability. And we need to talk about body positivity. And rape culture.

CALEB

Rape culture is a lot for high school -

ELLIE

They need it. It's where it starts to become habit and not just behavior they're learning. We need to talk about abuse and resources for help. And mental health and personal well-being. And sexual health. And... and... and...

*The room comes back into focus. Ellie is overwhelmed and suddenly aware of who she's speaking to.*

ELLIE

Sorry... got lost there. It's just... so much. There's so much.

RACHEL

It is. There's so much you want to indoctrinate our kids into believing.

ELLIE

That's not -

JUSTIN

Mom.

RACHEL

They aren't capable of making such serious decisions -

JUSTIN

Mom -

RACHEL

We can't overcomplicate things, we have to keep it simple because -

JUSTIN

MOM.

RACHEL

What, Justin?

JUSTIN

I want to say something. I think.... I think I, uh... I think I should have said this in the first place before we got.... Before I got... Before this happened. Uh.... Like... I... well,

I heard Avery talking the other day and, she... uhhh.. Was talking about this thing....  
Uhhh... asexu – asexual – (*whispering*) asexuality-

AVERY  
(*surprised*)

Asexuality.

JUSTIN  
Yeah. And... uhhh.... Well, I um, looked it up, and uh... I stayed after class to ask Ms.  
Callis about it and... um...well I think I might be. Asexual.

RACHEL  
What? What are you saying, Justin?

JUSTIN  
Yeah. That. Because... uhh... well, I know I get uncomfortable when people talk about  
being gay but uh... when we talk about procreating in church, I uhh... I get  
uncomfortable too.

RACHEL  
But that's normal, honey. You're not ready for sex. When you find the right girl that  
God's chosen for you and you get married and -

JUSTIN  
But I don't want that. I think. I don't.... I don't like girls. I mean, they're nice. Some of  
them. But like... I don't want to kiss them. I don't want to get married. I'm sorry, Mom,  
but.... I was thinking about monks and how simple it is for them.

RACHEL  
Yes, now, but when you're older -

JUSTIN  
I'm already sixteen, mom. Seventeen soon enough. I don't think... I don't think this is  
going to change. I mean... Avery knows who she is.

RACHEL  
Avery is not an example for you to follow, young man -

JUSTIN  
But when I learned that this word existed I felt... relieved? And I read everything I could.  
And... and I was so happy there were people like me. Who don't like physical  
intimacy... who are sort of scared of it but... not scared just... don't like it. And don't  
always know how to talk about it because... because we focus so much on sex...  
and...it's hard... but it... it feels right. Like when I found that Psalm I really liked?



RACHEL

“He will cover you with feathers and under his wing you will find refuge.”

JUSTIN

It felt like that. Like I was covered in feathers. It’s comforting. To think about that... like that. That I’m asexual.

*Silence.*

AVERY

I didn’t know you listened to me. I thought you didn’t like me.

JUSTIN

I don’t really know you.

AVERY

I guess I don’t know you either. Um... congratulations. On coming out.

JUSTIN

I’m not gay.

AVERY

Coming out isn’t just about being gay. You just came out as asexual. I’d hug you but... I don’t know if you like them so...

*She holds out her hand.*

AVERY

Congratulations. And welcome. To a more open life.

*He doesn’t move. Thinks. He shakes her hand.*

JUSTIN

Thanks. I think.

*Rachel looks perplexed, then angry, then confused.*

RACHEL

What... what does that mean?

JUSTIN

It... it just means I realized this. It’s not –

RACHEL

I don’t... I don’t even really know what you mean by asexual, Justin. Is there something wrong with you? Is it an illness? Did I do something wrong as a mother?

JUSTIN

No, Mom. No. That's... no. It's okay. It's going to be okay.

RACHEL

What... what does that mean you are now?

JUSTIN

Your son.

RACHEL

Of course you are. But... I don't understand. I don't understand what you're feeling. What's happening. What...

JUSTIN

Relax, Mom. Just breathe.

RACHEL

It's not okay! What world am I in where... where you aren't you and... and this -

JUSTIN

I am myself, Mom. This is who I've always been. I'm no different now.

RACHEL

But you are. You're something more than you were. Something other.

AVERY

Other is good. It's different, unique... powerful.

JUSTIN

Avery's right. I feel... I feel stronger knowing this. Being open. I'm happier, Mom.

RACHEL

But what about me? What if I'm not happier?

JUSTIN

It's not about you -

RACHEL

Yes it is. I made you. I'm your mother. You're part of me. And if you're... you're this way then I'm responsible.

JUSTIN

It's... it's not about you. I mean – you didn't do anything wrong. I just...I became this way. Maybe it'd be different if I grew up somewhere else. But I was probably born this way and... well, that's how it is.

RACHEL

You're making me feel like I don't know enough about you. Like I... I failed you.

KATHERINE

*(comforting)*

None of us know enough. We can't predict what our children will be. We can't predict what our children will do. We just have to... to trust them and support them and teach them the best we can.

PETER

Did you do the best you could?

KATHERINE

Yes. I did. Did you, Peter?

*Silence.*

JUSTIN

This is embarrassing.

*All look at him.*

JUSTIN

It is. I mean... we're supposed to be here because of Ms. Callis but... but I don't know if we should be. I mean... I shouldn't... I shouldn't have said those things about her, Mom. She's a good teacher. She really is.

RACHEL

You really think that?

JUSTIN

I do. I... I'm confused a lot by what she says but... I mean, she respects me. I was... I was wrong. She's doing her best.

PETER

"Doing her best" does not make her teacher of the year.

NICK

What more can anyone expect of us? Our textbooks are out of date. We're understaffed with overfilled classrooms. We –

PETER

Don't think I don't know our struggles, Nick. I know them. You just don't seem to –

NICK

You don't seem to care. How many times have I asked you at staff meetings to consider –

PETER

I have considered -

KATHERINE

ENOUGH.

*Silence.*

KATHERINE

I am so tired of all of this. Let's get back to the point - do we think that there are reasonable claims that Ellie Callis violated the abstinence policy of the district?

CALEB

Is that even a relevant question anymore?

BARBARA

It's the reason we're here.

CALEB

I think the reason we're here is to finally have a long overdue discussion about how this district functions and how it approaches sex ed.

PETER

We approach sex ed the way the state of Indiana indicates we must.

CALEB

Do you really think the state of Indiana is right in their "indications?"

BARBARA

No, but I don't see how we can do anything -

PETER

What can we possibly do?

NICK

If we don't do something, who will?

PETER

Why would we? There's worse things we could be teaching than abstinence only -

*The room falls into turmoil. Avery and Justin watch.*

AVERY

We've only touched the tip of the iceberg on this...

*She reaches out to Justin.*

AVERY

Can I?

*Justin nods. She takes his hand and leads him across the room.*

AVERY

There's so many things we don't know. So many things we don't have access to. So much of the world we don't even have the words for. We've been taught to see things only from a certain point of view and really, there's so much more to see.

*The lights shift. Avery and Justin are in their dream world, a world of could-be. Ellie notices them and steps away from the argument and watches.*

AVERY

What if we could learn it?

JUSTIN

Really learn it. Not to be fed information like you feed a parking meter but really learn it.

AVERY

If we let teachers teach to their full potential -

JUSTIN

If we didn't limit them -

AVERY

If we didn't constantly question them -

*Ellie steps into their world of exploration.*

ELLIE

But wouldn't you still be afraid of misinformation? Bias? Propaganda or indoctrination?

AVERY

Of course. There's always that risk. But if we put out better resources, better opportunities -

JUSTIN

And more opportunities -

AVERY

Those trying to spread misinformation are more likely to fail in the face of... so much else.

JUSTIN

We all do better when we all do better.

AVERY

I like that.

ELLIE

It's Paul Wellstone.

JUSTIN

It's good.

ELLIE

But it can't end here.

AVERY

We need actual change. We can't just complain and let things go. Or be cowardly because it's easier.

JUSTIN

It'll be worse if we let things stay as they are. For all of us.

AVERY

We should get started. We have so much work to do.

*Lights down. End of play.*