You are watching the mapping prevention video podcast series produced by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. The NSVRC serves as the Nations principle information resource center regarding all aspects of sexual violence.

In this podcast we talk with Alison Bellavance, Director of Education & Training at Planned Parenthood of Northeast & Mid-Penn, about incorporating healthy sexuality approaches into sexual violence prevention work.

Q: What drew you to prevention?

A: I was drawn to prevention because from a very young age I identified as a feminist. My mom always jokes that I was calling myself a feminist before I really should have even known what the word meant. And I think that what first drew me to prevention was that opportunity to help women. Over the years that I’ve been doing prevention work I feel really pleased and honored that I get to help women, men, young people, children but that initial draw was that feminist appeal and trying to help other women.

Q: How do you think sexual violence is going to end?

A: I think that Sexual Violence is going to end when we really start taking a larger scale approach. The work that Sexual violence prevention agencies do is just critical and amazing work but it’s not work that should be unique to those agencies. I think schools need to be involved, parents need to be involved, many other fields that serve young people and adults in our community and I think the more we take a collaborative approach the more likely we are to actually end sexual violence.

Q: Why do you think it is important to incorporate healthy sexuality education into prevention efforts?

A: I think that it’s really important to incorporate healthy sexuality education into prevention efforts and dialogue because the example that I always give is you know when we teach young people or anyone about healthy eating or healthy nutrition, we don’t just say here is what you cannot eat. We also say here’s what you can eat. So, we need to teach people and provide examples of ways of healthy sexual interactions, ways to establish consent, and ways that they can avoid the grayer areas of consent and issues that sometimes bleed into sexual violence. So I think that the more we can give people positive examples the more likely we are to help them avoid those negative behaviors.

Q: What advice would you give to folks hearing healthy sexuality has no place in sexual violence prevention or in the sexual violence movement?

A: So the advice that I would give to folks who are doing this work and hearing that healthy sexuality education does not have a place in sexual violence prevention is I think it’s two part. The first part would be: be patient. Social change does not happen overnight and I think we need to continue to incorporate healthy sexuality into the work even though it may take a long time for everyone to get on board. The other part of the advice I would give is to find commonalities and find points of agreement and work off of those. So if you can get a group of parents to be on board because you can provide programming that will help maybe reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse, that might be an entry point to eventually down the road do programming with teens around other issues of healthy sexuality.

Q: What is one thing you want people to take away from your NSAC workshop?

A: It’s just this wonderful opportunity we have to bring the fields of sexual violence prevention and sexuality education together. As someone who’s worked in both fields I feel very strongly that there’s just a huge opportunity to collaborate, to share resources, and ultimately to provide better services to the people who are experiencing sexual violence and maybe make a real difference.

For more information on the National Sexual Violence Resource Center please go to www.nsvrc.org or call toll free at 877-739-3895. The NSVRC was founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and is supported in large part with funds from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.