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MELANIE DAVIS: Welcome to how to create a faith-sensitive "Our Whole Lives" program, and we're glad that you're here.

Presenters tonight. I'm Melanie Davis. I'm the "Our Whole Lives" Program Associate for the Unitarian Universalist Association. And I am located in Bedminster, New Jersey. My co-presenter tonight is Amy Johnson. She is with the United Church of Christ. She is the "Our Whole Lives" program coordinator. She comes to us from Federal Way, Washington.

Susan Lawrence is with us. You can't see her, but she can see us. She's with the UUA Faith Development Office, and she is in charge of editorial projects. And tech support, you've already met him, Kareem Watson. And he works for the UUA Faith Development Office. Both Susan and Kareem come to us from Boston.

Amy, would you like to start us off?

AMY JOHNSON: All right. I will. I have a reading for us tonight to get us started called "Holy Midwife." It's by Barbara Marian, and it's from a book called Fragments of Your Ancient Name by Joyce Rupp.

Every day, a little birthing awaits us, an opportunity pregnant with possibility. Some of these spiritual birthings go easy. Others are long, difficult, and agonizing. You, holy midwife, attend each delivery and urge us toward expectant growth. Remind us that we must do our part. Breathe in, breathe out. Let go, let go. Trust the painful contractions of labor preceding the precious life that follows.

I chose that because sometimes when we're talking about incorporating other faiths, it can be a challenging process, but not one without rewards. So welcome to our webinar this evening.

MELANIE DAVIS: It is a beautiful reading. Thank you. Our agenda tonight, we'll be asking you what your interests are so that we can make sure to address any hopes, concerns, questions that you may have.

Amy will run us through the process of creating a group covenant, not only for this event tonight, but also that we can model for actually OWL programs themselves. We'll talk a bit about sexuality and our faith. We'll talk about hopes and concerns about opening up your program to nonmembers.

Then Amy will guide us through a frame of reference activity. I will address the difference between facts, opinions, and values. We'll run you through some scenarios so that you can get experience differentiating between facts, and opinions, and values. And we'll talk about why that's important when you open up your program.

We'll say a bit about the importance of facilitator training where opening up your program is involved. And then Amy will talk about creating a welcoming space for people from all faith traditions. And then, of course, we'll take your questions. We'll have some discussion, closing words. And then we'll be talking about what's ahead for our webinars and also how you can access this webinar after the fact.

So Annie and Teresa, if you'd like to type in the chat box what role you play in your congregation and why this seminar is of interest to you.

AMY JOHNSON: This is always the tricky part where we're waiting for folks to type.

MELANIE DAVIS: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

AMY JOHNSON: So I sort of feel like we should play a little holiday music or something while we're waiting. I know Teresa said she was from Arkansas and Annie from Colorado. Just wondering what your roles are and what brought you here tonight.

MELANIE DAVIS: And we're not going to force anybody to chat if you don't feel like chatting. That's fine too.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. Oh, we have somebody else who joined us too. Welcome, Michelle.

MELANIE DAVIS: Hi Michelle. Nice to meet you.

AMY JOHNSON: We're just doing introductions.

MELANIE DAVIS: So Annie is the DRE for children and youth. We have a popular seventh grade OWL program-- yay-- and regularly have neighbors and friends sign up for that class. I'm happy to hear that. Thank you, Annie.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah, yes.

MELANIE DAVIS: Michelle, where-- you can type in, if you'd like, where you're from and what interests you in tonight's topic.

AMY JOHNSON: Teresa, OWL facilitator helping a group of Marshallese community group consider whether they want to adapt OWL for their youth. We have a similar situation at my local church, so glad you're here.

MELANIE DAVIS: And if you-- Teresa, are you UC-- well, if you're UCC, you might want to talk to Amy offline to get more information about using "Our Whole Lives." And if you're UU, you might want to contact me. Kareem, if you could put our e-mail addresses in the box, that would probably be helpful.

There are limits to cultural appropriateness for adopting OWL. And also there are limits to the copyright and materials that can be adapted. So that's where Amy and I can be helpful to you in doing that.

So why don't we move along. Michelle, thanks for calling in from Charlottesville, Virginia.

AMY JOHNSON: All right. So I'm going to-- OK, there we go. So our covenant tonight, as you know if you are an "Our Whole Lives" facilitator, you know that when you create a covenant with your group, you're going to ask for their input. And that works really well when you're meeting with lots of different people for an extended period of time.

However, on a webinar, that's a little trickier, and we don't have a whole lot of time to devote to it. So these are what I call my top four-- sort of my traveling set of covenant pieces.

And the first one is personal responsibility. So we hope that you will take care of yourselves. I see your note, Annie, that you'll need to leave at 7:30 your time. And thank you for letting us know that so we know we didn't just offend you and you left in a huff.

But do take care of yourselves, and do ask questions as you have them, and we'll let you know if we can answer them here or later on, as Melanie had suggested earlier.

Please do follow up with us if you have a question that we don't answer. Also, you have the right to skip or pass. You don't have to participate when we ask you to. Melanie and I both like to ask for lots of participation in webinars and workshops, so you will have some opportunities to chime in in the chat box. And we hope you will, but you don't have to.

And then the last two kind of go together and I think are really key to this particular topic of faith sensitivity. And that is the belief that we have all reached this date in history of December 14th, 2016 through a different journey in our lives. We've all had different journeys to get here.

And we've developed different beliefs along the way. And those beliefs have helped us to survive and to make sense of our world. So it's our sincere intent to honor everyone's beliefs on this call and to do that in a spirit of mutual respect. Meaning that you don't have to change your beliefs to make me or Melanie happy, and we don't have to change ours to make you happy, but that we can exist in a spirit of mutual respect and honor each other's beliefs, even if we don't always agree.

And that is something that I think is really key when you are dealing with more than one faith in the room with an "Our Whole Lives" program. Or even in both of our denominations, there's usually quite a bit of diversity even within our own faith communities, our own local faith communities. There can be. And so to be able to create a space where you truly covenant to honor everyone's beliefs, and do that respectfully, can be very helpful.

So if that doesn't come up when you are creating your covenant, I would really encourage you to add that. Whether it's stated in this way or in another way, but to add that specifically about honoring differing beliefs in your group when you have more than one faith presence.

All right. So next, I'm going to talk about some hopes and concerns.

MELANIE DAVIS: Sure. So when we talk about the sexuality education, we talk about it providing roots and wings for our participants. And this is true for people of any age. So where "Our Whole Lives" is concerned, those roots are our religious traditions and values. And we're accepting participants for who they are and where they are in their journey, and we want them to feel good about themselves and their sexuality.

The wings are the freedom that they have to make meaning of their own lives. And so that's why OWL doesn't tell people what they have to do, or what they have to think, but helps them make those decisions themselves.

And when we're in "Our Whole Lives," people are grappling with ethics, and morals, and values. And the addition of sexuality in our faith, of course, puts that in the context of UU and UCC faith traditions.

Now it gets tricky when you open your program up to people who are not members, whether they're non-religious folks from your community or members of other faith communities. Because we're sort of used to doing things our way in our faith tradition, and here we're welcoming other people in.

So one of the things that we would encourage you to do-- and if you're not a facilitator yourself, you can talk to your facilitators about this-- is to make sure that as you're incorporating sexuality in our faith, those little discussion questions that say things like, "in our faith tradition, how do we look at x, y, or z?" to invite people from other faith traditions to offer their faith perspectives. That way, they will feel part of the group, not like outsiders, when they come in. Because we don't want anybody feeling like that little blue OWL in the corner standing out like a sore thumb. We want everybody to feel equally part of the program and able to bring their perspectives in.

Now at every "Our Whole Lives" facilitator training, one of the activities is we have big posters on the wall, and the facilitators get to discuss what is spiritual about sexuality and also about sexuality education. And I'd like to share with you some of the feedback that we got at a recent training that we held before General Assembly in June.

Some of the answers were, God created us in God's image. God, too, is a sexual being. Sexuality is included in valuing inherent worth and dignity of all people and our UU fourth principle of the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Oh, I should say that the people who are attending this training were both UCC and UU. Spirituality exists in intimate connections, love, and justice. In ways of expressing care, love, and concern. Religious culture and scriptures, our roots, have a lot to say about sex. Sex can be a spiritual experience. Sex and reproduction are represented in church symbols and rituals, such as baptism, confirmation, and marriage, and dedication.

Sexuality and spirituality are both part of being a whole person. We are sexual beings. Therefore, our spirituality is sacred. Sex is inherently about relationships, and covenant, and faith. And we all have the divine within, and that includes sexuality.

So if you think about those statements, they apply to a lot of different faith traditions, not just UCC and UU. So there is lots of room within an OWL program for people of all faiths, and it allows us to be very welcoming of everybody who might choose to be part.

SUSAN LAWRENCE: So we'd like to open up--

AMY JOHNSON: Let me chime in one thing?

SUSAN LAWRENCE: Yeah, sure.

AMY JOHNSON: Sorry.

SUSAN LAWRENCE: Go ahead.

AMY JOHNSON: I was just going to say, I think sometimes we may-- "we" as like the general royal "we"-- think of-- there's faiths that don't believe this or that or the other thing, when sometimes really what it is there's a continuum in pretty much any type of belief, from like really orthodox to more progressive. And so sometimes we may find pockets of people in our communities, or our neighbors, or different faith traditions, that really have a lot more in common with us than we might think.

But if we don't have a conversation, or invite them and let them know what it is we're about, and why we believe that sexuality and spirituality are connected, then they might not realize that we are really a safe place for them to come.

MELANIE DAVIS: Sure. And that we're not trying to change anybody's beliefs. That they're welcome to bring their beliefs into the OWL space and explore sexuality within the context of their own belief system. Good.

So we'd like to ask you first what hopes do you have about opening your program up to nonmembers? Teresa, I think you said that you've already opened your program up. And so you might have a different perspective on this than Annie or-- welcome, Jacqueline.

So let's talk about first what hopes you might have for opening your program up. And feel free to type in the chat box.

And Teresa says, within congregational settings, I wonder how facilitators meet both the needs of the religious and the secular families in the same class if they've committed to sexuality in our faith.

So that could be-- a hope could be to manage that successfully. And that could also be a concern, uh-huh.

Annie says, giving all participants that sense you spoke of that we have much more in common than we often think. Mhm.

AMY JOHNSON: So honoring that right to skip or pass, I'm going to ask-- and Teresa, maybe this was already a concern. But are there any other concerns you have? So we have your hope that we can have people managed with the secular and the spiritual part and giving participants a sense of having much more in common than we may think. What are some concerns that come up when you think about doing this work with other people that are in a faith that's different from your own? Or maybe it's that the secular folks?

Annie says, we often get non-church people join us, so I hope they might be drawn into our faith or faith community in the longer run.

Yeah. And isn't that kind of a tricky balance? Like you want to make sure that they feel welcome, but not be necessarily having them think that there's some sort of cost to them coming to the OWL program, like they have to join your church, right? So it's that kind of that dance of deciding how to be welcoming without being kind of stocky, you know? For new folks.

Any other concerns that people have that they're willing to share with us tonight?

MELANIE DAVIS: Can we-- if we back to the earlier question about having secular people in the group. I think one of the things that can be done-- and I would say, from personal experience, I grew up as a secular person surrounded by Christian people and had to get used to adapting.

And part of it can be, let's say there's a discussion question that says-- to add to the "Our Whole Lives" content. So from your faith tradition-- if you're not UCC, for example-- from your own faith tradition, how do you look at this? So as long as you word the question that says "from your faith tradition" or your own perspective, or your family's perspective. How can you look at this?

So the language really matters in terms of being inclusive. So if you know that you have people that are not-- that don't belong to a particular faith tradition, to just open up that phrasing to include all perspectives, that they don't have to be religious perspectives. I think that's an important way of helping people feel welcome.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah, I agree. And I also-- sometimes, when I'm working in a Christian context with some folks who are not Christian, I'll say, so this reading that we're doing does come from the Christian faith tradition. And instead of like throwing it out, I'll say, so I just want to share it, because I think that sometimes people make assumptions about what it means to be Christian. And that could be the same thing with any number of faiths. People might make assumptions about what it means to be Muslim, or what it means to be Jewish, or what it means to be Buddhist, or what it means to be UU.

And I-- especially in the sort of national narrative right now around Christianity, I want people to know that there is a voice in the Christian community that supports this work, and that believes that it's sacred, and that it's not like we're doing this on the sly behind a closed door or anything, you know? It's like this is upfront, legit work for our community.

So in the same time of asking those questions and saying, so then, what's something-- you might share something from your own faith tradition and then also ask, so what else-- so if I shared something that was a Christian reading, I would say, so what else from your faith tradition, or your values, or your family beliefs would have a similar supporting-- or what would you bring to this table, too? So you can do sort of a both/and, I think.

Any other concerns?

All right. I'm going to-- oh, here we go.

MELANIE DAVIS: Wait, there's one from Michelle.

AMY JOHNSON: Michelle says-- yeah. I'm currently teaching a seventh and eighth grade OWL class and preparing to teach in a local private school and like to be welcoming to everyone.

Yeah. And I think that Melanie's point about language being really important when you are in a private school. Where, even if it is a private religious-based school, many religious-based private schools have a variety of people who are attending. So that language piece that Melanie was talking about, about asking people what their family values are, or what do they believe, without saying "our faith tradition" or something like that can be helpful.

And this is another time to say that there's an opportunity to use OWL in secular settings sometimes without the sexuality in our faith piece. And it's perfectly legitimate to do that and to not bring that in if that's a secular private school and they don't want that. Then that's OK. You can run OWL without that.

MELANIE DAVIS: And as a reminder that the sexuality in our faith visuals can't be used in any other setting other than UCC and UU congregational-run programs.

So you want to move on?

AMY JOHNSON: I do. So this is an exercise that we've started to use with this topic and that comes from a woman named Jean Illsley Clarke, who's done a ton of work in transactional analysis and education. She's an international award winner for her work with that. She's in her 90s now, and she's just done some phenomenal work.

And I'd invite you to take a moment and look at this frame of reference, as it's called. So I want you to imagine that that part where it says "open" in the middle is actually open. There's a hole there, and that's the hole through which you're looking at different parts of your life.

And I'm going to invite you tonight to consider your frame of reference around the idea of faith. So I want you to think back to when you were pretty young, early elementary school or so. And think about what messages you received about faith. Did your family have faith practices? Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. Maybe you had a faith community, maybe not. Maybe faith was something you only heard about from other people. And since it's December, one way to particularly think about your faith is, what were some messages you received about the holiday of Christmas? This event of Christmas that's coming up?

So as you're thinking about that, I invite you to consider the words and the ideas that are written around the inside of that frame as it relates to this idea of faith or Christmas.

When you were young, and as you were growing, consider how your cultural and ethnic identities and heritage affected your views about faith or Christmas. Going to the geography portion, how about where you grew up in the United States, or where you grew up in the world? How did that affect what you thought about faith, or what you think about-- what you thought about faith when you were young, or what you think about it now? What was going on in history when you were young? What kind of events were happening? What decade is down there a little bit farther, but that's something to consider. Like what were the big historic things that were happening, and how did that affect what your family or what you believed about faith?

What messages did you get through the media about faith or about Christmas? [COUGHS] Excuse me.

What gifts did you or the folks around you have? What kind of giftedness? Were there people that were really great at singing? Writing? Hospitality? Maybe teaching other people? And how did that affect your beliefs about faith?

Again, the decade. Somebody who grew up as a small child in the '50s or '60s might have some different frames of reference around this topic than somebody who grew up in the '80s or '90s.

What about your ableness? How did that affect your beliefs around faith and Christmas? Your race? The way that society reads you and categorizes you in terms of your skin color, and what they say that means? How did that affect your beliefs?

Were there any in-utero or birth experiences that affected your family's faith beliefs? How about birth order? Did that color your views on faith? And what did you hear from your family? What was your religion, if you had one? And if not, how was that for you?

So those are all things that affect each of our frames around any number of issues. And today, we're talking-- tonight, we're talking about faith.

In theory, nobody's views are "the right" or "the wrong" view. They simply are what they are, and they have been shaped by all of these things.

Now on the outside, there are four different phrases that have arrows pointing in. One says philosophic change, one says economic change, one says cultural change, and one says technological change. Those are things that affect the entirety of a population or society at once-- outside influences on those personal things.

So while it might be very individual to me where I grew up, or what my family's messages were about religion or faith, having something like 2008 happen, where there's a huge economic change experienced by an entire society, or even most of the world, that affects everybody all at once.

Right now, many people are experiencing something that feels like a philosophic change, or they're having some feelings about-- intense feelings about a philosophic change that might be occurring since the election. And certainly, technological changes and technology have, in the last couple of decades, have affected all of us.

So again, thinking about that frame with an open hole in the middle, this next view shows a different shape.

So if we were together in person, I would have you rip a hole out of your frame of any shape or size. And somebody else next you might have a different shaped hole. So that's what this is supposed to be representing, that somebody else has a different shaped hole than that one that said open in the middle.

And if you look at this picture, it will show that there is a common place in the middle. Hopefully this makes sense to you. It was the best way we could do it with our technology available to us. That there's a hole where both of the shapes are open.

So if one person had a trapezoid shape open in their frame, and the other person had that kind of wobbly sort of circle-ish hole open, there would be a part in the middle where both were open.

If that happens, when you start to discuss something around faith, and you're talking about something where both of your frames of reference are open-- you've both had some similar experiences or some understandings around those things that are along the inside of that frame-- then the conversation might sound something like this.

Of course! Can you believe that? I mean, that is amazing how we both agree on this. And absolutely, this is the most wonderful thing. And we both had this amazing spiritual experience with that, and we both have the same understanding about how justice works with our faith, and that kind of stuff. You might have a conversation with some of those phrases in it.

But if you start to discuss something where one or the other frame is still closed-- so somebody has had a different experience around one of these topics around faith. So either it's sort of the edges of the trapezoid or the little parts of the wobbly circle thing that are not overlapping. Then one person is likely to discount the other person's experience.

So that might sound something like-- internally, I might be thinking, or externally, I might be saying-- wait, how could they really believe that? Or boy, they must have had a rough upbringing to think that's true. Or that just doesn't make sense. Or that's kind of magical thinking, isn't it? I don't understand why anybody would think that.

So again, neither is right or wrong. They are-- you know, we're talking about faith here. So it's a belief, not necessarily a fact, in some cases. And beliefs are really deeply held.

So this information and exercise is designed to help us understand a little bit more about where people are coming from and different-- all the different things that can play into how we end up with the faith beliefs that we have, and how people can view the world, or see it through the frame of reference around faith in entirely different, and valid for them, ways.

And the really cool thing that I love about this exercise is that-- and this idea-- is that, just because the hole in my frame looks one way today doesn't mean it has to stay that way. I always have the opportunity-- through some experiences, and engagements with other people, and conversations, and examining my beliefs, and being curious about your beliefs, I always have the opportunity to open my frame up a little bit more.

So there isn't a limit to that, and there isn't a time limit to that either. You can do that at any time throughout your life.

So that's what we hope that you will be willing to do and help other people do, is to open up that frame of reference around faith, and to know that it's more often that will happen with those conversations, and that engagement, and that welcoming. That music we talk about in our whole lives. The things that not only are conscious language, but also the underlying feeling that we hope people have and leave with.

It's going to happen more with that than just information. Because information is not always the most effective thing to change someone's deeply held belief. So hoping that this is helpful to you to think about how and why people may have some different nuances in what they believe.

And speaking of the difference between facts and values and beliefs, Melanie?

MELANIE DAVIS: So this is a picture of Al Vernacchio, who is one of the contributors to "Our Whole Lives" for grades seven to nine. He wrote the "Healthy Relationships" workshops. And he wrote a book called "For Goodness Sex," which is a really good resource to have on hand for parents.

And one of the things that he talks about is the difference between a fact, an opinion, and a value. And this comes into play even-- you know, earlier, Amy referenced the fact that not all UUs think alike and not all UCC folks think alike. And of course, that's true for when we're opening up the community to other people, as well.

Amy, sorry, there's a note in the chat box for you?

AMY JOHNSON: Oh, thank you.

MELANIE DAVIS: So if we look at the difference between facts, opinions, and values. So a fact is something that's indisputable. So they can be argued, but they can be verified with evidence. So somebody can say, I don't believe in climate change, or I don't believe that the ice is melting. But it's a fact if there's less ice than there used to be, right?

An opinion is a view or a judgment formed about something. So it can be a view or an opinion about an event, a belief, a comment, anything. Opinions don't always rest on facts. So they can be informed or they can be uninformed. They can be based on facts, supposition, or even just pure speculation. And they may or may not be defendable.

A value is a core belief. It's something that we believe really, really strongly and so strongly that it's going to guide our decisions and our actions. It's much more than opinion, but it's not a fact. It's just something that we believe inside. It answers the "why" question at a really deep level. So why would I do this? Why would I make this choice?

So to make this distinction more clear, let's use some examples, using same sex marriage as an issue. So a fact is that same sex marriage is legal in some countries.

An opinion might be, same sex couples should have legal rights, but not the right to marry. So see, there's nothing factual there. It's just an opinion.

A value could be that a heterosexual family unit is the most valuable grouping in society. Now why is this important? For your facilitators, working especially with those groups of young people in grade seven to nine OWL, when emotions run high, and people are just learning who they are, and starting to get really strong opinions about things, it's not uncommon, for example, for someone to say "abortion is wrong."

OK. Well, that is certainly not necessarily a fact. But it's something that somebody feels really strongly about. And if we're going to invite people from other traditions and other cultures into our midst, we have to allow for lots of different ways of thinking about things. So we need to use language and rituals that are welcome to everybody.

So what we're going to do to help illustrate this is go over a couple of scenarios and ask you to try to discern the facts, and the opinions, and the values. So here's the first one. I'll read it out loud. You can read along.

Jayden and Kai are in the sixth grade and friends. One day, when they are hanging out at Kai's house after school watching silly videos online, Jayden tells Kai that a friend sent a link for them to check out. They follow the link, which is for a pornographic video site. It's against Jayden's religion to view any pictures of naked people. Jayden says it's especially true before marriage. What are the facts, opinions, and values in this scenario?

So if you have an idea, you can type that in the chat box. It would be nice to have a highlighter, wouldn't it? To highlight on the screen.

So for example-- I'll get you started. For example, a fact might be that a friend sent the link, and the link went to a pornographic site. So that's a fact. So we know that.

What might be some examples of opinions or values? Fact. Jayden and Kai are friends. Yes, Michelle, thank you.

AMY JOHNSON: See that one Melanie?

MELANIE DAVIS: Fact, there is a video. Yes. Maybe pornographic or not. Well, yes, you're correct. Because one person's pornography is another person's PG-13. You're right.

Against Jayden's religion could be an opinion, maybe depending on interpretation. That-- yeah. Although there are some real strict rules. I know of a sex therapist who works with orthodox Jewish couples, and it is a fact that they are not allowed to see images of naked bodies, which makes sex therapy a challenge. But yes, certain things about our religious tenets could be open to interpretation, yes.

AMY JOHNSON: Or they might be seen as values that somebody has. So if that's a value that they're following, their religious value.

MELANIE DAVIS: That it's important to follow the rules, absolutely. Sure.

So it's not always clear, but it is important to understand what's fact and what's not. Because sometimes, especially in OWL, when we try to present the factual information and then encourage people to bring their own values and opinions into play, it's important to help the young people differentiate between those things.

Let's try the next one.

AMY JOHNSON: Yep. Sofia and Luciana are eight graders and they're talking. Sophia says, girls don't masturbate. Luciana says, yes, they do. It's a great way to relax and release sexual buildup. Plus it's a private way to have sexual pleasure without the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection.

When you're ready for sex, masturbation helps you learn how you like to be touched so you can show a partner how to please you.

So what do you think the facts, values, and opinions are in this scenario?

MELANIE DAVIS: Fact. Sophia has had an OWL class before. OK, good.

AMY JOHNSON: Oh. [LAUGHS]

MELANIE DAVIS: You could make that-- you could probably guess that. I don't know if it's a fact, but yeah!

AMY JOHNSON: Right. Sounds like it. Sounds like a script right out of OWL, doesn't it?

MELANIE DAVIS: It does.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. I like the smiley face. Yeah.

MELANIE DAVIS: She might have been able to teach OWL.

AMY JOHNSON: What about an opinion? Where do you see the opinions in that scenario? Opinions being a view or a judgment, not necessarily a sound foundation. Right. Sofia has an opinion that girls don't masturbate. Great. Yeah.

MELANIE DAVIS: And it could be a fact that some girls do.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah, right. Well, it is a fact that some girls do. But it's her opinion that they don't, right? So that's sometimes where facts and opinions-- like Melanie was talking about, especially in those junior high and early senior high years, and even on into young adulthood sometimes, and maybe there's even some adults that have trouble distinguishing facts and opinions, right? So it's a good skill to have them practice, and have us practice, for that critical thinking with such a huge part of our whole lives.

How about a value? That value that's a core belief? Anything you see in there that looks like a value to you? Communication in sexual relationships. I see that one. And value that sexual pleasure is a worthwhile pursuit.

MELANIE DAVIS: Mhm. Mhm.

AMY JOHNSON: Right underneath all that. The P word, we call it. Pleasure, right? Talking about that in sex ed. What a concept.

MELANIE DAVIS: I like the value-- it's an implied value that you don't have to be embarrassed to show a partner what pleases you.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that your pleasure is important. So great. All right. Should we go to the third one?

MELANIE DAVIS: Yeah. So Ishiko is 17 and pregnant and thinks she wants to get an abortion. She decides to talk to some friends and family about her decision. June, her partner, agrees with her decision. He feels they are both too young to get married, and he has a scholarship to go to college next year. Kazuko, Ishiko's older sister who became pregnant as a teen, was too afraid to talk to her parents and had an abortion, which she now regrets. She feels guilty a lot and thinks Ishiko shouldn't have the abortion. She's also newly married and afraid she will have trouble getting pregnant because she's had an abortion. What are the facts, opinions, and values in this scenario?

AMY JOHNSON: I think it's great if we start like we've been doing, if anybody can shout out some facts there.

MELANIE DAVIS: Mhm.

AMY JOHNSON: This is one that's just got them all jumbled up in there, isn't it?

MELANIE DAVIS: Mhm. So family values and friends' perspectives, mhm I don't know if that was for the last scenario or for this one, Teresa.

AMY JOHNSON: And anybody want to shout out a fact there?

MELANIE DAVIS: So a fact that she's pregnant. We can say it's a fact that her sister--

AMY JOHNSON: And she's 17.

MELANIE DAVIS: And her sister had an abortion.

AMY JOHNSON: Any-- what about opinions? What opinions do you see in there? Maybe an opinion her partner has? Hint hint.

MELANIE DAVIS: [LAUGHS]

So she's pregnant. Opinion is that you can't easily get pregnant if you've had an abortion. Absolutely true. Absolutely true.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. I think another opinion in there is June's opinion that they're too young to get married.

MELANIE DAVIS: Mhm.

AMY JOHNSON: So that's an opinion.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

MELANIE DAVIS: The sister feeling guilty could be a fact. But the guilt may arise out of a value that abortion is somehow wrong. So there can be a connection there.

AMY JOHNSON: And her opinion is that her sister shouldn't have this abortion.

MELANIE DAVIS: Mhm.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

AMY JOHNSON: She feels guilty, so her opinion is that the other person shouldn't do that thing.

MELANIE DAVIS: Right. So Jacqueline says there's an opinion about the best age to get married, and that marriage must be in place if a child is born. Right.

So there's a lot of teasing out that can happen. And the OWL curriculum encourages this. And the "Sexuality and Our Faith" also encourages deeper thinking. So what we need to do when we invite people in who are not UCC or not UUA is to those teasing out questions in "Sexuality and Our Faith," add the language that allows other people to tease things out from their perspective as well. And that helps make a more inclusive program. So let's move on.

I'm going to talk about facilitator training. Most congregations do make an effort to send their facilitators for training, and we highly recommend it. Training is not just a matter of learning what the curriculum is. In fact, it's less about learning what's in the curriculum and more about becoming comfortable with your own sexual history and sexual boundaries and talking about things in ways that don't expose too much of your own self. And being comfortable facilitating, and working with partners, and understanding things like gender, and using the right pronouns for people, and honoring people's identities.

Training also helps people understand that everyone who comes to the table in an OWL space comes with their own unique perspectives and understandings about sexuality-- their own opinions, and their own values, and their own take on the facts. So we really encourage you to send folks to training so that they can help create this kind of environment that's ideal for learning for both folks in your congregation and people in the community that you're welcoming into your space.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. And then once you have folks, and you're welcoming them into your space, that physical space can say a lot about how welcome people are. So be aware of what is in that space. Be aware of-- if you're UCC, if there's a lot of Christian kind of paraphernalia around, or if you're UUA, if there's a lot of UU stuff around.

And know that honoring where people are coming from is often more about inviting them to participate, and inviting them to bring in their own things that are a part of their faith tradition, than deciding that for them.

So for instance, instead of saying, oh, we have some Jewish kids coming to this program, let's bring in a menorah, and we'll play dreidl some day! Or something like that. Ask them to bring in their own symbols, things that are important to them that express their faith. And maybe it's an object, or maybe it's a reading that they take turns-- or teams of them take turns bringing in.

And that creates a much richer and thoughtful, and that kind of concrete thinking and experiencing that's important for everyone. Rather than either just like trying to make sure nothing's in the room at all, because we don't want to offend anybody, or deciding for people. Inviting people to bring in their own symbols in ways that feel comfortable for them so that they feel included is, in our opinion, a better way to do that.

MELANIE DAVIS: A good example is that I was talking to a friend who's Jewish, and we were talking about Christmas trees. And I asked about the blue Christmas trees-- blue and white and silver Christmas trees. And she said, no, no, no, no, no. That's not the way Jews do Hanukkah, and that's not how they understand Christmas. You just don't a blue and white Christmas tree.

AMY JOHNSON: Well, weirdly appropriating of weird-- yeah. Of course, the whole Christmas tree thing is appropriated anyway. But let's not go there tonight.

MELANIE DAVIS: So we want to briefly-- before we wrap up, we do want to offer an opportunity to do some quick problem solving of some things that could happen when you open up your space.

So we have a couple scenarios. And the first one is, you're running a junior high OWL group. And in the question box, someone asks, my best friend is Christian, and she says all people who are LGBTQ are choosing a lifestyle of sin and they're going to hell. How do I talk to her about this?

So if you want to type in the chat box, how might you address that question in a manner that sensitive both to LGBTQ individuals and to the people who share the friend's beliefs, who might be in your program?

AMY JOHNSON: [INAUDIBLE] about those OWL values can be helpful.

We think you're the advanced class, so we gave you the tricky scenarios here.

MELANIE DAVIS: Amy, how would you like to get this started?

AMY JOHNSON: Sure. You know, I think that there's not any one right answer, obviously, to do this. But I think that if you're talking to a friend who has a faith belief who's different from yours, and has a value-- which, a value and opinion are when people talk about lifestyle and those kind of things. I think it's important to say something about what your value is, and what your belief is.

And so I think that it can be helpful to say, you know, I know some people think that it's a lifestyle, and that's not what my belief is. In my faith, you know, I believe this. And tell me more. Tell me more about why you think somebody would be choosing that? Or how would you feel if you were LGBTQ and somebody thought-- was saying that about you? So kind of bringing in some empathy things?

I think that the values of self-worth are-- and owning our own values are important. About, you know, in my faith tradition, we believe that every person is valued with their worth and dignity and that it's important to respect that. So I think that there are some ways to really encourage young people to stand up for what they believe and use "I" statements instead of accusing that person of being judgmental or just not talking with them about it at all.

And we have a comment in our chat box too. Teresa says, I like that. I was trying to think of ways the friend might ask further questions too to try to bring the conversation deeper. I like the idea of sharing one's own values up front too.

One thing I really love about the "Our Whole Lives" values is how freaking hard they are to argue with. You know? Like what are you going to say? Well, no! And some people might. Some people actually might say, no, that's not-- that person doesn't have worth and dignity. But then, like really? So they're pretty solid. And I think that that leading with your own beliefs and having a deeper conversation can be helpful.

MELANIE DAVIS: And we do know--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah. I was just going to say we do know, from OWL graduates, that that's one thing they do take away, is this ability to speak about their values and put those first. So that's an important thing.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah. I was going to skip this one, because it was kind of like the one--

MELANIE DAVIS: Sure.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

AMY JOHNSON: Because I know we--

MELANIE DAVIS: At parent orientation, when the group is creating a covenant and agreements, someone suggests being non-judgmental. Another parent objects, saying, well, I have some pretty strong beliefs about openness and relationships, orientation, and identity. If somebody thinks differently, I'll have a hard time not being judgmental.

So if a parent says that in your parent orientation, how might you respond?

AMY JOHNSON: And I want to just chime in here too and say that this actually happened to me once in a parent orientation. And this person-- I'm not sure it's clear from how it's written. But this person was like, I believe in openness in relationships, and I believe in all identities are important, and all orientations are legitimate. And so if somebody thinks differently from that, if somebody is kind of close minded, then I'm going to have a hard time not being judgmental about that. So how would you respond?

We may have stumped our audience, Melanie.

MELANIE DAVIS: Well, I would suggest that we go back to what our group covenant was, or our group agreements when we started. We have those just as we have them for an event like this, or we have them for an OWL program. We also have them for the parent orientation.

So you can go back to that covenant and say, well, you know, mutual respect was one of our agreements. And so we're going to understand that everyone comes to here from a different place. We have different perspectives. We raise our children in accordance with our own values and beliefs, and we can respect those and have an open dialogue.

So that's a reiteration for why it can be so important to have those group agreements.

Let's see. What does this comment say?

AMY JOHNSON: And in this scenario, we're creating this-- so if that happens during that conversation, you can also bring in-- that might be a time when you bring in that all beliefs are honored and mutual respect stuff that Melanie was talking about. You might say, so maybe instead of saying nonjudgmental, can we agree that, in this context, that could mean this, would be great.

And then what's in here?

MELANIE DAVIS: Teresa said, I like that. I was trying to think of ways the friend might ask further questions too to try and bring the conversation. Oh, that was the other one, right?

AMY JOHNSON: Oh. We're all here to learn, and judgments are going to close down our dialogue and prevent further learning. So I'd like all of us to assume best intentions and consider ways we could hear something challenging and respond with requests for more information or respectfully disagree. Yeah, great.

MELANIE DAVIS: Yeah. And one way that can be helpful, how does that look to you? Or you can ask open ended questions that don't just-- don't require someone to have a yes or no, but encourage dialogue.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I was just going to say, when you open up your program to people who are not in your congregation or your church community, you will likely get more concerns from parents that you haven't run into before. And that's OK. The parent orientation has pretty clear instructions on how to handle differences of opinion. And it just helps. Especially if you're a DRE or a Christian educator, if you can be at the orientation so that your facilitators aren't on their own, that can be helpful.

AMY JOHNSON: Yeah. And I was going to say, too, just as we're getting close to the top of the hour here, that we can't possibly put every single possible problem or challenge that anybody would have in here. But much like in a facilitator training, we're hopeful that giving you some of these scenarios and some of these problem solving opportunities will at least kind of get you thinking and give you some practice in things so that you realize, you know, that you actually-- you have the skills. And with those values in your hip pocket-- the values, the assumptions, and the skills that you already have-- you can use those in new ways, when you have these other challenging things happen.

MELANIE DAVIS: So we'd like to see if you have any questions. You can type them in the chat box. And we've got a little bit of time. Or if we don't get to them, you can always e-mail us. Maybe I can type our e-mail addresses in this box here.

AMY JOHNSON: I can do that if you want to--

MELANIE DAVIS: So an easy way to reach us is owl@ucc.org for Amy, or owl@uua.org for me. And you're welcome to write to either one of us. Let's see. Here's a question.

That was earlier. OK.

AMY JOHNSON: That was me putting in the emails.

MELANIE DAVIS: OK. So I think what I'll do is I will-- if you have questions, just e-mail us. We're always here. You can call us. Amy and I-- let's see. What pitfalls do you most often see from mixed groups?

Actually the biggest one that I see is not a pitfall, it's just a question. Do we charge people when they're not members of our church or our congregation? And people address that differently. Sometimes, they see "Our Whole Lives" as part of their mission. And so they purposely do not charge, because they want everybody to be able to take advantage of "Our Whole Lives."

One thing I would not recommend is necessarily charging-- you know, charging some people something and some people nothing. But it's certainly up to your congregation. That's a question that can be thrown out on the Laredo list and also on the "Our Whole Lives" facilitator list.

AMY JOHNSON: And I would just say too the pitfalls can be the assumption that facilitators are assuming that people are coming in with certain values that they're not, and not giving enough time to kind of process through some of those challenges and really get to that common ground. So it might take a little bit more time, and we all know how much time is valuable to people. But it's worth it.

MELANIE DAVIS: Well thank you for joining us tonight. We're going to have some closing words and then a little bit about upcoming webinars.

So our closing words are an excerpt from Fluent in Faith, a Unitarian Universalist Embrace of Religious Language by Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar. The story says, a mother said that her son, Nathaniel, and his father sat on their deck before bedtime, the sky streaked with rose and orange, the smell of cut grass in the air. Nathaniel quieted and watched the changing colors-- deeper oranges, the beginnings of lavender and amethyst, the burst of red on the horizon as the sun disappeared. His voice rose reflective as he asked, what makes the sun go down?

His father, creatively demonstrating with objects from his dinner plate, answered, the Earth is like a giant ball that spins very slowly. And each time it turns completely around, a new day begins. The sun doesn't really move. We are moving, even if we can't feel it. It seems that we see the sun move across the sky. But actually, it's the Earth, with us on it, that is spinning. The sunset happens when the earth turns away from the sun.

Nathaniel listened and watched the demonstration and then looked out at the horizon and said simply, oh, I was hoping it was God.

The Father looked at the sky, then set aside his demonstration, seeing beyond the science in his mind to the beauty and amazement before his eyes. Together, father and child sat quietly as the colors continued to darken and the blessings of the night sky settled around them.

Thank you for joining us, and now we're going to talk a little bit about what's coming up.

Susan, I don't know if you can hear us? She might not be able to. I think we're having some technical issues. But as you can see, we have an upcoming webinar. The next one is "Meet the Black Lives of UU." it's presented by Kenny Wiley, a member of the Black Lives UU Organizing Collective and Senior Editor of UU World Magazine and Director of Faith Formation at Prairie UU Church in Denver, Colorado.

Like this webinar, it will be offered in the afternoon on a Tuesday and in the evening on a Wednesday. And you can see that link for the webinar, so you can register.

Also, that's the same page where you'll be able to find this archived webinar. If you can allow a week or so for the webinar archive to be posted, then it will be available to you and/or your facilitators to watch any time.

Thanks again for joining us. We hope that you got a lot out of tonight. Goodnight everybody.

AMY JOHNSON: Goodnight.