

**StarTribune.com** | MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

## She sings the body electric

By [Gail Rosenblum](#), Star Tribune

Last update: September 23, 2007 – 3:56 PM

### **SHE SINGS THE BODY ECLECTIC**

Speaking of bodies, few people find them more amazing than Robie H. Harris. The author of the wildly popular children's books "It's Perfectly Normal," "It's So Amazing!" and "It's NOT the Stork!" comes to the Twin Cities Oct. 4 and 5 to speak to professionals and parents about how to communicate healthy sexuality to children.

While pee, poop, body odor and bodily fluids get their due, Harris' books focus, in age-appropriate fashion, on marvels such as gender similarities and differences and that fabulous feat called babymaking. We caught up with her by phone at her home in the Boston area last week.

#### **Q**

What's the biggest challenge you face when writing books about sexuality for children as young as 4?

#### **A**

Figuring out how to answer those questions that all parents and educators have: How much information do we share? When do we tell them what? Ultimately, what do we need to tell kids to help them stay healthy?

#### **Q**

How much pushback do you get from parents, teachers and others around your books?

#### **A**

Not a lot. But some people do not buy these books because of their own cultural or religious beliefs. That's OK. People on the other side of this issue care as much about their kids as I do. They have the right to not read my books. They have the right, if they don't agree with a school's sex-ed curriculum, to talk with their child's teacher and opt out. What they do not have the right to do is keep award-winning, responsible or well-reviewed books out of the library, making them unavailable to children and families who choose to read them.

#### **Q**

How often do you have to update your books, and what information have you added recently?

#### **A**

I update every time we reprint. It's my job always to be checking and vetting with 20 or 30 top health professionals. In 2004, for example, I added information about oral sex in "It's Perfectly Normal" (recommended for ages 10 and up). As an author, I thought, "Oh, my goodness, how am I going to write about that for kids in a way that's comfortable, but that also emphasizes the emotional and physical risks and responsibilities of having this kind

of sex?" I also wrote that while some think oral sex is not sex, it is sex and here's why.

The latest edition of "It's Perfectly Normal" has been updated with information about the new human papillomavirus vaccine, which can prevent cervical cancer. I decided not to add that information to "It's So Amazing," which is for children as young as age 7.

**Q** Is it ever too late to talk to your kids about sex?

**A**

No matter what age kids are, if a parent has not started talking with them about sex, start in, and realize that you may stumble. We all do. If you feel you messed up, you can go back the next day and say, "I messed this up ... I was telling you X about this topic yesterday and, the more I thought about it, what I really wanted to tell you was Y." I respect parents and this is a very, very hard thing to talk about. That's one reason I wrote these books -- to serve as a bridge to talk with kids directly about sexual matters.

Some parents give the books to their kids, who read them on their own. Some read the books with their kids. Others say they don't feel comfortable doing that, but still want their kids to have this information. I suggest that they connect their child with a nurse or doctor, or a family member they trust.

**Q** Many kids get their sex ed from the Internet. Does that worry you?

**A** A lot of information on the Internet is accurate, but a lot is not, nor is it suitable or safe for kids. Parents need to say to their kids, "Come check all information from the Web with me, or with our family's health professional."

**Q** What's up next for you?

**A**

Four very, very simple nonfiction books for children, ages 2 1/2 to 4. Sex education begins when a parent starts naming body parts when changing a diaper or during toilet-training.

Gail Rosenblum • 612-673-7350

Gail Rosenblum • [grosenblum@startribune.com](mailto:grosenblum@startribune.com)

© 2007 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.