

# ACT BRAVER

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## **A**void euphemisms, but don't avoid the topics!

Use the right words rather than skirting around the subject with air quotes. If you are talking about periods, say periods. If you need to say vagina, say vagina. The thing with words is that the embarrassment or awkwardness we associate with them are just connections in our brain. Your experiences of that word and the response it got, the way society uses it and responds to it, have all programmed your brain to respond to that word in a certain way. The more we use the right words, the more we can rewire our brains out of the squeamishness we've developed around them.

## **C**onfident and courageous

Make sure you arm yourself with the information you need to be confident in these conversations. We've found that one of the biggest barriers to these important conversations is lack of confidence. When women lack confidence in their own or someone else's knowledge and comfort about talking about these topics, it usually equals permanent avoidance of any discussion.

## **T**ravel compassionately

Everyone is coming to these topics from their own set of experiences, values and biases. Meet them there and bring them on a journey with you. Some people will never have said the word period out loud before. Some people will have been taught different words for things. No one will know what your period pain feels like. Be generous and patient with others' starting position.

## **B**oundaries

Create boundaries around the topics you want to talk about. If you want to talk to your personal trainer about breast pain, be clear that you want to chat about it because it's affecting the exercise you can do on certain days. Know that it's OK to say when there's information you don't want to share, or to check if someone else is comfortable having a chat about what you want to discuss.

## **R**esentment

Sometimes people will resent what you are saying, in a #notall men/teachers/doctors, sort of way. If someone's offence gives them an excuse to sit on the side lines, or to avoid important conversations, then they are part of the problem. Try to use language and tone that imply that no one is to blame for the current predicament and all of us are responsible for forging a path forward. Also be prepared to come across people who resent the fact that if we succeed in making life better for women, then they will have been dealt a worse hand than future generations. It's not a great perspective, but trust us when we say, it's out there.

## **A**cross the lifespan

Women's bodies change across our life stages. Some life stages are inevitable for women, like puberty and menopause, and some are possible but not certain, like pregnancy and childbirth. Don't apply a one-size-fits-all approach to your body across your life, and don't expect your experience of your body to remain consistent through the years.

## **V**ault

All the topics we cover in this book could be private and personal for someone. It is a privilege to be trusted with other people's experiences and stories. When talking about women's health issues, you need to be clear about how important this confidentiality is to you, to ensure that others don't share information and experiences that are not theirs to share.

## **E**mpower, don't impose

Empowering people is harder than just imposing your opinion or a solution on them. But every woman's experience of her body is different, and often your experience, what worked for you, or what is normal for you, will be different from someone else's experience and solutions. Try to stay curious, ask questions, really listen to the answers, and show empathy – connect to how someone feels about something rather than just trying to fix the situation altogether.

## **R**emove Judgement

Create conversations and spaces where women feel safe to talk about their bodies and how they feel about them, without fear of judgement, criticism or dismissal. Try to be as supportive of perception, as well as reality – a woman might have a fear of leaking urine that stops her from exercising, and that experience is as important as someone who actually leaks when they move. Support others who have been judged, criticised or dismissed to develop the confidence to go back again and ask for help, or to help someone understand the impact of their actions or words.

