

The Truth About Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

Current Research on Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

- In a recent Congressional report about widely-used abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula more than 80 percent of the curricula reviewed contained false, misleading or distorted information about reproductive health.ⁱ
- According to researchers, 88 percent of teenagers who pledge to remain abstinent before marriage break that pledge. When they do have sex, they are less likely than other teens to use condoms or be tested for STDs.ⁱⁱ
- A recent review of program evaluations in 11 states, including Pennsylvania, indicates that after participating in abstinence-only programs, teens are less willing to use contraception, including condoms. And in only one state, did any program demonstrate any success in delaying the initiation of sex.ⁱⁱⁱ

Characteristics of Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Curricula

- Present inaccurate data on HIV exposure. One curriculum teaches teens that 41 percent of heterosexual female teens have HIV, and that 50 percent of homosexual males have HIV,^{iv} and another states that HIV can be transmitted through tears and sweat.ⁱ
- Only present condoms and contraception in terms of failure rates of pregnancy and STD transmission, which are often exaggerated.^v
- Often present stereotypes about men and women that are not supported by scientific evidence. One curriculum, for example, teaches that women need “financial support” from men, while men need “domestic support” from women.^{vi}

Why Choose Comprehensive Sexuality Education?

- More than 85 percent of Americans believe that it is appropriate for school-based sexuality education programs to teach students how to use and where to get contraceptives.
- 94 percent of parents of junior high school and high school students believe that birth control and other methods of preventing pregnancy are appropriate topics for sexuality education programs in school.^{vii}
- A review of a large body of evaluation research on programs to prevent teenage pregnancy found conclusive evidence that comprehensive sexuality education programs do not increase sexual activity or hasten the onset of first intercourse. To the contrary, several of these programs have been shown to delay the onset of sex or increase condom or other contraceptive use among sexually active teens.^{viii}
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, Institute of Medicine (IOM), Office of National AIDS Policy, National Institutes of Health, Society for Adolescent Medicine, and the Surgeon General of the United States all have published research analyses supporting the effectiveness of comprehensive sexuality education.

For more information please visit: www.siecus.org

ⁱ United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform – Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division, *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs* at i (Dec. 2004) (hereinafter House Committee Report).

ⁱⁱ H. Brückner and P. Bearman, *After the Promise: the STD Consequences of Adolescent Virginity Pledges*, 36 *Journal of Adolescent Health* at 271-278 (2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ D. Hauser, *Five Years of Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education: Assessing the Impact*, *Advocates for Youth*, September 2004.

^{iv} House Committee Report at 20 and fns. 95-96.

^v House Committee Report at fn at 8-9 and fns 28, 29, 32 and 49-50.

^{vi} House Committee Report at 17 and fn 79.

^{vii} *Sex Education in America: General Public/Parents Survey*. (Washington, DC: National Public Radio, Kaiser Family Foundation, Kennedy School of Government, 2004), 9.

^{viii} Douglas Kirby, Ph.D., *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, May 2001.