

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

In too many schools, students receive incomplete, medically inaccurate sexuality education that often imposes one particular religious viewpoint about sex on all students regardless of their individual religious traditions. In order to make responsible, healthy decisions, young people need—and society has a moral obligation to provide—medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sex and sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), but also provides accurate information about contraceptive options so that individuals can make informed life decisions. A small minority must not be allowed to impose its religious beliefs about sexuality education upon all Americans.

Comprehensive programs about sexuality are effective.

These programs have demonstrated effectiveness in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraception and condom use.¹

Most Americans support comprehensive sexuality education.

Recent polling shows that most adults support a comprehensive approach to sexuality education—one that provides information about abstinence and contraception. Seventy-eight percent of those polled favor allowing public schools to provide students with birth control information.²

Abstinence-only programs do not work and are dangerous.

According to a report commissioned by Congress and released in April 2007, abstinence-only programs, specifically those funded by Title V Section 510(b) of the Social Security Act, do not have statistically significant impacts on the rate of sexual abstinence, the number of sexual partners, or the age at which sexually experienced youth first engaged in sexual intercourse.

In addition to being ineffective, abstinence-only programs ignore the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students, sexually active students, and students who are or have been the victims of sexual violence.³

A comprehensive sexuality education program includes material that:

- ▶ Is age-appropriate and medically accurate.
- ▶ Does not teach or promote religion.
- ▶ Teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy or STIs.
- ▶ Stresses the value of abstinence without ignoring those young people who are or have been sexually active.
- ▶ Provides comprehensive information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods as they relate to both pregnancy prevention and risk reduction for STIs, including HIV/AIDS.
- ▶ Encourages family communication about sexuality.
- ▶ Teaches negotiation skills for young people.
- ▶ Teaches young people how alcohol and drug use can affect responsible decision-making.⁴

¹Fact Sheet: *The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*, Washington, DC: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2007.

²*Abortion and Rights of Terror Suspects Top Court Issues*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005.

³Christopher Trenholm, *Impacts of Four Title V Section 510, Abstinence Education Programs*, New Jersey: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2007.

⁴Fact Sheet: *The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*, Washington, DC: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2007.