



Abstinence Only Education: A Barrier to Healthy Sexual Development

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The Problem:

Abstinence Only education in the United States is the most significant barrier to the healthy sexual development of adolescents and future adults. The United States is the only developed nation that applies abstinence policies as its only, federally funded sex education programming. In 2005, \$270 million was allocated for abstinence only education.

Research Evidence:

Teens are disregarding oral or anal sex as actually “having sex.” Without information on protection from STIs teens are unknowingly participating in high risk behaviors in order to maintain abstinence and virginity. Abstinence education programs ignore vital health information, such as family planning options, and protection against STIs. Abstinence education is ineffective in increasing the rates of sexual abstinence-until-marriage, raising the age of first time consensual sex, and ineffective in decreasing the number of sexual partners that teens experience. Most all Americans have sex before marriage. The average American lives 13 years between the onset of fertility and the average age of marriage. Children of single parents and non-traditional families are being told that their experience fails to meet social moral expectations, a message that supports the stigmatization and marginalization of large segments of our diverse population.

Proposed Solutions:

- Public political, health and education officials must be responsive to their constituents.
- Congress must move to require medical and scientific accuracy in educational materials.
- Governors of the state must reject federal funding for abstinence only education.
- State departments of education must outline curriculum guidelines for comprehensive sexuality education.
- Local advocacy groups must stress the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education.
- Concerned citizens (parents, teachers, and local advocacy groups) must pressure legislative officials to be responsive to their voice and the needs of their children.

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