

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Evidence-based HIV Prevention Strategy

Comprehensive Sexuality Education includes material that:

- is age-appropriate and medically accurate;
- teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy or STDs;
- stresses the value of abstinence without ignoring those young people who have had sexual intercourse;
- 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 STDs, 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; and
- does not teach or promote religion.

### Comprehensive Sexuality Education vs. Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage

Comprehensive programs about sexuality—medically accurate, age-appropriate education that includes information about both abstinence *and* contraception—have been found to be effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraception and condom use among teens.<sup>1</sup>

*No such findings exist for federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.* Under the federal definition of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, students must be taught that “a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of all human sexual activity” and that “sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.” Programs accepting these funds *are prohibited from discussing contraceptives*, except in the context of failure rates.

These programs have been funded by the federal government for over twenty-five years, and with over \$1 billion spent there remains not a single, sound, peer-reviewed study showing that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs work to help young people make good decisions in the long term. Conversely, numerous evaluations and reports have found that these programs are ineffective, medically inaccurate, and misleading and are not receiving proper oversight.

In fact, 13 different states have recently evaluated their federally funded abstinence programs, and not a single one has found positive, long-term impacts. In California, Maine, and New Jersey, these programs have even been deemed so extreme that it is illegal to teach them in a publicly funded setting and state governments there have opted to reject federal funding for these programs. These states, and many others, need a federal funding stream available in order to apply for grants to teach comprehensive sexuality education in their states.

### Why the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act is needed

The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act, introduced by Representative Barbara Lee and Senator Frank Lautenberg, would provide grants to states for the purpose of conducting comprehensive sexuality education programs. No direct federal funding stream currently exists for comprehensive sexuality education. To become an original cosponsor of the REAL Act in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress or for more information, please contact Julie Nickson in Representative Barbara Lee’s (D-CA) office at 225-2661 or Apryl Clark in Senator Frank Lautenberg’s (D-NJ) office at 224-3224.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Kirby, *No Easy Answers* (Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1997); Douglas Kirby, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001); and David Satcher, *The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*, June 2001.

<sup>1</sup> *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, 3 August 2005), accessed 30 August 2005, <<http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/social-issues-05.pdf>>.