

KIDS, SEX, AND EDUCATION

David Alan Hjelle

Professor Mike Vanden Bosch

Grammar and Composition: English 101D

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Introduction—Abstinence (saving sex until marriage) should be taught in American schools.

I. Premarital sex has many physical dangers.

A. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are common.

B. Teenagers are at the highest risk of STD infection.

1. Teens are physically more vulnerable to infection.

2. Teens are more likely to have multiple partners.

C. STDs often cause death, cancer, or sterility.

D. Condoms are not an effective solution.

II. Premarital sex can leave you with emotional pain.

A. Broken sexual relationships scar humans emotionally.

B. Abstinence until marriage is the only way to combat this problem.

III. There are economic expenses related to having premarital sex.

IV. Premarital sex is morally wrong.

A. Many feel that abstinence is a religious viewpoint.

B. Abstinence education will not be effective without defining moral standards.

V. Abstinence education works in reducing teenage sexual activity.

A. There are many specific examples of successful abstinence education programs.

B. Abstinence education is not perfect, but is a needed weapon in holding back the onslaught of STDs.

VI. There are many critics against abstinence education.

Conclusion

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The numbers are staggering. Pregnancies in teenage girls are happening at a rate of one million per year. Sexually transmitted diseases infect three million young adults annually, out of America's total of 12 million sexually active youths. By their fifteenth birthday, 25 percent of America's young women have had sex (Stryker). Once they reach 18, that number jumps to nearly 50 percent and skyrockets to 75 percent for teenage men. AIDS, for which there is still no cure, is spreading faster among teenagers than among any other group (Griffin). Among Americans who have been married, 93 percent of men and 80 percent of women (between 18 and 54) have lost their virginity before their honeymoon (Stryker).

The sexual attitudes of America are changing. In the seventies, fewer than one in twenty girls had engaged in sexual intercourse by the age of 15. In the nineties, that number has leapt to one in three (Griffin). Something needs to be done. The story of children raising children has become far too common in American society.

What is the answer? There have been many controversies in recent years. Should abstinence (abstaining or refraining from sexual intercourse until marriage) be taught in America's educational systems? It is clear from the evidence and logic that abstinence must be taught in our schools.

Physical Dangers of Premarital Sex

The most obvious reason for encouraging abstinence in our schools lies

with the physical dangers associated with premarital sex. And, these dangers are quite painfully obvious to many of today's youth. At a major American university, 60 percent of the sexually active females on campus had contracted human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is responsible for 90 percent of cancer in the cervix, and kills roughly five thousand American women per year (McIlhaney). And, as Dr. Joe McIlhaney has said, "condoms provide essentially no protection against HPV transmission." Within the past fifteen years, there has been an increase of 500 percent in the number of white teenagers with genital herpes. Since the explosion of HIV across America, 400,000 have died of AIDS and related diseases (McIlhaney). Again quoting McIlhaney, this is "as many as died in World War Two".

In 1997, the Institute of Medicine wrote that "eight new sexually transmitted pathogens (germs) have been identified since 1980, bringing with them new challenges to prevention and treatment. More STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] will emerge and become established in the U.S." (quoted in McIlhaney). This is happening. There are more than twenty significant STDs today. Each year, new victims total approximately twelve million. Viral STDs have infected one in five Americans between the ages of 15 and 55 (*The Facts*).

In this influx of sexual disease, teenagers are at the highest risk. They are physically more vulnerable to STD infection, despite their self-image of immortality. Sixty-six percent of all new cases of STD infection are found in those 15 to 24 years of age. Twenty-five percent of the new cases occur in teens alone. Teenagers who are sexually active are also likely to have multiple partners, which increases the level of risk associated with premarital sex. *Family Policy* records the results of a study Douglas T. Fleming performed on the effects of multiple partners on STD transmission. His results speak a clear message. Of those who had one sexual partner, 10.2% contracted genital

herpes. For those with two to four partners, the statistic increased to 20.7%. For those who had more than five partners, however, 46% of the participants became infected with genital herpes (McIlhaney).

The outlook is not good once you acquire a sexually transmitted disease. Even though most STDs are asymptomatic—even up to years from initial infection—six (syphilis, HIV/AIDS, herpes II, human papillomavirus, hepatitis B, and pelvic inflammatory disease) of the eight most common STDs can cause cancer or even death. The other two (chlamydia and gonorrhea) are blamed for sterility. Roughly 80 percent of those infected do not know it (*Is Sex Safe?*).

Traditional sex-ed programs hope to combat this onslaught of impending disease with safe sex—using contraception to prevent infection. Dr. Brian Gaffney, the chief executive of the Health Promotion Agency in Northern Ireland, states, “Practicing safe sex *reduces* the risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies” (*The Belfast Telegraph*, emphasis added). Reduces? Condoms have an average failure rate of 13 percent or more per year. Dr. Susan Weller studied the effects of condoms on preventing HIV infection during sexual intercourse; she discovered that they are successful 69 percent of the time. That translates to a 31 percent rate of failure (*The Facts*)! When dealing with a very real and very fatal disease, these statistics are simply unacceptable. As is stating in *The Facts*, “It is unrealistic to expect people to use condoms *consistently and correctly* with every act of intercourse over a period of several years.” Clearly, educating our children that sex can be safe if you use a condom is an outright lie. Safer, perhaps. We cannot let our children take the risk.

Emotional Pain from Premarital Sex

...to suggest to our children that really the only things that matter about sexual

activity are pleasure, or “comfort,” or getting pregnant, or getting a sexually transmitted disease—to suggest that the sexual intimacy is not significant in other ways—is to offer them still another bad lesson. Why? Because it is false, as every adult knows; sex is inextricably connected to the psyche, to the soul...sexual intimacy changes things—it affects feelings, attitudes, one’s self-images, one’s view of another.” (Bennet quoted in Olsen)

Bennet has hit upon a truth seldom fully realized in our society today. Yet, this fact is acknowledged across the board. Dr. Brian Gaffney stated in *The Belfast Telegraph*, “It is important for young people to recognize that their sexual health and behavior has huge implications for other parts of their lives—both physically and mentally.” The United States federal government also acknowledges this in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, when they set aside \$250 million for abstinence education. This education includes curriculum teaching that sex before marriage is harmful, not only physically, but also mentally (Lerner). Anyone who has ever been left by a boyfriend or girlfriend can testify that emotional pain is always left behind. In a defunct sexual relationship, then, that pain must be that much greater. As Wanda Boyenga, the director of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse, has said, “Condoms don’t protect the heart” (Gardner). Saving sex for marriage is the only solution to this problem.

Economic Costs of Premarital Sex

Does this increase in sexual activity—and its associated side-effects—have any economic effects? Certainly. The results of sex have a price tag—taking care of new children, abortions, and medical care for those with STDs, to name just a few. In fact, the cost of taking care of and supporting AIDS victims alone was projected in the fall of 1991 to be \$8 to \$10 billion dollars (Olsen). Not every victim of HIV is sexually active—but promoting abstinence would make a

huge dent in that cost.

The Immorality of Premarital Sex

Morality can quickly come into play when discussing abstinence education. Barbara Huberman, Advocates for Youth's director of sexuality education in Washington, D.C., says, "This is an issue of church and state. Waiting until marriage for sex is basically a religious view" (quoted by Lerner). Abstaining may or may not be a religious view—that is not the point. Ted Koppel made a clear point during a graduation address he gave at Duke University:

We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. 'Shoot up if you must, but use a clean needle.' 'Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish, but wear a condom.' No! That answer is no. Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or dying in an AIDS ward, but no *because it's wrong*, because we have spent 5000 years as a race of rational human beings, trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is a howling reproach." (quoted by Bennet)

This should be the core of abstinence education. Not everyone may agree with it—so let the other dangers that premarital sex incurs convince them of the need for abstinence education. But abstinence education without any definition of right or wrong will rarely accomplish anything. As a high school senior has adeptly noted, "No one says not to do it, and by default they're condoning it" (Bennet). Our youth want higher moral standards (*CitizenLink Press Releases*). Abstinence is one of those standards.

Abstinence Education Works

There are many reasons why abstinence education is a good idea for American schools. One major question remains: does a sex education system

promoting abstinence and *only* abstinence work? This, too, has been controversial over recent years. Many have been insistent that it does not. There are, however, many examples of abstinence education working in today's society.

In 1997, Add Health surveyed a total of about twelve thousand youth. Their results were quite encouraging. Teenagers who have taken a pledge of chastity are less likely to engage in sex than those who have not. (Also attributing to this factor, according to the survey, were healthy relationships with parents who did not approve of contraception.) A Centers for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior survey showed a 10 percent increase in abstinence from 1995 to 1998. (In 1995, 53.1% of teens engaged in sex, versus 48.4% in 1998.) (*CitizenLink Press Releases*). This has likely been a positive effect of the increase in abstinence-only sex education of late. There are even more specific examples:

- *Sexuality, Commitment, and Family*. This is an abstinence-only program developed by Teen-Aid, Inc. In San Marcos Junior High, San Marcos, California, the number of pregnant girls was reduced from 147 to 20 within two years of using the curriculum.
- *Project Taking Charge*. The eighth grade class at Nathan Hale Middle School in Crestwood, Illinois typically has "a number" of pregnant students. After three years of this program, the school graduated three classes without any pregnancies.
- "Best Friends." In Washington, D. C., there is an average of twenty to seventy girls becoming pregnant in a group of four hundred. Of those involved in this program, that number has been reduced to one.
- *Postponing Sexual Involvement*. Research has indicated that those involved in this program at Emory University are less likely to be

sexually active than those not in the program.

- *AANCHOR*. Participants in this program had more abstinent attitudes than those not in the program.
- *FACTS*. This abstinence-based program has reported positive results on a before-and-after survey of participants' "affirmation of abstinence," "rejection of permissiveness," and "future orientation and peer support for abstinence" (*Family Research Council: In Focus*).

These are just a few examples of abstinence education accomplishing its goal: reducing teenage sexual activity. What do they show? Abstinence education works.

Unfortunately, it is not perfect. Melvin Anchell has written, "Nature never intended for children to go to school to learn how to mate. And nature never intended that children should be taught from a book how to feel affection...We never used to have to teach young people how to mate" (94, 97.) This is true. Ideally, this education should come from the home (Bennet quoted in Olsen). But, given the sexual rampage that has swept our nation, our young people need to be warned. They need to know the truth—the dangers, the expenses, the pain, and the immorality of premarital sex. The statistics indicate that sexual education in the home is not happening at a satisfactory level. Abstinence education is an effective solution. It can work in American schools today, and it should be used.

The Critics

The critics of abstinence education have raised several interesting points. Some of these have already been addressed. There are several others that require a response.

The first is best expressed by Jeff Stryker when he writes that the

“disconnect between the abstinence-until-marriage aspirations and reality of adolescent (and adult) sexual behavior is profound.” It is true that the ideals of abstinence education are high. And, most of the American population does not practice them (Stryker). But, that does not reflect what the average American teenager truly wants. An Emory University survey of one thousand sexually active girls showed that 84 percent wanted *most* to know “How to say ‘no’ without hurting the other person’s feelings” (*Family Research Council: In Focus*).

Debra Haffner, the president of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), says that “One of the things we need to do desperately is to be honest with young people. In the same way that we have to support the virgins in America’s classrooms, we need to help young people who are sexually active, whether adults like it or not” (Gardner). This is obvious—today’s young people do need as much support and help as they can get. However, support and help do not mean agreement. Those who are sexually active need to be told that they are living dangerously and living *immorally*. Yes, they need help to be as safe as possible, whatever they decide—but they cannot be denied the truth.

Finally, critics of abstinence education often share this opinion with Howard Engel, the interim co-director of AIDS Vancouver: “Abstinence is a viable choice. But I don’t think it is realistic to expect that it is going to happen” (Steele). The youth of America are trusted to drive, to vote, to hold jobs, and to go to war. Yet, they are not to be trusted when it comes to holding back their sexual desires? Amy Stephens had it right when she said, “Society tells kids that their hormones and passions are uncontrollable. Why is the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] surprised when teens take adults at their word and engage in risky behavior?” (*CitizenLink Press Releases*).

Conclusion

Clearly, abstinence not only should be taught, but *must* be taught in today's public schools. What other option does America have? Today's youth have tried the traditional methods of sex education, and sex-ed failed. Now is the time to give a clear message: save sex for marriage. Safe-sex is not the answer. Premarital sex can hurt far too much—physically, emotionally, mentally, and economically. Our kids deserve the truth—will we be strong enough to tell them?

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