

## UNAIDS Report: "Sexual Health Education Does Lead to Safer Sexual Behaviour."

### Talking Points

On October 22, 1997 The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released a review of 68 studies on sexuality and sexual health education in a variety of countries, including the United States, France, Mexico, and others. The review, the most comprehensive and current in the sexual health field, confirms what we have always known: **sexuality education for young people promotes safer sexual practices and behaviors**, and does not increase sexual activity in young people.

The study found that responsible and safe sexual behaviors can be learned, and that while many education programs can provide information that increases students' level of knowledge, only "high-quality education" impacts behavior. "High quality education:"

- uses focused curricula and is clear in its statements about goals, the risks of unprotected sexual activities, and how to avoid risky behavior;
- incorporates learning activities that address the influences of society and the media on sexual behavior;
- teaches communication and negotiation skills;
- encourages open communication; and,
- is grounded in theories that emphasize the social nature of learning.

### TALKING POINTS

- This report confirms what Planned Parenthood has known through years of experience and from previous research: that balanced programs – those discussing both abstinence and contraception, including condoms – can reduce risky sexual behavior. The onset of intercourse is not hastened, and neither the frequency nor the number of sexual partners is increased.<sup>1</sup>
- In the United States, 47 percent of teens say they personally need more information on how to prevent AIDS and other STIs.<sup>2</sup> It is vital that Planned Parenthood and other educators and trainers receive the support to provide people of all ages with important, life-enhancing – often life-saving – information.
- When study after study shows that balanced, comprehensive programs are effective, and no studies have shown the effectiveness of abstinence-until-marriage programs, it is blatantly irresponsible of the federal government to insist on funding programs that teach only about abstinence. Most abstinence-until-marriage programs use fear, shame, and guilt to frighten young people away from their sexuality, and from contraceptives.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Kirby, "No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy." Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Princeton Survey Research Associates. "The 1996 Kaiser Family Foundation Survey on Teens and Sex: What They Say Teens Today Need to Know, and Who They Listen To." Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996.



- The \$250 million federal funding to states for abstinence-until-marriage programs is an enormous waste of taxpayer dollars. For years, professionals have known what makes programs effective, yet this expertise is ignored. The federal abstinence funding is an obvious attempt to give political cover to legislators who know abstinence-until-marriage programs do not work.
- Federal and local policymakers need to pay attention to the the research: abstinence is an important message to give to young people, but it can not be the only message. If we truly care about the health and well being of young people, we need to give them balanced and responsible programs.
- Planned Parenthood supports responsible sex education because it helps teens develop life skills and make healthy decisions.
- Abstinence-only programs avoid the real issues that teens face every day.
- Research shows that the only programs that help teens delay intercourse are those that include information about contraception.

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the only programs that help teens postpone sexual intercourse are those with a balanced message. Kids need information and skills to delay intercourse AND they need to know about contraception.

Because most teens have sex by the time they leave high school, they need accurate information to help prevent pregnancy and STDs.

By the time they leave high school, 72% of teens have had sex.

- The vast majority of Americans support responsible sex education.