

DISCUSSION GUIDE

for

*Abstinence Comes
to Albuquerque*

And

“Experts Answer
Frequently Asked Questions”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the new documentary film, *Abstinence Comes to Albuquerque*, a ninth grader tells her mother that she's heard some unusual things from a sexuality education program in her school. The family talks about their problems with the program, and a school board member speaks about its weaknesses. The film then profiles an abstinence-only-until-marriage program as well as a more balanced sexuality education program. Following the documentary are interviews with national experts on sexuality education and adolescent health.

This discussion guide is meant to help individuals and groups use the DVD for educational and advocacy activities that support balanced sexuality education in their communities. The guide is divided into three sections: "Background Information," "Using This Documentary" and "Experts Answer Frequently Asked Questions."

The first section provides background information to help you and those you work with understand the issues of sexuality education and adolescent health that are at the heart of the documentary.

In "Using This Documentary," you will find discussion questions and ideas for using this DVD for educational purposes with parents, teens, and professionals, and for advocacy purposes with community activists, school board members, and state and local policymakers.

The final section, "Experts Answer Frequently Asked Questions," contains a list of experts who are interviewed, and the questions they are asked. Viewers can access each expert's interview through the menu button on the DVD and can follow along as the experts answer these important questions.

*To order additional copies of the DVD,
contact: Orders@stuartproductions.com*

Abstinence Comes to Albuquerque provides a glimpse into a nationwide debate over what young people should be taught about sexuality. Through personal stories, community profiles, and expert interviews, the program highlights the differences between a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage approach and more comprehensive sexuality education.

This section provides some pertinent background information to help viewers better understand the issues played out in the documentary.

The Different Approaches to Sexuality Education

When discussing the sexuality education young people receive, many people refer to two distinct schools of thought: balanced and responsible sexuality education and abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. In reality, however, most schools in the United States fall somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, and programs are often called by a variety of different names.

The following terms and definitions provide a basic understanding of the types of sexuality education programs that are currently offered in schools and communities. Remember, however, that names can be deceiving. It is important to look past labels and find out what young people in your community really are, or are not, learning in their sexuality education programs.

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education:** Sexuality education programs that start in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. These programs include age-appropriate, medically accurate information on a broad set of topics related to sexuality, including human development, relationships, decision making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. They provide students with opportunities for developing skills as well as learning information.

- **Abstinence-based:** Programs that emphasize the benefits of abstinence. These programs also include information about sexual behavior other than intercourse, as well as contraception and disease-prevention methods. These programs are also referred to as abstinence-plus or abstinence-centered.
- **Abstinence-only:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors. These programs do not include information about contraception or disease prevention methods.
- **Abstinence-only-until-marriage:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of marriage. If contraception or disease-prevention methods are discussed, these programs typically emphasize failure rates. In addition, they often present marriage as the only morally correct context for sexual activity.
- **Fear-based:** Programs that are designed to control young people's sexual behavior by instilling fear, shame, and guilt. These programs rely on negative messages about sexuality, distort information about condoms and STIs, and promote biases based on gender, sexual orientation, marriage, family structure, and pregnancy options.

What the Research Says About Sexuality Education

Over the years, many researchers have turned their attention to sexuality education in an effort to determine which approaches work best in helping young people delay sexual activity and prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. This research clearly shows that a balanced approach to sexuality education is more beneficial for young people.

- **Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are not effective.** There are no published studies in the professional literature that show that abstinence-only programs will result in young people delaying sexual intercourse. In fact, at least one study has provided strong evidence that such a program did not delay the onset of intercourse.

Proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs often conduct their own in-house evaluations and cite them as proof that their programs are effective. Outside experts, however, have found these evaluations to be inadequate, methodologically unsound, or inconclusive.

A number of states have released evaluations of their statewide abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. The results have been disappointing. For example, a report released by the Minnesota Department of Health revealed that its statewide program, Minnesota Education Now and Babies Later (MN ENABL), has been ineffective in reducing adolescent sexual activity. The report concluded that, while well-implemented, "the intervention itself, however, was of low intensity and had low impact for students." Similar reports from Arizona, California, Iowa, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Texas have also found that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have little, if any, helpful impact on young people's sexual behavior.

- **Virginity pledges are not an effective strategy.** Although they were once the sole province of religious organizations, many secular groups and schools now host events where students sign "virginity pledges" as a way to promote premarital abstinence. Today, virginity pledges are also part of many abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula and programs.

Research has found that under certain conditions these pledges may help some adolescents delay sexual intercourse. When they work, pledges help this select group of adolescents delay the onset of sexual intercourse for an average of 18 months.

However, the studies also found that those young people who took a pledge were one-third less likely to use contraception when they did become sexually active than their peers who had not pledged. These teens are therefore more vulnerable to the risks of unprotected sexual activity such as unintended pregnancy and STIs, including HIV/AIDS. Further research has confirmed that although some students who

take pledges delay intercourse, ultimately they are equally as likely to contract an STI as their non-pledging peers. The study also found that the STI rates were higher in communities where a significant proportion (more than 20 percent) of the young people had taken virginity pledges.

■ **Balanced education about sexuality is effective.**

Numerous studies and evaluations published in peer-reviewed literature have found that education about sexuality (comprising programs that teach teens about both abstinence and contraception/disease prevention) is an effective approach to helping young people delay their initiation of sexual intercourse.

Reviews of published evaluations of sexuality education, HIV-prevention, and adolescent pregnancy-prevention programs have consistently found that they can

- ◆ delay the onset of intercourse
- ◆ reduce the frequency of intercourse
- ◆ reduce the number of sexual partners
- ◆ increase condom or contraceptive use

And that they

- ◆ do not encourage teens to start having sexual intercourse
- ◆ do not increase the frequency with which teens have intercourse
- ◆ do not increase the number of sexual partners teens have

These conclusions are based on a number of research studies, articles, and publications that may be very useful to you in your advocacy efforts. The citation for each article is listed below.

- Peter Bearman and Hannah Brückner "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse." *American Journal of Sociology* 106.4 (2001): 859-912.

- Peter Bearman and Hanah Brückner, "After the promise: The STI consequences of adolescent virginity pledges," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36.4 (2005): 271-278.
- Anne Grunseit, et al., "Sexuality Education and Young People's Sexual Behavior: A Review of Studies," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 12.4 (1997): 421-53.
- Doug Kirby, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy* (Washington: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, May 2001).
- Doug Kirby, *No Easy Answers* (Washington: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1997).
- *Minnesota Education Now and Babies Later* (MN ENABL) Evaluation Report 1998-2002.

Federal Funding for Sexuality Education

Despite this research, the federal government provides no funding for comprehensive sexuality education programs. Unfortunately, a great deal of federal money has been spent on unproven and potentially harmful abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. In fact, more than one billion taxpayer dollars have been spent on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs since 1981. Between 2000 and 2005, more than \$600 million was spent on these programs.

Programs that receive these federal funds must adhere to the following strict, eight-point definition of "abstinence education."

Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act, P.L. 104-193: For the purposes of this section, the term "abstinence education" means an educational or motivational program which:

- has as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
- teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children;
- teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only cer-

tain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;

- teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity;
- teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
- teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
- teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances, and
- teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Although the federal government has lent its seal of approval to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, the majority of the country actually supports a balanced approach. Numerous surveys of educators, parents, voters, and young people have found overwhelming support for teaching young people a wide-range of topics and providing medically accurate information.

- One study found that 93 percent of parents of junior high school students and 91 percent of parents of high school students believe it is very or somewhat important to have sexuality education as part of the school curriculum.ⁱ
- The same study found that 99 percent of parents of high school students believe HIV/AIDS is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools; 98 percent believe sexually transmitted diseases are an appropriate topic; 97 percent believe basic information about how babies are made, pregnancy, and birth are appropriate top-

ics; 93 percent believe that birth control and other methods of preventing pregnancy are appropriate topics; 85 percent believe information on how to use and where to get contraceptives is an appropriate topic; and 83 percent believe abortion is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.ⁱⁱ

- A 2002 poll of registered voters found that 90 percent of all respondents agreed that students should receive age-appropriate and medically accurate sex education that begins in the early grades and continues through twelfth grade.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, most major medical, public health, and education organizations also support this approach. In fact, more than 140 national organizations came together to form the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education (NCSSE), a group committed to medically accurate, age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education for all children and youth in the United States. Organizations that support comprehensive sexuality education include

- ◆ American Academy of Pediatrics
- ◆ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- ◆ American Medical Association
- ◆ American Nurses Association
- ◆ American School Health Association
- ◆ The Institute of Medicine
- ◆ National Education Association

Finding More Information

The next section of this guide focuses on how you can use this documentary to advance education and advocacy efforts.

Understanding the history of and debate surrounding sexuality education, as well as the arguments used on both sides, can help you in this work. For more information check out the following websites:

- ◆ www.communityactionkit.org
- ◆ www.siecus.org
- ◆ www.plannedparenthood.org
- ◆ www.ncsse.org

Young people might also want to check out www.teenwire.com.

USING THIS VIDEO

This section is designed to help individuals and groups use this video to encourage discussion and help support comprehensive sexuality education in their communities and schools. It provides ideas for working in education settings with young people and parents, as well as suggestions on how to use this DVD as an advocacy tool when working with state and local policymakers.

Education with Young People

This DVD is relevant to and could be screened in numerous high school classes—government, civics, English or language arts, health, family life, or sexuality education. It engages students in critical thinking about the needs of adolescents and the policies that have an impact on their health and education, and encourages young people to look at questions of free speech and separation of church and state. The documentary also raises issues of how decisions are made in the school community, and how students, parents, teachers, and administrators work to meet the needs of all the students.

Alternatively, you could show this film in an after-school program, to young people involved in community service activities, youth development programs, or any other community setting.

You might want to introduce the film to young people in the following way:

- “Sexuality education is an issue that is important to many people, but sometimes it can be hard for everyone to agree on how best to provide it. This film shows what happened in Albuquerque, New Mexico, when a student told her mother some of the things she was hearing from a program in her school. As you watch the documentary, pay attention to what the teenagers do, what the parents do, what the school board does, and what the professionals from local, state, and national organizations do about sexuality education for young people.”

After the group has seen the film, you might want to use the following questions to foster discussion.

- What was your reaction to seeing this film?
- At the end of the film, Sarah's father, Mr. Rodriguez, says that he thinks education should not be one-sided. Do you agree or disagree with his opinion? Why?
- Were you surprised to learn about the controversy over teaching an abstinence-only-until-marriage program in the school? Why or why not?
- There were two groups of students shown in the film: the peer educators who were teaching abstinence in Socorro and the peer educators in Albuquerque who were teaching about contraception. What did you think about the work each group was doing?
- The New Mexico secretary of health said that they decided to use the abstinence money to teach students in the sixth grade and under. Why do you think they made this decision? Do you think it was a wise decision? Why or why not?
- In her interview, Leslee Unruh, the director of the Abstinence Clearinghouse, says, "In reality kids are NOT going to have sex?" Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- What do you think students in our community need for sexuality education?
- In this film, a parent complained to the school board about something she didn't like. We saw that there were school board members and a local doctor who agreed with her. Over the course of a year, many discussions happened with many people, and the state finally decided to change the way it was using the government money. How do you think that happened? What lessons can we learn from these actions?
- Who is responsible for making sure that public schools teach the information that you and your peers need to know?

Education with Parents

As is shown in the documentary, parents are concerned about their children's sexuality education. According to a recent study, 94 percent of parents believe it is appropriate for students to learn about birth control and how to deal with the issues of being sexually active, 91 percent think it is appropriate to teach about making sexual choices based on individual values, and 83 percent support students learning how to use condoms.iv

Presentations to parents can be organized in people's homes as "house parties"; bringing together people who know one another from their neighborhood, faith community, work, their children's school or recreational activities, or other social networks.

Meetings can also be organized through community centers, non-profit organizations, public libraries, or houses of worship. It is best to have these meetings as conversations rather than large community events, as people tend to be more comfortable talking in smaller groups. Try to keep the group to less than 20 people.

Once you have the group assembled, you might introduce the documentary by talking about the fact that young people get sexuality education from a variety of sources, including parents, their friends, school, the media, and other organizations. You can explain that since 1996 funding from the federal government has paid for programs that have as their "exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity" until marriage. Then go on to introduce the film by saying that this documentary shows what happened in Albuquerque when one of these federally funded programs was presented in a public school.

After screening the film, ask what people thought about it. You might want to use the following discussion questions to get the dialogue started.

- What type of sexuality education do you think is appropriate for public schools? What kind of sexuality education do you think young people in this community are receiving? (Hint: It can be helpful in this discussion to have informa-

tion about the sexuality education that is offered in local schools, if any.)

- Do you think our community's schools are meeting the needs of the students?
- What did you think about Susan and Dario Rodriguez, the parents in the film, and their complaint to the school board? Would you ever complain to the school board if you disagreed with its approach to education? Do you think it would have an impact?
- What do you think education about human sexuality should be trying to achieve?
- Do you think abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are appropriate in our community? Why or why not?
- In the film, Ms. Grisham, the state secretary of health, expressed concerns about the federal requirements to talk about sex only in marriage. Many students in this community and across the country come from homes where there aren't two, married parents. What do you think about this federal requirement and Ms. Grisham's comments?
- Who are the officials who control the policies about what gets taught in our community? (Hint: many parents might not know; it can be helpful in this discussion to have this information available.)
- What do you think you can do to influence them?

If you have enough time, you might also want to show parents all or some of the interviews with experts on the accompanying DVD. You can select individuals or the questions they answer to highlight points that have come up during the parents' discussion.

Education with Advocates and Policymakers

There are many decision makers in your state and community who can have a direct impact on sexuality education, including state legislators, school board members, and school district administrators. This documentary can be used as a tool for organizing advocates in your

community and mobilizing support from policymakers at all levels.

Advocacy efforts are most successful when they involve diverse members of the community. Therefore, you might want to use this film to introduce the topic to a variety of community members and encourage them to take action. Some ideas on how to do this include

- Organize a viewing at the local library. Invite the PTA and other parent organizations. Use the events in the documentary to highlight how important parents are in advocacy efforts. Ask participants what they might be able to do to help support comprehensive sexuality education in your community.
- Contact local public health and education organizations and arrange a time to show the DVD to their board members and staff. Ask them what their organization can do to advocate on this issue. (Hint: Many of these organizations are probably working on these issues already and you might also want to find out how you can contribute to their efforts.)
- Organize a viewing for young people. Young people are obviously the ones most affected by decisions about sexuality education and as such they can be powerful voices in this debate. Invite local young people from your community to view the documentary and follow it with a discussion/training about how they can be advocates.

Once you have organized members of your community, you will want to bring this issue to the attention of state and local policymakers, as ultimately these individuals have control over the messages young people will learn. This documentary can be a great first step in introducing the topic to policymakers, many of whom are likely unfamiliar with the debate over sexuality education. Some ideas of how to do this include

- Send a copy of the DVD to key state legislators, especially those who oversee funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Make sure to include a cover letter explaining who you are, your position on sexuality education, and specific ideas on how the legislator can support such pro-

grams. (For example, you might ask that the legislator vote against funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs or sponsor a bill to mandate that all information given in sexuality education programs is medically accurate.)

- Organize a viewing of the film at the statehouse. Invite prominent members of the legislature to speak at the event. Bring community members from each legislator's district to underscore how important this issue is to their constituency. Also consider bringing young people who can talk about the education their peers need and how the state is (or is not) helping them become sexually healthy.
- Send a copy of the DVD to all school board members. Once again, include a cover letter explaining who you are and your position on sexuality education. Include local statistics on teen pregnancy and STIs or stories from students or teachers in your local school. Tell the school board members what type of education young people in your community are receiving (it's hard to believe, but they might not know) and let them know whether a change is needed.
- Organize a viewing for school board members or candidates for the school board. This viewing could be at someone's home, the local library, or a featured part of a regular school board meeting. Invite local public health experts and young people to introduce the film and the issue. Ask school board members for their reactions and opinions on sexuality education once they have seen the film. Make sure that there are a number of parents and community members present for this discussion—remember, members of the school board are elected to their positions and they need to keep their constituents happy in order to remain members of the school board.

EXPERTS ANSWER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Throughout your education and advocacy efforts, questions will no doubt come up about sexuality education, virginity pledges, adolescent pregnancy, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and domestic and international policy. Many of these questions are answered by experts in the DVD that accompanies the documentary. The following list of questions can help you determine which interviews contain the information you are searching for; simply use the DVD's menu to jump to that interview.

Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality Education

DEBORAH M. ROFFMAN, HUMAN SEXUALITY EDUCATOR
AUTHOR, *SEX AND SENSIBILITY: THE THINKING PARENT'S*
GUIDE TO TALKING SENSE ABOUT SEX

- What do you think about the controversy around abstinence-only education?
- How do you see American attitudes toward teens and their sexuality?
- What is your opinion about federally funded abstinence-only programs?
- How do you approach the children you teach?
- Our culture defines sex primarily as vaginal intercourse. Why do you think that's wrong?
- What does "friends with benefits" and "hooking up" mean?
- Doesn't the abstinence-only message help to counter the media's message about sex?
- What's the responsibility of schools in this debate?
- How do you approach kids when you teach sexuality?

WILLIAM SMITH, VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC POLICY, SEXUALITY INFORMATION AND EDUCATION COUNCIL OF THE U.S. (SIECUS)

- When did the federal government begin funding abstinence education?
- How does the government decide who to give this money to? Are there any restrictions?
- What does it say about condoms?
- I've heard people say that for every \$1 spent on abstinence education, \$12 is spent on comprehensive sex education, is that true?
- Do you believe that abstinence programs are effective?
- Do you agree that the conversation about reproductive health issues has changed to include more and more about abstinence?

MICHAEL MCGEE, VICE PRESIDENT FOR EDUCATION, PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION OF AMERICA

- In your opinion, what kind of sex education do parents want for their kids?
- At Planned Parenthood, how much of the conversation is about abstinence?
- So, what is your opinion of abstinence-only education?
- In your opinion, why have teen pregnancy rates dropped so dramatically?
- How would you compare American attitudes toward teen sexuality to attitudes in some other countries?
- In the film we just saw about sexual education in Albuquerque, New Mexico, your local affiliate works with kids for a peer-to-peer approach. How important is this?
- I understand that some of Planned Parenthood's programs encompass more than sexual education. Can you give some examples?
- How concerned are you about the federal money being

spent on abstinence-only education programs?

- Beyond comprehensive sexuality education, what's your message to young people?

Frequently Asked Questions About Virginity Pledges

DR. PETER BEARMAN, DIRECTOR, PAUL F. LAZARFELD CENTER FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

- Is it possible to estimate how many people have pledged to remain virgins?
- How did it begin?
- What kind of kids tend to pledge virginity?
- Do virgin pledgers remain virgins?
- Does the 18-month delay work for all kids who pledge virginity?
- But any delay by kids of any age is a good thing isn't it?
- I have heard that virgin pledgers sometimes practice risky behavior. Is that true, and if so, how is that possible?
- How do virgin pledgers define sex?
- What does that mean in terms of public health issues?
- Why do you think teen sexual activity has dropped in this country?

Frequently Asked Questions About Adolescent Behavior

DR. JOHN SANTELLI, PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL POPULATION AND FAMILY HEALTH, MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

- Is abstinence education as defined by the federal government restrictive, in your opinion?
- But abstinence is the preferred choice, isn't it?
- I hear there's been a big drop in teen pregnancy rates. If

so, by how much?

- That's an incredible drop. Why did it happen?
- Do you mean that the abstinence programs caused the drop in teen pregnancy or abstinence as a behavior?
- What role are kids playing?
- So if teen pregnancy rates are down, are sexually transmitted diseases also down?
- What are some of the effects of these abstinence-only programs?

Frequently Asked Question About Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

LESLEE UNRUH, PRESIDENT, THE ABSTINENCE CLEARINGHOUSE

- How do you define abstinence?
- Why not teach abstinence along with information about condoms and STI's ... what some people refer to as "abstinence plus"?
- So, what should be taught about condoms?
- In reality, many people will have random sex, won't they?
- What do you teach single mothers about abstinence?
- One of your goals is to undo the sexual revolution. Do you think you have been successful?
- Are you willing to work with those who advocate comprehensive sex education?
- What role should parents play in all this?

Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. International Policy

**SUSAN COHEN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS,
GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE**

- What is the United States international policy regarding

sexual education?

- I have heard about a dramatic drop in HIV in Uganda. What is that attributable to?
- To what extent do you think programs promoting abstinence were a cause for the drop in HIV prevalence?

ⁱ *Sex Education in America* (Washington, DC: National Public Radio, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Kennedy School of Government, 2004).

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data from public opinion survey conducted by Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates for the Othmer Institute at Planned Parenthood of NYC (February 2002). For more information, see <http://www.othmerinstitute.org/press/press5.html>.

^{iv} *Sex Education in America*.