

Abstinence-Only Sex Ed

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Yesterday, my 14-year-old sister brought home a video & curriculum from her Family Life class (which is sex ed, for those of you who didn't grow up in Virginia's public school system). According to the accompanying letter, it's something for the whole family to review and go over with her. So, I flipped through it last night, curious to see what they were teaching her.

Now, I haven't been in a sex ed class for many years (almost a decade, actually), but I remember hearing the usual stuff about contraception, how things work, etc, and I was expecting roughly the same thing from this material. However, much to my disappointment, it's an abstinence-only curriculum. Thirty-five pages about how not to have sex before marriage, and the only information about contraception says that contraception is basically useless. Nothing about the different methods of protection, no numbers to back up their claims, not even any information about STDs (except to say that they exist and are the punishment for premarital sex).

I had heard about these sorts of programs before, but I never really noticed how absolutely ridiculous they were. Studies have proven that abstinence-only sex ed curricula are completely ineffective at lowering pregnancy rates, and in most states where they are taught (like Texas, Dubya's home state), the pregnancy rates increased dramatically. Teenagers are going to have sex no matter what they're told, and those who don't probably wouldn't be having sex anyway. So, if kids are going to have sex regardless of what they're taught, why aren't we teaching them how to be safe about it? At least then they'd be getting some useful information out of having to sit through the class.

Also, there was no mention at all about masturbation, something that virtually everyone does or has done. Yet, as common as it is, kids generally feel very guilty about it, especially girls. This should not be a taboo subject, especially for teens. What happens if something goes wrong, or an injury results? What if a kid is too embarrassed to talk to someone, and ends up with a more serious problem or permanent disfigurement that could have been prevented?

And what about homosexuality? Statistically, at least 10% of these students are struggling with their sexual orientation in addition to the usual teenage bullshit that accompanies middle/high school. Additionally, 1/3 of teen suicides are committed by kids who were ostracized because they thought they were gay/bisexual, and gay students have much higher rates of depression than their straight peers. So, shouldn't a sex ed class have at least a tiny mention about homosexuality, something to help these kids not feel so excluded?

Thanks to the interference of the fundamentalist right-wingers, these classes that are meant to help students do nothing more than hurt them. Kids are taught outright lies about contraception, they learn nothing about things that are actually relevant, and gay teens are completely excluded as if they didn't exist. This is not an acceptable state of affairs. If you have teenage kids, let the school know that their sex ed program is complete and utter crap, and then teach your kids what the school left out. Or, if you can't handle doing that, point them at the internet. There are hundreds of websites out there that teach sex ed the right way, with real information, and a realistic approach, not some fantasy where every kid unconditionally obeys what the authorities say.