Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive sexuality education programs promote abstinence as the most effective way to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI) while also teaching accurate and age appropriate information on healthy relationships, contraception and STIs. Providing this information to adolescents allows them to make responsible decisions about sexual activity.

**FAST FACTS**

- Comprehensive sexuality education provides a complete message. It is a developmentally appropriate sexuality education that covers but is not limited to educating people about anatomy, sexual behaviors, pregnancy prevention strategies and gender roles.  
- Comprehensive sexuality education is effective in providing adolescents with information to make responsible choices concerning their sexual health as well as building knowledge, attitude and skills.  

**Many Americans support a comprehensive sexuality education program that includes lessons on abstinence as well as contraception.**

- Comprehensive sexuality education has shown a positive impact on the behaviors of adolescents, including:
  - An increase in the use of contraception
  - A decrease in the onset of sexual activity
  - A decrease in the number of sexual partners
  - A decrease in the frequency of sexual activity
- The characteristics of an effective sexuality program include:
  - Focusing on abstaining from sexual activity and/or using a form of contraception
  - Addressing social pressures to engage in sexual activity as well as refusal skills
  - Reducing sexual behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancy and STIs
  - Involving the participants in a manner that allows them to personalize the information
- Public opinion polls have shown that parents of middle school and high school students support a comprehensive sexuality program.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, Institute of Medicine, and Society for Adolescent Medicine, among others, support comprehensive sex education.
- Analysis of data from Youth Risk Behavior surveys found that sexual activity among high school youth declined significantly from 1991 to 1997, prior to large-scale funding of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, but changed little from 1999 to 2003 with federal funding of such programs.
- Public opinion polls of parents of middle school students and high school students show:
  - 93% and 91%, respectively, believe that it is very important or somewhat important to have sexuality education as part of the school curriculum.
  - 72% and 65%, respectively, believe that the federal government should fund comprehensive sexuality education programs.
  - They supported educating adolescents about condom and contraception use.
- 73% of adults and 56% of teens wish for more information about both abstinence and birth control or protection in schools.

**RESOURCES**

- Healthy Teen Network: [www.healthyteennetwork.org](http://www.healthyteennetwork.org)
- SIECUS: [www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)
- Community Action Kit: [www.communityactionkit.org](http://www.communityactionkit.org)
- Sex Ed Library: [www.sexedlibrary.org](http://www.sexedlibrary.org)
- Advocates for Youth: [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)
REFERENCES