

GET EDUCATED ABOUT SEX EDUCATION

THE CONCERN

- **The United States ranks highest among developed nations in rates of teenage pregnancy** and sexually transmitted diseases. Around 70 percent of pregnant teens drop out of high school, which is 3-4 times higher than the dropout rate for teens who do not become pregnant. These numbers are even higher for girls who are members of racial minorities.
- **Oregon law requires elementary and secondary schools to provide Comprehensive Sexuality Education** and instruction in infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and STD prevention and contraception. However, the plan of instruction must align with Oregon Statute and Rule and be developed by local community members, approved by local school boards and reviewed biennially.¹ Comprehensive Sexuality Education seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships.
- **Abstinence-only education does not lead to abstinent behavior.** The states with the lowest teen pregnancy rates are those that prescribe Comprehensive Sexuality Education and/or HIV education, covering abstinence alongside proper contraception and condom use.² “Abstinence until marriage” programs are significantly less successful in preventing teen pregnancies, and they discriminate against LGBT young people who can’t access same-sex marriage.
- **The reality is that more than half of the adolescent population is sexually active.** Abstinence-only education leaves the young people who are already sexually active uninformed, making it more likely for them to engage in risky behaviors.

THE FACTS

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education empowers young people** with the full range of honest and medically accurate facts to make an informed decision about what is best for them, whether it be abstinence or engaging in safer sex.
- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education gets results.** Thanks to improvements in contraceptive use and access to accurate sexual and reproductive health information, the U.S. teen birth rate dropped 9 percent between 2009 and 2010 to a record low. This sharp decline in births is accompanied by a decline in abortions.³ Even with dramatic reductions in pregnancy, birth and abortion rates among all racial and ethnic groups, disparities persist among black, white and Hispanic teens.
- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education does not encourage sex.** In fact, programs that include information about contraception and condoms, as well as abstinence, have been shown to help young people delay sexual initiation as well as protect themselves when they do have sex. Teens who receive Comprehensive Sexuality Education are not more likely to have sex than those who

¹ Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, Oregon State Profile Fiscal Year 2010

² Stanger-Hall KF, Hall DW (2011) “Abstinence-Only Education and Teen Pregnancy Rates: Why We Need Comprehensive Sex Education in the U.S.” PLoS ONE 6(10): e24658. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0024658

³ Guttmacher Institute, “New Government Data Finds Sharp Decline in Teen Births: Increased Contraceptive Use and Shifts to More Effective Contraceptive Methods Behind this Encouraging Trend,” Dec. 1, 2011

do not.⁴ Research has found that having condoms and contraceptives available does not make teens more likely to have sex.⁵

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education helps young people to identify their own values** and enables them to lead their lives according to these values.
- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education has widespread support.** The American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, Institute of Medicine, and Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, among others, have endorsed Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Local supporters include Oregon Youth Sexual Health Partnership, Planned Parenthood, Basic Rights Oregon, Cascade AIDS Project, and the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon.

GET INVOLVED

Comprehensive Sexuality Education is essential to help young people to prepare for healthy and fulfilling lives.

- **If you're an administrator...**
 - Ensure that policies, guidelines and implementation plans are in place to provide students with Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
 - Participate in the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey. Addressing health issues such as unintended pregnancy can greatly improve academic success, and the survey results can help members of the school community to make data-driven decisions and effectively address health-related barriers to learning.
 - Value cultural diversity, parents' opinion and parental support that will have a positive impact on the effectiveness of sexuality education in your school.
 - Support positive health outcomes for all students. Ensure linkage between the school sexuality education curricula and access to youth-friendly services.
 - Provide opportunities for training and group discussion for parents on how to talk openly about sexuality with their children, and stimulate good communication between parent and teachers on this issue.
 - Offer training and support to teachers to raise professional standards of delivering Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
 - Monitor how sexuality education curricula are implemented at your schools.
- **If you're a teacher...**
 - Advocate for Comprehensive Sexuality Education curriculum adoption and implementation for all grades.
 - Provide relevant, age-developmentally appropriate information by helping to clarify and develop values and support self-development and self-esteem, and by contributing to a positive approach to health and well-being.

⁴ Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001. And Alford S. *Science & Success: Programs that Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections*. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, 2007.

⁵ Guttmacher S, Lieberman L, Ward D, et al. Condom availability in New York City public high schools: relationships to condom use and sexual behavior. *Am J Public Health* 1997; 87:1427- 1433.

- Offer a comprehensive approach to address sexuality and sexual relationships.
 - Participate in trainings to prepare yourself for questions from young people.
 - Keep yourself and your health teacher peers accountable.
 - Partner with parents and school health staff.
- **If you're a parent...**
 - Attend your local school board meetings and testify in support of Comprehensive Sexuality Education programs.
 - Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper to express your views.
 - Most importantly, talk to your kids. When parents have conversations with their children about sex and contraception well before the children become sexually active, the initiation of sex may be delayed and the use of condoms or other contraceptives increased.⁶
 - Take action at AdvocatesForYouth.org, which champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health.
 - Join groups like "Get the Conversation Started: How to Talk with Your Kids About Sex" on MightyBell.com
- **If you're a student**, join the School Health Advisory Council or advocate for one at your school. You can also join the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network's Youth Advisory Council or other peer education/advocacy groups that raise awareness about youth health.

⁶ Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2007.