
An Importance Of Sex Education For Children in united States

America is, in many ways, bound to a puritanical mindset. There are many subjects that members of this country refuse to let change, or even be discussed at times. Whether it is debating the existence of angels or keeping the "Christ" in Christmas, this is simply the way our country has and will probably continue to be. One such subject of great contention is the ever popular discussion of sexual education. As a nation that is guided by a heavy amount of religious beliefs (as made evident by any one in three cars that wield an "abortion is murder" bumper sticker) citizens across country can be quick to reject new and inventive ways to approach tradition-laden subjects. In the past 50 years, research on the effectiveness of sex education methods has started to show a significant change in the commonly held principles of our nation, and has even suggested that things may need to be revised if we are to fix some of our glaring statistics regarding teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. After attending an event on sexual assault in the social sciences building auditorium last Tuesday, September 22nd, I decided to do some research of my own as to which method of sexual education is best for this country-- after the presentation made it abundantly clear that many children in this nation grow up confused and uninformed about sex and consent. It was after I did some research on my old school district's sex ed policies, as well as some articles from the SIECUS (Sexuality Information Education Council of the United States) and the National Center for Biotechnology Information that I realized that abstinence-only sex ed programs not only fail to prevent pregnancy, but are ineffective when it comes to delaying vaginal sex among young adults, all while failing to provide the healthy knowledge of how to practice safe sex.

If the world were perfect, it is fair to say that many people would prefer to never have to explain sexuality to children. Both parties would even agree that the process is usually very uncomfortable, and as someone who experienced this modern sex education program, I can provide anecdotal evidence to support that claim. In order to apply something to this research, I had to do some digging on the sex ed policy of my original school district, Francis Howell. However, upon researching Francis Howell's sex ed policies, I found that they have made it very discrete, if it even exists on any public level. With this uncertain set of results, I have to draw on my experience with the district's sex ed program. First, though, it is important to recognize the definitions of these programs. "Abstinence-only programs refer to curriculums that only teach the principle of abstaining from sex until marriage, and never include discussion of contraceptives or safe sex practices. Comprehensive programs can include this abstaining principle, but must also teach children how to properly use contraceptives and inform them on how to prevent STD's or pregnancy" (SIECUS 2008). When I was in middle school, I recall being taught quite a bit about the various STD's and how you can catch them, but when it came to contraceptive use and safe sex, I never heard mention of the word "condom". Instead, we were told that the only safe way to prevent pregnancy or STD's was to abstain until marriage. So, with this in mind, I suppose my school loosely fell into the realm of comprehensive sexual education.

Having learned this, I decided to read up on the costs and benefits of both programs. I ended up at the website for the Sexuality Information Education Council of the United States, with an article from March of 2008. The article explained the findings of a group of Washington

University researchers, who studied the adolescent population as a whole-- which is a rather unique method of studying this type of topic (educational styles). Not to waste any time, the article was quick to explain the immediate statistics of their findings-- and the results were quite jarring. When it came to pregnancy rates, they found that young people who received comprehensive sex education were “significantly less likely to report a teen pregnancy compared to those who received no sex education” (SIECUS 2008). They then compared it with abstinence, and found that “in comparing abstinence-only programs with comprehensive sex education, comprehensive sex education was associated with a 50% lower risk of teen pregnancy” (SIECUS 2008). Both of these statistics serve to support claims that comprehensive programs are more effective at explaining the risks of unprotected sex, and that knowing these risks is what truly impacts the likelihood of teen pregnancy and early unprotected sex. But, to further press the point, they found that “Comprehensive sex education was marginally associated with reduced reports of vaginal intercourse” (SIECUS 2008). This one is particularly interesting because it calls out a fear of many abstinence program supporters. These supporters like to suggest that if you teach a child about condom use, or that there’s a pill that prevents pregnancy, that the children will be encouraged to engage in these activities. The effect seems to be the opposite, though. If this were the case, then why is it that comprehensive programs have lead to a delay in starting vaginal intercourse? The question then shifts, and one must ask themselves, how has abstinence-only education come this far with so much research to fight it?

In an article written by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, I learned that the fault lies on congress. In 2006 and 2007, the federal government acted on legislation that provided 176 million dollars per year to these programs, and they even specified that such programs were forbidden to mention contraceptives or safe methods of sex. This was not always the case, as there was a brief time when we switched over to what was referred to as “the first large-scale federal investment dedicated to preventing teen pregnancy through research- and evidence-based efforts” (Stranger-Hall 2011). But, the funding for abstinence only education was reinstated and given a mandatory spending of 250 million dollars over 5 years in 2010. Not as much as the years prior, but legislators were hellbent on getting this education program funded for a longer period of time. With government funded national research committees referring to this period as a time when congress supported something based on scientific evidence and calling it unique, there is clearly some blame to be placed on the puritan culture our nation wears like a blemish-- and that blemish is shining in congress right now.

The fact of the matter is, there is a wealth of evidence to prove that comprehensive sex ed programs are the ones that effectively teach children the risks of unsafe sex, and actually get the point across that you either need to wait until you are prepared or you are able to do it properly. Parental committees are always quick to suggest that these non-abstinence programs are corrupted, or perverted, but if you look at the data you can see that the puritanical way appears to be handed down by a tradition of ignorance.