



BALANCED AND RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

We are all sexual throughout our lives, and learning about our sexuality is an integral part of living. Sexuality education guides our understanding of sexual behavior. It helps us understand the physical, intellectual, and emotional realities of our "femaleness" and "maleness" and our relationships with one another. It also helps us understand our sexual and reproductive health care needs. Sexuality education takes place in our homes, in classrooms, on the streets, at work and play, in youth groups, and in religious settings. And a lot of it comes from the media. However, an increasing number of the sexual messages in our culture are used to sell products and are often distorted and have little to do with our real lives. As parents, teachers, and caregivers, we want our children to have accurate, healthy, and useful information about sexuality. Planned Parenthood, which has maintained the nation's largest and most respected network of professional sexuality educators and programs for more than 80 years, has learned that school sexuality education programs are most effective when they are responsible, balanced, and inclusive. By providing resources, consultation, training and technical assistance, we support families, schools, and communities throughout America in their efforts to provide these programs.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education combines the efforts of parents, educators, and students. It recognizes that the most important sexuality educator is the

parent, and it assists parent/child communication by providing parents and children with information as well as models for conversation. It helps youngsters understand that the family is a source for guidance in developing responsible, honest, and respectful values about sex and sexuality. Planned Parenthood has, for more than 20 years, led a national coalition of 50 organizations that provide sexuality education programs and publications for families. National Family Sexuality Education Month is celebrated every October by this coalition.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is empowering. It provides young people with useful information to help them make healthy choices about the full range of sexual expression, including abstinence. It enables people to become sexually literate so that they can communicate their sexual feelings and decisions to one another. It relieves adolescents' concerns about being "normal" by providing information that helps young people take pride and comfort in their sexuality.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is moral — not moralistic. It validates important commonly accepted values. By teaching young people to be honest, healthy, and respectful about sex and relationships, balanced and responsible education fosters acceptance of responsibility for their sexual choices and supports ethical





relations with family and friends. It promotes respect for self, for others, for family, community and nation, and respect for differences. It does not promote a narrow or sectarian view of morality that would be inappropriate for the diverse population of public schools. Religious teaching on sexuality is properly taught in the home, church, mosque, synagogue, or temple.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is practical and moderate. It reflects the real world and addresses sexual issues free of stereotype, misinformation, and mythology about race, ethnicity, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. It acknowledges the richness of our culturally diverse society and varied family structures. It answers the real questions of young people and addresses their real needs, without promoting extreme social, political, or religious views.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is comprehensive. It is accurate, balanced, and age-appropriate. It is straightforward about the physical, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality and sexual behavior, and locates sexuality in that broad context, not simply in biological mechanics. It is free of titillating or provocative descriptions. It includes information about the benefits of delaying intercourse and the emotional and physical risks of unprotected and too-early sexual intercourse. It helps young people to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills that they need to become healthy adults.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is positive. It acknowledges that sexual experience can be enriching and satisfying whether for pleasure or procreation. It acknowledges that people express

themselves sexually in different ways at different times of their lives. It supports young people's pride in their own bodies. It increases people's understanding of sexuality as a normal, healthy, lifelong aspect of human development. It recognizes that ignorance, fear, and shame cause people to make sexual decisions that may endanger their well being and their lives.

Balanced and responsible sexuality education is effective. It helps young people grow into healthy adults. Especially when combined with loving, secure homes that encourage open communication about sexuality, responsible sexuality education helps young people protect themselves against sexual abuse, sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancy. Reality-based sexuality education programs will not solve all our personal and social problems, but they can help us make informed choices regarding our sexual and reproductive health. They encourage us to be honest, respectful, and responsible with ourselves and one another.

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