


**Planned Parenthood<sup>®</sup> Federation of America**  
**Clergy Advisory Board**  
**Statement in Support Of**  
***Comprehensive, Medically Accurate, and Age-Appropriate Sex Education***



As clergy, we have a responsibility to remind our congregations, our communities, and our elected leaders that our religious traditions view the body and the physical world as a sacred arena in which God acts. We believe that God blessed human beings with the opportunity to bear children as a sign not only of the sacredness of life but also as a sign of our capacity for God's gift of sexual intimacy.

The gift of sexuality is God-given, and so, too, is the moral imperative that we instruct our children, with due allowance for their age, so that they will understand their bodies and make wise choices about their sexual life, including the choice to be abstinent.

As religious leaders from many faiths, we counsel young people as they grapple with social pressures and difficult decisions. We spend time with families and teens through religious instruction, youth activities, confirmation, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and much, much more. We know that many of our youth are not getting the honest facts they need about sex. We believe it is immoral to lie to our children by giving them inadequate and inaccurate sex education or abstinence-only programs that fail to teach our teens how to prevent pregnancy and how to protect themselves from infections and abuse. As a result, in the name of morality, our young people are contracting sexually transmitted infections at unprecedented rates, having children that they are not prepared to care for, or dying from HIV/AIDS. Scientific data demonstrates that comprehensive sex education can delay first intercourse, reduce the number of sexual partners, and increase the use of condoms and contraception.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive sex education is a proven good; it would be morally wrong to withhold a proven medical benefit from our children.

When we are honest with our teens, they will respond to our candor by being honest with us. Comprehensive sex education strengthens family communication. When there is sound conversation about a sensitive matter like sex, teens will know who they can turn to, especially in their time of need. Stronger family ties, a benefit of comprehensive sex education, will serve teens and their loved ones well.

Public funding that exclusively supports abstinence-only programs discriminates against many religious denominations that support comprehensive sex education. Many of our houses of worship provide age-appropriate, medically-accurate, comprehensive sex education; we have led such programs ourselves. These programs emphasize abstinence as the best way to keep oneself safe and healthy. Many young people take this path and we offer them our support and encouragement. However, experience shows that in any group

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby D. *Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2007.

of teens, some will turn in a different direction — we are morally responsible for them as well.

This year alone, nearly four million teenagers will contract sexually transmitted infections and an additional 750,000 will become pregnant. For the sake of our young people, we urge Congress and state legislatures to heed the expert conclusions that abstinence-only programs do not stop or even delay teenagers from having sex nor do they have any positive impact on reported rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>2</sup>

As clergy seeking to improve the well-being of the young people we serve, we want to see comprehensive sex education become a reality. We believe that providing comprehensive sex education is a moral imperative for a responsible and just society in the care and instruction of our youth. Anything less is to fall far short of our moral obligation to the health and well-being of the young lives entrusted to us by God.

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The Planned Parenthood Federation of America Clergy Advisory Board (CAB), launched in 1994, leads a national effort to increase public awareness of the theological and moral basis for advocating reproductive health and justice. CAB members are dedicated pro-choice clergy from different denominations and communities throughout the U.S. who work with Planned Parenthood at the national and state levels to further the goal of full reproductive freedom for all women and men.

*November 2007*

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<sup>2</sup> Jayson, Sharon. "Sex Education Clash Churns Over Grants, Study: Abstinence Teaching Ineffective." *USA TODAY*, April 16, 2007, pp. 5D.