



Abstinence-Only Education & Sexual Violence

What do popular abstinence-only-until-marriage programs teach teens about sexual violence?

Abstinence-Only Programs Ignore Sexual Violence

☒ Sexual violence is not directly addressed in most abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula, marginalizing teens who may have experienced sexual abuse, harassment, or assault.

☒ These curricula do not provide referrals or resources regarding sexual violence, missing a critical educational opportunity. As a result, teens who experience sexual violence may believe there is nowhere to turn for help.

☒ Abstinence-only curricula use fear-based tactics to encourage teens to remain abstinent, describing premarital sex as shameful, immoral, and harmful. Many programs place an emphasis on remaining “pure” or “chaste” for a future spouse. The omission of a discussion about sexual assault places the blame on survivors of sexual violence and sends the message that survivors should feel guilty or “impure” for having premarital sex, even though the sex they had was unwanted.

“Premarital sex is often associated with emotional problems like guilt, shame, fear, distrust, etc. A person may experience guilt from knowing that they have done something wrong.”

--*Reasonable Reasons to Wait* (Student Workbook, p.178)

“Guys say sex is more physical, they are driven by hormones and peer pressure. Girls say sex is an emotional experience, involving strong feelings.”

--*Choosing the Best LIFE* (Leader Guide, p.6)

“The girl may need to put on the brakes first in order to help the boy.” --*Reasonable Reasons to Wait* (Student Workbook, p.96)

Abstinence-Only Curricula Reinforce Harmful Gender Stereotypes & Blames Survivors

☒ Abstinence-only curricula depict boys as sexually uncontrollable and desiring sexual activity from any and all women. Male sexuality is discussed as separate from emotional intimacy or commitment. Even worse, such stereotypes ignore the fact that boys can experience sexual violence.

☒ Many abstinence-only programs depict girls in a “temptress” role. Girls are instructed not to provoke boys’ interest by flirting or wearing revealing clothes and are warned that girls have the responsibility to stop sexual activity. This harmful message implies that the girl is responsible for unwanted sexual activity because of her appearance or her actions.