



Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Not Just a Public Health Issue

In recent years, the federal government has increased spending for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in public schools. Meanwhile, comprehensive sexuality education programs have been pushed aside, leaving millions of students in the dark. Why should civil libertarians care?

Why Oppose Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education?

- ★ **State-Sponsored Religion.** Many federally-funded abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula were developed by religious groups and individuals whose views on sexuality are not shared by other religious and non-religious people. These programs are promoted in an effort to impose one set of values on public school students.
- ★ **Homophobia.** Many abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs only mention homosexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS, promoting harmful stereotypes. These programs deny gay and lesbian students information about their own identities.
- ★ **Censorship.** Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs promote widespread censorship of critical information. Health textbooks have been censored to comply with federal regulations, and teachers are often restricted from addressing certain “sensitive” topics, such as homosexuality and abortion—even when students ask about them.

Why Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education?

- ★ **A Positive Alternative to Abstinence-Only.** In order to effectively fight abstinence-only-until-marriage education, schools must be provided with a superior alternative—comprehensive sexuality education that teaches students about abstinence *and* contraceptive use.
- ★ **Separation of Church and State.** Comprehensive sexuality education provides students with balanced and accurate information, free of religious biases and value judgments.
- ★ **Gay and Lesbian Rights.** Accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity should be discussed as part of a normal and healthy sexuality.
- ★ **Free Speech.** Students deserve the right to know about their own bodies, and teachers have the right to provide accurate information. Supporting comprehensive sexuality education sends a strong message: censorship will not be tolerated.

The ACLU’s Unique Role. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs negatively affect a variety of groups that the ACLU has traditionally defended, including gays and lesbians and religious minorities. By supporting comprehensive sexuality education, the ACLU is in a unique position to connect a variety of individuals and groups, including students, parents, teachers, HIV/AIDS organizations, public health officials, gay and lesbian rights advocates, and health practitioners.