

139-3

Yesterday, D.C. officials unveiled a plan to reduce the District's arresting teen-pregnancy rate by half by 2005 — and well they should. "While the rate had been steadily declining since its peak of 238 per 1,000 in 1993, in 1999, the most recent year for which statistics are available, we saw the numbers in the other direction. We don't know yet if this represents a trend or an anomaly," said Brenda Miller, executive director of the D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Now, her comment begs the question. The bottom line, after all, is the fact that it does not matter whether the rise in teen pregnancies reflects a trend or anomaly.

So, let's examine the benefit of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the ABC's and a few painful realities of babies having babies.

- Seven out of 10 teens are ready to listen to you, their parents, talk about sex.
- Only one in three teen moms earns a high school diploma.
- The sons of teen moms are 13 percent more likely to end up in jail.
- The daughters of teen moms are 22 percent more likely to become teen moms.

■ The primary reason teen girls who remain virgins do so is because to do otherwise would be against their religious and moral values.

■ Parents rate high among teens as trustworthy and preferred information sources on birth control.

How did we get here? We relinquished our responsibility as parents. The longer version is that, in the 1960s, while all manner of wild oats were being sown, the federal government began turning its back on health education and buying into the mistaken argument that government-sponsored sex-education programs would solve the so-called crisis of un-

The ABC's of teen parenthood

What are the facts about abstinence vs. birth control?

planned births, teen pregnancy and venereal disease. So, instead of children being taught *not* to have sex, they were taught *how* to have sex. Moreover, Planned Parenthood wasn't the only organization spreading this message. Other messengers include the National Education Association, which is America's largest teachers union, and the PTA — and their voices eventually drowned out mom and dad's, as well as the voices of our spiritual leaders.

Funding for such "educational" programs has taken its toll. Our children suffer spiritually, because the stigma of out-of-wedlock births disappeared, and they suffered economically, too. Furthermore, according to practically every standardized measuring stick, they suffer academically, as well — as school dollars shifted from classroom fundamentals to special-interest crusades. Meanwhile, the costs for these how-to sex-ed programs skyrocketed. In 1968, for example, the federal government spent \$14 million on family planning services, and within one decade taxpayers were paying for such services to the tune of \$279 million. Yet, the results proved over and over again that these programs, if not part of the problem, were surely failures. "As sex education programs spread widely through the American education system during the 1970s, the pregnancy rate among 15- to 19-year-old females rose from approximately 68 per thousand

in 1970 to approximately 96 per thousand by 1980," writes Thomas Sowell in his 1995 book, "The Vision of the Anointed." He goes on to quote R. Sargent Shriver, founding director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, which led the charge for more government-funded sex-ed programs, from his 1978 congressional testimony: "Just as venereal disease has skyrocketed 350 percent in the last 15 years when we have had more clinics, more pills, and more sex education than ever in history, teen-age pregnancy has risen."



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Well, folks, back to the future. There is, according to the so-called experts, no conclusive data to prove that abstinence-only programs do or do not work. So there clearly is a need to study the abstinence-only issue, since it remains an integral mandate of welfare reform. But there is some data. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), a leader in how-to sex-ed advocacy, programs vary widely by region. For example, AGI reports that, while 55 percent of school districts in the South are most likely to have abstinence-only policies, school systems in the Northeast, including the District, are least likely to have abstinence only, relying instead on the how-to approach.

That fact alone should signal an alarm. Because, you see, while such liberal policies continue along the how-to course, the District continues to have the highest teen-pregnancy

rate (134.4 per 1,000 pregnancies) when compared to the 50 states, and the District's numbers, as Brenda said, are rising. Moreover, the District has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world — which is utterly shameful.

Indeed, the best way to talk to children is to speak to them directly, limit their options and draw parameters for them. Tell them straight up. "No, you cannot have sex," and explain why. And they need to be told "no" over and over again — just as Planned Parenthood, the PTA and the teachers' union keep telling us over and over again that sex education is the answer.

See, folks, just think for a moment about all that money we spend on teachers and counselors to explain the how-to's of sex. Then imagine what the countless federal, state and local tax dollars spent on sex-ed can do — how many textbooks, extra math and reading teachers, new science labs and technology that money could be used for. Think, for a moment, too, about the astronomical costs of welfare, remedial education programs and juvenile justice programs.

Seems to me that the message we've been sending is very loud. But can't you see that leaves teens too much wriggle room?

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