

ROBERT RECTOR

When Sex Ed becomes Porn 101

It's "Back To School" time again, and here's the first pop quiz. No, it's not for the kids. It's for parents, and they have to answer only one question: Do you know what your children are learning in sex-education classes? If you're like most parents, the answer is no. But if the program is billed as "abstinence-based," you probably don't feel particularly concerned. The important thing, as far as you're concerned, is your kids are being taught to say "no" to sex.

But are they? The fact is, nearly all of the government-funded abstinence-based or "abstinence-plus" programs delivered in schools nationwide contain little, if any, reference to abstinence. They may mention it briefly, but it's often presented as something that (wink, wink) kids in the "real world" will ignore.

Far worse, though, is what abstinence-plus programs do contain: explicit demonstrations of contraceptive use — especially condoms — and direct encouragement to experiment sexually.

This despite the fact parents consistently say they don't want their children exposed to such messages. A recent Zogby poll found 3 in 4 parents disapproved or strongly disapproved of abstinence-plus curricula. About the same number say they want their children to receive an authentic abstinence education.

More likely, though, their children are being exposed to programs such as "Focus on Kids" (which, like other abstinence-plus programs, is heavily promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Kids are told, among other things, to go on a "condom

hunt" to local stores to survey the various types of family planning methods and ask: "What's the cheapest price for three condoms?"

Focus on Kids also has teachers stage "condom races" between teams of students. (Warning: Explicit language ahead.) "Each person on the team must put the condom on the dildo or cucumber and take it off," the program says. "The team that finishes first wins." But intercourse isn't the only topic on the agenda. Teachers are told to have kids "brainstorm ways to be close. The list may include . . . body massage, bathing together, masturbation, sensuous feeding, fantasizing, watching erotic movies, reading erotic books and magazines . . ."

Unfortunately, Focus on Kids isn't the only program with such an approach. In "Becoming a Responsible Teen," or B.A.R.T., kids get an education not only in condoms but in lubricants: "If you were trying to find something around the house, or at a convenience store, to use as a [lubricant] substitute, what would be safe? Why? . . . Some 'grocery store' lubricants are safe to use if they do not contain oil: grape jelly, maple syrup and honey."

Then there's the ironically named "Be Proud. Be Responsible" program, which lists several ways teachers can show kids as young as 13 "how to make condoms fun and pleasurable." For example,

"Once you and a partner agree to use condoms . . . go to the store together. Buy lots of different brands and colors. Plan a special day when you can experiment. Just talking about how you'll use all of those condoms can be a turn-on."

And who knows where you'll be when the mood strikes? Perhaps that's why the CDC-approved "Reducing the Risk" program advises teachers to tell kids, while they're shopping for condoms, to "put down the store's hours, too, because it may be important to know where to get protection at some odd hours." There are also family-planning clinics, of course: Students who might worry about what Mom and Dad think are told, "you do not need a parent's permission . . . no one needs to know that you are going to a clinic."

It helps to engage in some "role playing," too, according to the "Be Proud. Be Responsible" program. Two females, "Tyceia" and "Felicia," are told to "begin negotiating safer sex" together. They've been "sexually active with males in the past," but now they can "accept" their bisexuality. Male students aren't excluded: "Gerald" is told that "Allen has never used condoms. You want to have sex with him, but not without using condoms."

It's bad enough that these sex-ed programs hide under an abstinence-plus label while completely undermining what most parents want for their children. But when they encourage indiscriminate condom use and sexual experimentation, they're sending kids a troubling message — that we expect them to be sexually active and approve of it, provided it's "safe." And it's all billed to you, the taxpayer. Is that what we want?



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