



## Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programming vs. Comprehensive Health Education

### What is Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programming?

Abstinence-only-until-marriage programming promotes abstinence from sexual activity without teaching basic facts about contraception and other preventative measures against unintended pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS.

### What are the Disadvantages of Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programming?

According to a report prepared by the Committee on Government Reform for Representative Henry A. Waxman in 2005, more than 80% of abstinence-only-until-marriage programming used by federal grantees contained false or misleading information. Specifically, the report found 5 major flaws in the programming:

- **False Information about the Effectiveness of Contraception**  
-“Pregnancy occurs one out of every seven times couples use condoms.”
- **False Information about the Risks of Abortion**  
-“5-10% of women who have legal abortions will become sterile.”
- **Blurred Lines between Religion and Science**  
-“Conception... occurs when one sperm unites with one egg....This is when life begins.”
- **Stereotypes about Boys and Girls Presented as Fact**  
-“Women gauge their happiness and judge their success on their relationships.”
- **Scientific Errors**  
-“24 chromosomes from the mother and 24 chromosomes from the father join to create this new individual” (the correct number is 23).

Many schools have found abstinence-only-until-marriage programs to be ineffective in decreasing unintended pregnancy and STI rates. When the Maryland Center for Maternal and Child Health evaluated its program in 2002, it found that the number of students who claimed they would remain abstinent and the number of students who practiced abstinence in the last year both declined.

These programs have not only proved ineffective, but detrimental to the health of students as well. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), one study on virginity pledges showed that young people who participated were one-third less likely to use contraception when they *did* become sexually active. (These are promises young people make – sometimes in an abstinence-only-until-marriage program – to remain abstinent until marriage.)

### What is Comprehensive Health Education?

Comprehensive health education includes information about abstinence, as well as facts about contraception and STI and HIV/AIDS prevention. In Massachusetts, the Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework includes 14 different health and wellness topics, including reproduction and sexuality. Visit <http://www.careforyouthma.org> to learn more.

### What are the Benefits of Comprehensive Health Education?

Comprehensive health education is essential in allowing students to protect themselves when making decisions they may *already* face. According to the 2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey of high school students, 45% had had sexual intercourse. Comprehensive health education will provide students with the information they need in order to keep themselves safe and healthy.