



Analysis of Comprehensive Sex Education Curricula Review

By: Project Reality

In May 2007, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a “Review of Comprehensive Sex Education Curricula,” a study commissioned by Senators Santorum and Coburn to review and evaluate federally supported comprehensive sex education programs.

The “comprehensive” or “abstinence-plus” curricula selected for this study were chosen based on the frequency and strength of endorsement received from the leading and recognized sexuality information organizations and resources. The purpose of the study was to inform federal policymakers of the content, medical accuracy and effectiveness of “comprehensive” sex ed curricula currently in use. The study includes summaries of each curriculum’s content.

Project Reality examined the study and summarized the findings into brief points for easy reference. In the points below, you will find overall findings of interest as well as specific points for each curriculum studied. Findings of this study indicate that although these programs are being promoted as “comprehensive,” they discuss condoms and contraception nearly **seven times more than abstinence**. In addition, there was virtually no effect on delaying sexual activity in children using these programs and no long term effects.

Overall Findings of Interest:

- Of the curricula reviewed, the curriculum with the most balanced discussion of abstinence and safer-sex still discussed condoms and contraception nearly **seven times more than abstinence**.
- The most common medical inaccuracy involved the **promotion of Nonoxynol-9**, which has been shown to increase the risk of STDs.
- Every curricula reviewed contained misleading statements about condom effectiveness – leading teens to believe condoms are more effective than they actually are.
- All curricula were evaluated by the curriculum authors themselves.
- Sample sizes in some of the evaluations were small and research design issues decrease the ability to draw conclusions from some of the evaluations.

- Often the impacts observed in evaluations were small and most often time impacts do not extend three or six months after a curriculum has been used.
- Only a couple of curricula show impacts on delaying sexual debut.
- **Seven of the nine curricula reviewed instructed and encouraged teens to shop for condoms.**
- **Seven of the nine curricula reviewed targeted African-American teens and focused on encouraging condom use among the African-American population.**
- **THERE WAS NO REFERENCE IN ANY OF THESE COMPREHENSIVE SEX ED CURRICULA TO THE EMOTIONAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL ACTIVITY.**

Detailed Review of Specific Curriculum:

1. *Be Proud Be Responsible*

Authors: L. Jemmott, J. Lemmott III, K. McCaffree, 2003

Distributed by: Select Media of New York

Target Audience: 13-19 year olds

- There are 77 references to abstinence/100% safe & effective; 495 references to condoms
- “Once you and your partner agree to use condoms, do something positive and fun. 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.”
- “Showering together is a green light (no-risk) activity”
- Inappropriate, detailed discussion about condom usage and fore-play on pages 81-128 (Can be very uncomfortable for youth, especially for those who are not sexually active)
- Effectiveness: no impact on whether participants engaged in sexual behavior, small sample size of all African-American males, no long-term follow-up

2. *Reach for Health*

Authors: L. O’Donnell, et al., 1994-95, 2003; In collaboration with The Education Development Center, Inc.

Distributed by: PASHA

Target Audience: Urban and minority youth in 7th and 8th grade

- Equal reference to words relating to abstinence as content related to condoms, etc.
- “Express your feelings with greater physical intimacy; touching without clothes on, touching the other person’s sexual organs, having sexual intercourse – vaginal, oral and anal

- Effectiveness: sexual activity at 6 month follow up was higher across the sample in both the study and control group

3. *Safer Choices 1 & 2*

Authors: K. Coyle, J. Fetro, 1998; In collaboration with the Center for Health Promotion R&D at the University of

Texas-Houston

Distributed by: ETR Associates

Target Audience: 9-10th Graders

- There are five mentions of the word abstinence, 45 references to the word safest and 7 references to “not having sex” in Program 1, 383 mentions of the word “condom”; five mentions of the word abstinence, 26 references to the word safest and 7 to “not having sex” in Program 2, 389 mentions of the word condoms.
- Includes condom shopping assignment
- Effectiveness: no impact on delaying initiation of intercourse, no impact on frequency of sex, no impact on number of partners, increased use of condoms at last sex

4. *AIDS Prevention for Adolescents in School*

Authors: S. Kasen, I. Tropp, H. Walter, R. Vaughan, et al., 2003; In collaboration with The HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, The New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University

Distributed by: the Program Archive on Sexuality, Health and Adolescence (PASHA)

Target Audience: 14-19 year olds

- There are no references to abstinence, committed relationships or marriage, no discussions on the benefits of abstinence; focuses largely on the acquisition and use of contraceptives
- Effectiveness: no impact on abstinence or delaying initiation of sex

5. *BART: Becoming a Responsible Teen*

Authors: Janet S. St. Lawrence, 1998, 2005; In collaboration with the Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center

Distributed by: ETR Associates

Target Audience: 14-18 year olds

- There are 19 references to abstinence; 262 references to condoms
- “Using condoms correctly is a central part to becoming a responsible teen”
- Does not provide elaborate details on condom failure or the benefits of abstinence

- Effectiveness: no measures were taken to evaluate pregnancies, births or STDs

6. *Teen Talk*

Authors: M. Eisen, A. McAlister, G.Zellman, 1983-84, 2003; In collaboration with psychologists at the University of Texas and the RAND Corporation

Distributed by: Copyright b Sociometrics, 2003 and available as part of PASHA

Target Audience: 10-14 year olds

- There are 32 mentions to abstaining from sexual activity; 347 references to contraceptives (22 references to condoms and 24 to rubbers)
- Includes condom shopping assignment
- **Detailed information about how to get an abortion**
- **Detailed information about the anonymity (no need to tell parents) of visiting a clinic and/or getting an abortion**
- Effectiveness: no impact on overall initiation of intercourse, little impact on contraceptive use on sexually inexperienced and experienced youth

7. *Making Proud Choices*

Authors: L. Jemmott, J. Lemmott III, K. McCaffre, 2001, 2002

Distributed by: It is published by Select Media, although training is available through ETR Associates

Target Audience: 11-13 year olds

- There are 18 mentions of abstinence, 650 references to condoms
- “The surest way not to get HIV is to practice safer sex”
- “You know you are safe when you use condoms”
- “How can you prevent HIV/AIDS? By using latex condoms every time you have vaginal, intercourse, oral sex or anal sex.”
- Effectiveness: no delay in sexual initiation was reported, no impact on abstinence

8. *Positive Images*

Authors: P. Brick and B. Taverner, 2001; In collaboration with Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey

Distributed by: Planned Parenthood

Target Audience: high school and college students with adaptation for middle school students

- Although abstinence is mentioned frequently, the focus of this curriculum is on birth control which is mentioned 987 times
- Encourages emergency contraception use
- Encourages condom demonstration and practice by students in the class
- “Understand that outercourse is a possible option for expressing sexual feelings without risk of pregnancy” (page 11). While it is true that outercourse does not carry the risk of pregnancy, some sexually transmitted diseases are transmissible through mutual masturbation.

9. *Reducing the Risk*

Author: R. Barth, 2004, In collaboration with: ETR Associates, creator/publisher of health education materials

Distributed by: ETR Associates

Target Audience: 9-10th Graders

- There are 90 references to abstinence; 254 references to protection and 183 mentions of condoms
- “At some time in their lives, most people will decide they are ready to have sex but not to become a parent.”
- “If a condom is used correctly together with foam every time a couple has sex, the combined method will work almost all the time to prevent pregnancy.”
- Includes condom shopping assignment
- Effectiveness: no impact on frequency of intercourse, no impact on initiation of first sex at 6 months, no impact on contraceptive use at first intercourse, no overall impact on unprotected sex at 18 months, no impact on pregnancy rates