

Testimony in opposition of House Bill 293 or
Ohio Prevention First Act
House Health Committee
Representative Barbara Boyd, Chair

December 2, 2009

I am a licensed psychologist in private practice and a former school psychologist with approximately two decades of experience with children and their families. I am in support of Abstinence Education for a number of reasons. These reasons are not my reasons; they are the reasons that cry out from children who visit mental health offices and guidance counselor offices. They are the cries of children who are devastated by the seemingly endless disappointments that crowd their lives.

A state of anarchy is present in many homes today. Divorce and domestic violence statistics are high. The fallout is everywhere. Schools and counseling offices are filled with children who weep, act out in anger, and ... harden - in an effort to find a place where they belong - a place to call "Home."

Mental health offices are filled with children who are on medications for depression and anxiety. Some children are angry and do not understand why the parent they live with is so busy and does not have time for them. Other children are lonely and do not grasp the stress that their single mothers have in trying to pay the bills. (It is hard for a child to understand that Mom remains with her boyfriend when he beats her because he pays the bills.) Still other children are sad and struggle with why the parent they are not living with does not want to see them.

Parents seeking help for their children struggle themselves. Sometimes, "Step-parents" bring the child in because the biological parent is unavailable. Often times, it is the guardian or foster parent that brings the distraught child in. Other times, it is grandparents that have taken custody and struggle with the myriad of problems that have arisen because of abuse and neglect. In other cases, it is the married girlfriend or boyfriend of the parent that is the one given the permission by the biological parent/or guardian to bring the child in for counseling.

During counseling sessions, social histories or family histories are obtained. It is not unusual to have children list their parent's former live-in girlfriends or boyfriends and then voluntarily reveal who they "really consider" to be "Dad" or "Mom."

Thousands of children around the state and country cry themselves to sleep because Mom or Dad is unavailable. Our hearts cry with the child who sadly states "My Mom and Dad broke up... and I and my Daddy broke up."

Many children are distracted at school because they are worried and unfocused "because a lot is going on at home." Some want nothing to do with marriage because they see no hope for it. Others believe things can be different and that they will make different choices. Little hearts and big hearts are breaking all around us.

Family is about relationship and in many families - the relationship is not there. So, why bother talk about families and parents? Simple. Many children desire a relationship with their biological parents when they do not have one. Teens occasionally come in and say, "I know my father/or mother lives in a nearby town, I don't remember them, I want to meet them." It is "The Relationship," that cries for fulfillment.

What does all of this have to do with Abstinence Education?

Everything. Encouraging young people to learn to identify positive relationships and work toward lasting ones is essential. After all, this is the age where people strive to achieve lasting and “sustainable” results. Assisting parents so they can learn how to connect with their children is critical - parenting skills are essential. Teaching youth about the pitfalls of sex outside of marriage is positively life saving. Abstinence education is not just concerned about STDs and pregnancy, but also about the quality of life for the individual and the community. The concern is truly comprehensive in its scope - as it is concerned with the physical, psychological, social, and economic well being of the individual - and the community. We all know the statistics on poverty, welfare, and single parent households. Of course, we will always find people that beat the odds, but they do not reflect the majority.

Depression and Anxiety among youth is high and it is related to fractured relationships. The youth of today are hurting. Their parents are hurting. The discussion is much bigger than birth control or condoms. Is it any wonder why many kids are “looking for Love in all the wrong places?”

Sex is biologically and chemically structured to bond people together. When you are bonded to the wrong person - you suffer. When you are abandoned by someone you care about - you suffer. When children are involved - they suffer. Sex is not recreational. It is intended to draw people together so they can form a family unit where children can be safely brought up in an atmosphere of emotional security.

Children want to be loved by their parents. They want their parents to love one another. Parents want to love their children. They need help. Abstinence Education can help children and their parents. Abstinence education gives the much needed statistics and teaches youth about the ramifications of sexual behavior. It clearly and positively discusses sexual behavior and the consequences of that behavior.

Abstinence education is “truly comprehensive” in its sex education because it does not give “a menu” of sexual practices, but rather gives “recipes” for healthy dialogue on relationship building for the present and the future, for the individual and for the community. Abstinence education is not so much about “Abstinence” as it is about the “Engagement” of Individuals in a productive dialogue about Community - Relationships and Family.

We desire to build healthy families and marriages, not just the freedom to express sexual impulses?” Freedom is a good thing but as Viktor Frankl put it so eloquently in his book Man's Search for Meaning: “Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is irresponsibility ... That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.”

Let us be responsible and help our youth learn the skills to build healthy marriages, stable families, and economically strong communities.

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