

ADDRESSING SENSITIVE HEALTH ISSUES

BY BRENDA PIERCE

Teachers, administrators, and deans must recognize the need for education and discussion on sensitive topics such as sexual activity, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS, and acquaintance rape. However, there are many reasons that prevent them from addressing these very important topics. They may fear constituent disapproval of “sex education,” experience feelings of discomfort, or think they do not have enough knowledge on these topics to answer the very direct questions young people often ask.

Here are some suggestions to help your campus address these sensitive issues at minimal cost. Our focus should not be *if* the issues should be addressed but *how* they are addressed. Contrary to fear of constituent disfavor, I have found that most knowledgeable parents, faculty, and pastors are grateful for assistance and only too aware of the consequence of ignorance or avoiding the problems.

Videos are a popular medium and provide a lot of information in a short and stimulating format. Be sure to have an individual present who can

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answer questions and point out areas that may have been briefly touched upon or may be contradictory to the message you want to present. For example, you may show a video on sexual activity that discusses sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or birth control and then follow with a discussion of abstinence. To avoid the high cost of videos, check with local libraries, educational service districts, county public health departments, conference offices, and local Red Cross chapters to see if you may access their videos.

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Recruit community resource persons to assist with planning or to provide a program. Check to see if local health departments have pamphlets that they will provide at no cost. Many of them have developed programs on STDs, HIV/AIDS, and sexuality. Another excellent resource to have is an OB/GYN physician or nurse practitioner who can come in to provide information and answer questions. Other agencies in your area that may be eager to speak to your youth, such as an HIV/AIDS support agency or a rape support center.

Most guest speakers are willing to customize their program if they are informed of the school's philosophy and

will be delighted for an opportunity to stress abstinence. Another advantage that community persons have is the ability to talk comfortably on subjects we skate around. If you feel a speaker may go too far in a presentation, schedule yourself to speak last so that you have the opportunity to follow up with your school philosophy. If there is a college or university near your school, they may have a health promotion program or peer education program. Enthusiastic college students will provide good models for students and are able to "speak the language."

Drama is another effective medium. Some excellent plays on youth affected by HIV/AIDS address myths and provide

information on modes of transmission and behavior that put a person at risk. Another drama to try is a mock trial for a date rape that provides insight on both the female and male perspective.

When planning a program, select your target audience and the main emphasis. Often the information is gender neutral. At other times, you may find it beneficial to provide a different focus if you are addressing men and women together or separately. One topic that often necessitates a different focus is rape. It is valuable to have a man or man/woman team discuss this with men. A panel discussion could include a police detective, a prosecuting attorney, and a medical provider trained to do rape examinations for legal purposes. For women, the focus may be on their right to say "no," where to go for an examination, what kinds of questions the police may ask, and what to expect in a court case from the victim's perspective. For men, the focus may be on respecting the woman's desires, learning at what point sex becomes rape, and what legal ramifications can result from failing to respect the woman's right to say "no."

Local experts may need to make separate presentations due to scheduling conflicts or the time allotted for your program. It may also be helpful to have a health professional discuss the emotions the victim may experience and what peers may do to help.

Addressing the issues of sexuality, rape, and STDs can be difficult for a variety of reasons, and the thought of planning a prevention program can be overwhelming. However, by accessing the multiple resources available, a concerned administrator, educator, or dean can provide stimulating and informative programs. Be sure to interact with and discuss the issues with other concerned persons. We can all learn from each other to overcome our personal discomfort and tackle the contemporary challenges of the 1990s. ☞

Brenda Pierce is the Director of Student Health Services at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington. This article, now slightly revised, first appeared in The Window (March/April 1994) and is used by permission.

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R E S O U R C E S

VIDEOS

Sex

It Only Takes Once
Intermedia, Inc.
1600 Dexter Avenue, N.
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 282-7262

Rape

Date Rape: It Happened to Me
Pyramid Film and Video
2801 Colorado Avenue
Santa Monica, CA 90404
(212) 828-7577

Campus Rape

Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center
1250 Sixteenth Street
Santa Monica, CA 90404

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Playing It Safe
G. D. Searle & Co.
Medical & Scientific Info Department
4901 Searle Parkway
Skokie, IL 60077

AIDS

The Broadcast Tapes of Dr. Peter
Media Incorporated
One Veteran Square/Suite 201
P. O. Box 496
Media, PA 19063

AIDS Hotline

(800) 342-2437
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

STD Hotline

(800) 227-8922
Monday - Friday, 8 am - 11 pm

PAMPHLETS

American College Health Association
P. O. Box 753
Waldorf, MD 20604
(410) 859-1500

Do It Now Foundation
P. O. Box 27568
Tempe, AZ 85285
(606) 491-0393

ETR Associates
P. O. Box 1830
Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830
(800) 321-4407
(Pamphlets and videos)
[Have materials to promote abstinence]

BOOKS

Lifestyle Workshops
by Martha Imrie Carey
Skokie, IL 60077
Published by:
Human Kinetics Books
P.O. Box 5076
Champaign, IL 61820
(800) 342-5457
[Excellent ideas for programs and
implementing peer education]

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