



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS
Washington Office for Advocacy
(202) 393-2255 • socialjustice@uua.org • www.uua.org/socialjustice

Issue Brief: Comprehensive Sexuality Education

"We believe that human sexuality is one of the great gifts that we have been given. We believe that when used responsibly, sexuality can be a gift not only to ourselves as persons, but to our relationships and can actually be a way we can deepen our connection to the Divine."

-- Rev. William G. Sinkford, Former UUA President

Sexuality is an integral part of life. In its broadest sense, sexuality encompasses the full expression of an individual's gender, has intellectual and emotional as well as biological dimensions, and is conditioned by cultural and religious norms. In order for individuals to take responsibility for the consequences of their behavior, they must have access to comprehensive sexuality education. Comprehensive sexuality education seeks to

- increase understanding of sexuality as a normal, healthy, lifelong aspect of human development;
- provide medically accurate information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives, including condoms;
- help individuals understand their sexuality, communicate their sexual feelings and decisions to others, and accept responsibility for their actions.

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has been a long-time advocate of age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education. We teach sexuality education in our congregations through the program *Our Whole Lives (OWL)*. *OWL* equips participants with information to help them make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior. Grounded in a holistic view of sexuality, *OWL* also helps participants clarify their values and understand the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality.

Current Situation

Since 1996, Congress has committed over \$1.5 billion dollars (through both Federal and state matching funds) to abstinence-only education programs, and zero dollars to comprehensive sexuality education. Programs receiving federal funds must teach that sexual expression outside of marriage will have harmful social, psychological and physical consequences, and they are prohibited from discussing contraceptives unless they are portrayed as ineffective. Given that about 70% of young people will have sexual intercourse before age 19, and 90% will have intercourse before marriage, failing to provide accurate information about pregnancy and disease prevention represents a colossal moral and public health failure.

These programs continue to receive funds despite the vast body of research which shows that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs **do not** actually help young people make good decisions in the long term. In fact, numerous evaluations and reports have found that these programs are ineffective, inaccurate, misleading, and are not receiving proper oversight. Comprehensive sexuality education programs are supported by many leading medical organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Society of Adolescent Medicine and the American Medical Association.

The Responsible Education About Life Act

The Responsible Education About Life Act (REAL) (H.R. 1551/S. 611) will provide funding to states for medically accurate, age appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education in public schools that includes information about abstinence and contraception, from both a values and public health perspective. The federal grants made available by REAL will allow states to choose the sexuality education program that meets the public health needs of their communities.

Talking Points

The UUA views access to sexuality education as an issue of justice. The consequences of not receiving comprehensive, medically accurate sex information disproportionately impacts people of color, poor people and queer people. It is crucial that people of faith speak out in support of comprehensive sexuality education programs that help our youth make healthy, informed decisions regarding their sexuality.

- ✓ My religious tradition affirms sexuality as a sacred gift. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs deny our youth critical information that might help them avoid sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. We need to provide our young people with age appropriate, medically accurate information about sexuality and sexual health. We must not let our negligence, and their ignorance, continue to harm our young people and communities.
- ✓ In addition to the people in my faith tradition who favor comprehensive sexuality education, the American public is overwhelmingly supportive; 8 out of 10 American adults support the inclusion of information about abstinence and contraception in sexuality education courses for students in grades 9-12
- ✓ Failing to provide our youth with accurate information about pregnancy and disease prevention is ethically wrong, especially since as many as 70% of adolescents will need this information before they turn 19. This lack of information represents a colossal moral and public health failure.

Contact Congress- Support the REAL Act

Members of Congress want to hear from their constituents about the issues that matter to them. Remember to identify yourself as a person of faith, parent, student, youth, *OWL* facilitator etc. when you ask them to support the REAL Act.

Email: Via the UUA Washington Office website www.uua.org/socialjustice

Call: The Capitol Switchboard at (202) 225-3121

Lobby: Set up a lobby visit with your Senators and Representative in Washington, DC or in your district.

Further Actions to Take

- Visit the UUA Washington Office website www.uua.org/socialjustice to:
- Learn more about the Youth and Young Adult Sexuality Education Advocacy Training (SEAT) in Spring 2009 in Washington DC
- Sign up for the UU Justice Action Network and receive email updates about sex education

Additional Resources

Advocates for Youth: www.advocatesforyouth.org

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS): www.siecus.org

For more information on Comprehensive Sexuality Education or the Sexuality Education Advocacy Training please contact Orelia Busch in the UUA Washington Office:

obusch@uua.org or (202) 393-2255 x 12