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SEXU

R E P O R T

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS
AS SEXUALITY EDUCATORS

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SIECUS

R E P O R T

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HELPING PARENTS BREAK THE CYCLE OF SILENCE

Mac Edwards

When I started editing this *SIECUS Report* on “Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators,” I asked my cousin about her experiences teaching her daughter about sexuality. My cousin and I talk every day. We share everything from opinions about new books to news about family. We have talked daily for many years, so we know each other very well.

“I bought the best book I could find and gave it to her with a short note,” she replied. “Something like, ‘You should read this.’ We didn’t really talk.” I was shocked because I know she is a woman with very progressive ideas.

She made me realize that all parents can use some assistance learning to communicate with their children about sexuality.

AUTHORS OF TEN TALKS

As we began putting this *SIECUS Report* together, we decided to contact Pepper Schwartz and Dominic Cappello, the authors of *The New York Times* bestseller *Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children about Sex and Character*. Pepper is on SIECUS’ Board of Directors and is also a professor of sociology at the University of Washington in Seattle. Dom is the creator of such popular parent sexuality education workshops as *Can We Talk?* and *Plain Talk*.

Because of his extensive work with parents, we asked Dom to write the lead article titled “When Sex Ed Meets Parent Ed: Supporting Parents as Sexuality Educators.” In it, he says that he has repeatedly seen in his workshops that few families talk about sexuality at home. Yet he offers hope that families are beginning to break this cycle of silence through education and training.

MORE PROGRAMS, RESOURCES

We found hope, too, as we contacted sexuality education professionals across the country working on this subject. There is a growing list of related programs, books, and curricula. This *SIECUS Report* will share some of that information.

First, Elaine Lambert, Mary Dykeman, and Andrea Rankin tell us in “There is Such a Thing as a Free Lunch” about the “Lunch ‘n’ Learn” classes that are part of the award-winning Zero Adolescent Pregnancy! (ZAP) Program in Cortland County, NY. Sexuality education consultant Peggy Brick tells us in “Faith Community’s *Our Whole Lives* Project Supports Parental Involvement” about the new ground-breaking curriculum and parent guide

developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

We then briefly reviewed the work of eight organizations—the Annie E. Casey Foundation; the Cornell University Cooperative Extension Parent HIV/AIDS Education Project; Family Health Productions; Girls, Inc.; Mothers’ Voices; the National Education Association; Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); and Planned Parenthood of New York City; — currently helping parents.

Particularly poignant is the comment of a mother attending a *Parents Educating Parents* workshop sponsored by Mothers’ Voices. Her 26-year-old daughter had just died of AIDS. “It’s difficult to talk about sexual behavior...difficult to talk in the graphic way that you need to,” she told the group. “But I’d rather have that difficult moment. Because the moment you learn your daughter is HIV-positive, your life as you knew it stops.”

Next, we excerpted from the SIECUS radio series titled *Take a Minute to Talk to Your Kids about Sexuality*, which was field tested last year in Connecticut, and Wisconsin. The question-and-answer series suggests parental responses to questions from toddlers to elementary and high school students.

We then compiled a list of “Books on Sexuality Education for Parents and Caregivers” and “Books on Sexuality Issues for Children and Adolescents.”

We are also including two resources with this mailing: *The SIECUS Annotated Bibliography on Sexuality Education in the Home* and the *Families Are Talking* special supplement with more information on parents and caregivers as sexuality educators.

CONCLUSION

Nary Suon, an immigrant from Cambodia who was hired by Plain Talk, the program sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to serve as an outreach worker to the 9,000 Southeast Asian community members in White Center, WA, recently said, “Parents know how to produce kids. But they need education to protect them. If you want to help kids, you must put more services in the community, more parenting classes, and more ways to help families.”

That, in a nutshell, is why we decided to publish this *SIECUS Report*. We want to make certain those services, classes, and resources are available. SIECUS is here to help break the cycle of silence.

**KIDS NEED PARENTS AS SEXUALITY EDUCATORS;
WE NEED PARENTS AS ADVOCATES**

Tamara Kreinin, M.H.S.A.

For many years now, we have given lip service to the phrase “parents are their children’s first sexuality educators.” We have talked about their importance when, in fact, we know that many parents and caregivers are not talking to their children about sexuality-related issues. We hear that they often do not know when or how to start these conversations, that they feel ill-equipped to handle discussions, and that even those parents who are talking to their children about sexuality are not spending enough time on these issues.

OUR NEXT FRONTIER

I am so pleased that we are devoting this entire issue of the *SIECUS Report* to “Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators.” I believe this is our next frontier in assuring that young people are well prepared to make decisions about their sexual health.

While we must continue to assure that our schools are providing high quality sexuality education, we must accept the fact that schools alone cannot meet the needs of our youth. Increasingly, schools are not offering comprehensive sexuality education and, even under the most ideal school conditions, teachers cannot replace parents when it comes to topics as value-laden as sexuality.

As part of our work, we must assure that parents and caregivers are involved in sexuality education in a meaningful way. We must help them obtain the information and skills to foster open and ongoing conversations with their kids starting at a very young age and continuing throughout the teen years. We must also help them understand that they need to talk not only about anatomy and reproduction but also about their own values and beliefs relating to sexuality and sexual behavior.

KIDS NEED PARENTS TO SHARE

As I travel the country and talk with young people, one thing that they always tell me they want is to hear from their parents. This desire has been confirmed by the research. Kids report that they want to hear from their parents; and not just about “sex,” but also about love, values and relationships.

Deborah Roffman, the author of the new book *Sex & Sensibility: The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense about*

Sex, recently said in an interview that kids grow up healthier in families where sexuality is acknowledged and discussed. She added that kids need adults to:

- recognize and validate their particular stage of sexual development
- give them age-appropriate information about sexuality
- share their values in the context of competing values in the surrounding culture
- create a safe, healthy environment by stating and reinforcing age-appropriate rules
- teach them how to handle potentially harmful situations and make responsible and healthy choices of their own

In order to reach this goal, we need to start

by relieving the anxiety and embarrassment parents often feel when talking about sexuality. We then need to help parents and caregivers know what to talk about and the age at which discussions on each topic are appropriate. As Ms. Roffman says, we must help parents understand that *knowing doesn’t equal doing*. In fact, over 30 studies tell us that giving young people accurate information about abstinence and contraception will not increase sexual behavior and can, in some instances, delay young people’s involvement in sexual behavior.

WE NEED PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

Once parents are more comfortable with sexuality and see themselves as sexuality educators, they will be more likely to ask what is happening at their schools and throughout their communities. They will begin to inquire about the scope of sexuality education courses, the curricula and materials used, and the training and background of the teachers. In doing so, they will become advocates for comprehensive sexuality education.

CONCLUSION

As professionals, it is our responsibility to reach out to parents and caregivers, support them, and help them become comfortable with their role as sexuality educators.

Our ultimate goal is to see parents and educators become partners, taking full advantage of their different roles as the shapers and influencers of how young people learn, think about, and manage their emerging sexuality.

“Our ultimate goal is to see parents and educators become partners.”

WHEN SEX ED MEETS PARENT ED: SUPPORTING PARENTS AS SEXUALITY EDUCATORS

Dominic Cappello

Author and Designer of Parent/Child Communication Programs
New York, NY

These days, sexual issues are everywhere. Parents shake their heads at the sexy ads and billboards, the sexual jokes in sitcoms, the sexual scenes on daytime television, and the explicit and often vulgar dialogue in afternoon talk shows. Parents can't even count on the news to be safe to watch: daily reports include horror stories about incest, rape, and sexual scandal.

The low point for many families came when the sexual transgressions of President Clinton were a regular feature of nightly newscasts. During impeachment proceedings, young children innocently asked their parents about oral sex and the stains on "that woman's" dress. Parents found they became flustered trying to explain terms and acts that they had hoped would never come up in conversation.

This was the moment when millions of parents across the nation realized that they did not have the tools to conduct a conversation with their children about sexuality.

SEX ED IS NOT ENOUGH

Many parents feel embarrassed and ill-equipped to handle discussions about sexual topics. Some just hope these topics will never come up, while others rely on school-based sexuality education to provide their children with information and guidance.

These parents often discover that school-based sexuality education, while very important, is not enough. Today, in fact, American schools face strong political pressure to limit the scope of sexuality education. As a result, the sexuality education most students in the United States receive usually covers such topics as "fallopian tubes" and the "sperm and egg chase." Teachers, however, shy away from potentially value-laden discussions, such as how to interpret the sex scenes on just about every program on television, for fear that such discussions may cross the line into teaching moral and family beliefs.

Only parents can share unique family values. If their children are lucky enough to attend a school that teaches comprehensive sexuality education, so much the better. But school lessons—no matter how comprehensive—are not a replacement for talks in the home.

Not only are most kids not getting the factual information about sexuality from school, they are not getting their family beliefs or rules there. They cannot. Only parents can provide this perspective.

Susan Coots, sexuality education consultant, Syracuse, NY

In reality, parents should be available to discuss family values and beliefs when sexuality education becomes character education (and it is very difficult to separate the two). Children need their moms, dads, and caretakers to listen to their concerns and to help them think through the sexual issues that arise in everyday life.

PARENTS ARE OFTEN SILENT

When I talk to young people and their parents in workshops all over the country, I see firsthand how few families are talking about sexuality and character at home. Parents speak candidly to me about having received little guidance from their own parents (aside from the classic statement "If you have sex, I'll kill you") and admit struggling to break the cycle of silence with their own children. They truly want to keep their children safe and help them develop healthy relationships.

Some parents wonder about whether or not they should talk with their kids about sex. They have some idea that the talk might send a message that being sexual is OK. Of course, children get thousands of messages about sex and relationships every week—from TV, the Internet, and peers. It's the parent's silence that is the problem. The messages about sexuality from the parents should be the most consistent, articulate, and most respected.

*Paul Sathrum, senior project manager
Health Information Network
National Education Association*

PARENTS ARE UNPREPARED

A lot of adults grew up without ever having talked with their parents about sexual conduct. Even if their parents made sure they took the school health class—or gave them a book about puberty—these parents never talked about values or how to put those values into practice. How could that have happened? Pretty easily.

When I was in sixth grade I had a health class about how bodies work. But I didn't know what to do the first time a boy showed any interest in me. My mom never talked about anything like that.

Nancy, mother of one, Memphis, TN

My parents always told me that the schools should not talk about sex, and since it was optional, they didn't sign me up for that class. But they never

talked about it to me at all. I learned stuff from the guys at school.

Jeff, father of two, Orlando, FL

My parents never mentioned the word *sex*. In school, I was not taught anything about sex. I do remember in sixth grade that the girls were sent to the cafeteria to watch a special film. My sister said it was about ‘girl stuff.’

Nick, father of one, New York City

Parents are not sexuality education experts just because they are parents. Since most parents have never had open and frank talks on sexual topics with their own parents, they do not know how to introduce intimate and potentially embarrassing topics to their children.

ESSENTIAL TALKS

Even though I believe parents should talk with their children about sexuality and character from the age of two, I know this often does not happen. Starting with their preschool children, parents need to explain the difference between safe touching and unsafe touching between peers and adults. Parents also need to introduce family values about love, respect, and relationships.

As their children grow older, parents need to talk about respecting personal boundaries, then proceed to discuss puberty and sexuality—and all the rights, rewards, and responsibilities of being sexually mature adults. There are, however, three specific stages when it is essential for parents to engage their children in such discussions.

The first stage. This is when children enter kindergarten. Suddenly they are interacting with as many as 30 other children who represent 30 different sets of family values. Parents need to know that their children will start hearing terms for body parts and sexual acts on the playground and on the school bus. They also need to understand that schoolmates will gladly tell their children where babies come from. It is at this time that parents should initiate birds, bees, puppies, and human babies talk. They need to focus on both school and home rules relating to such subjects as sexual language, nudity, touching, and appropriate behavior.

The second stage. This is when children enter the fourth grade. By this time, some have reached puberty. They all need to understand puberty as well as reproduction and sexual attraction. Parents need to focus on school rules relating to the use of sexual terms as jokes or insults. They also need to discuss with their children self-esteem, peer pressure, media literacy, and sexual harassment.

The third stage. This is when children leave elementary school and enter middle school or junior high. At this time, parents must address the subject of sexual activity—from holding hands to kissing to intercourse. They must make sure that their children know both the emotional and physical aspects of puberty and sexual maturity.

PARENT WORKSHOPS

In many ways, the sexuality education workshops that I conduct for parents are *Parent-Child Communication 101*. I help build communication pathways. I give moms, dads, and caretakers basic tools to explore their family values as they discuss a range of topics, in an age-appropriate manner, with their children. Such topics include human anatomy, human reproduction, family planning, sexual attraction, and sexual orientation.

Even though parents may experience long pauses in conversations with their children, I encourage them to allow their children to fill in the silence. I stress that while parents might struggle through a given talk, they might also be pleasantly surprised at their children’s mature questions and wise answers the next time around. I have seen this happen time and again in communities across the United States.

Workshop goals include:

- increasing the amount of time parents spend in meaningful discussions about sexuality and character with their children
- increasing parents’ understanding of their children’s views about sexuality and character
- increasing parents’ confidence that their children can keep themselves safe
- giving parents the information and skills to develop, communicate, and maintain family rules about developing relationships, becoming sexually active, using sexual language, or viewing sexual imagery

Do these goals appear daunting? I do not think parents will meet every goal after one quick workshop and a short parent-child talk. My first goal is to help parents begin to have meaningful conversations. I focus on the communication process, not on making certain that parents or their children come up with the “right” answers on a test about sexuality.

Many parents attending my workshops report thinking, “Can I really do this?” My answer is “Yes, you can.” Thousands of parents in cities across the country have proved it.

When parents become stressed at the thought of having talks about sexuality with their children, I ask them to consider calling in the “reserves.” I suggest that they get help from another adult—a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, a stepparent, or a trusted friend from a community group, church, or temple.

I am not suggesting that parents give the responsibility

“My first goal is to help parents begin to have meaningful conversations.”

for communicating with their children to another adult. Rather, I am suggesting that sometimes parents might find it more productive to bring in a favorite uncle or aunt to discuss sexual ethics and responsibility. In truth, though, most parents can handle the talk about character with little or no anxiety.

Parents' evaluations of workshops say over and over again that one of the most helpful aspects of my workshops is the sharing between parents—ideas about discipline, rules, values, and strategies for keeping the peace. Parents are happy to know that they are not the only ones on the block to have rules about dating and staying out late.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Those of us committed to sexuality education are finding like-minded partners with public education groups, public health groups, religious organizations, philanthropic organizations, and businesses that are helping to support and fund national public education campaigns for parents. We are also working with state departments of education and departments of public health to support parental involvement through education programs that complement youth programs.

Many school-based parent organizations are also sponsoring parent workshop series. In fact, the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in Oregon and Washington State have strong active memberships with flourishing

parent programs. The workplace, too, is fast becoming a productive place to hold parent workshops. The human resource departments at many businesses are actively seeking programs to assist employees who are parents. For example, the carpet mills in Dalton, GA, hold parent workshops during lunch. The engine plants in Western New York also have brown-bag luncheon presentations. Religious groups are also conducting parent workshops.

Yet we still have a long way to go, because states do not always give priority to public sexuality education for children—let alone for their parents. Clearly, we continue to face a daunting challenge to provide quality comprehensive sexuality education for both the nation's youth and their parents. But by bringing parents into the process, we may have built a strategic partnership that will make the challenge less formidable and far more productive.

Dominic Cappello is the co-author (with Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D.) of the national bestseller Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children about Sex and Character and the author of Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children about Violence. He is also the creator of the National Education Association's "Can We Talk" and "¿Conversamos?" parent-child communication programs. This article includes excerpts from the Ten Talks book.

JOURNAL OF SEX EDUCATION AND THERAPY SEEKS EDITOR

The American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) has initiated a national search for a new editor of the *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy* (JSET). The person selected for this position will play a vital role in the future of JSET. The editor will work closely with AASECT's management and Communications Steering Committee.

Qualified candidates must be active sexological professionals who possess an earned academic degree, hold a current academic appointment, are computer literate, have a record of publishing research, and have strong editorial experience.

The deadline for submission is February 15, 2001, or until the position is filled. The appointment will begin in the spring or early summer of 2001.

Qualified applicants should submit a curriculum vita and resume to:

Stephanie Sanders, Ph.D.
Chair, AASECT Communications Steering Committee
Morrison Hall 313
Indiana University
1165 East Third Street
Bloomington, IN 47405-3700 USA

THERE IS SUCH A THING AS A FREE LUNCH: A MODEL WORK-SITE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Elaine Lambert, M.S.N., Director

Mary Dykeman, Family Planning Education Specialist

Andrea Rankin, M.S., Retired Director

Jacobus Center for Reproductive Health

Cortland County Health Department

Cortland, NY

In 1993, the Cortland County Health Department's family planning clinic received a frantic call from a bank supervisor requesting help for a distraught employee who had just learned her five-year-old daughter had pulled down her bathing suit in the neighborhood kiddie pool.

A staff person reassured the bank employee, but the incident immediately sparked a discussion among clinic staff members about the disruption these issues can cause in the workplace and about the need to take parent education to the workplace where the parents are during the day. The result was the county's first work-site parent education program called "How to Talk with Your Kids about Sex." It eventually evolved into our current "Lunch 'n' Learn" program.

This program was developed by Zero Adolescent Pregnancy! (ZAP), a multi-faceted program designed to reduce teen pregnancy in Cortland County.* Started in 1991, ZAP was originally an alliance between the local Catholic Charities and the Health Department. In 1994, the Health Department, the YWCA, and the Cortland City Youth Bureau became ZAP's partners.

ZAP attempted an approach to teen pregnancy prevention by involving the whole community, not just the usual human service providers. ZAP trained teens as peer educators, assisted parents in their role as sexuality educators for their children, worked with health teachers to provide effective sexuality education curricula, and worked with clergy to help them bring sexuality education to their faith communities. This holistic approach, coupled with the declining teen pregnancy rate and the research conducted with Cortland's eighth graders, earned ZAP the award of "Best Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program" in the United States in 1998. The award was presented by the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Parenting (NOAPPP) at its annual conference in Colorado. In the same year, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton cited ZAP's successes in a nationally televised speech. She subsequently visited the program site and met with teens involved in the program.

*It appears the ZAP Program contributed to a reduction in the number of teen pregnancies in rural Cortland County from 152 in 1990 to 107 in 1998, a 30 percent decrease in numbers and a 23 percent reduction in the rate of teen pregnancy. Subsequent ZAP school research noted a drop of 56 percent in the number of eighth graders reporting consenting sexual intercourse between 1996 and 2000.³

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

National research has shown that children who can speak openly and honestly with their parents about sexuality are far less likely to engage in premature sexual intercourse than those who cannot.¹

ZAP's own research among eighth graders from most of the Cortland County schools over the past five years has also shown the importance of parental attitudes on their children having sexual intercourse. Of the eighth graders who reported having had sexual intercourse in the 1996 survey, 90 percent said that their mothers "wouldn't care." In contrast, only 10 percent of those who reported not having had sexual intercourse said the same thing. Conversely, 86 percent of eighth graders who were not having sexual intercourse reported that their mothers would be "very upset" if they did. Findings are similar, but not quite as strong, with respect to fathers' attitudes.²

Early on, teens told the ZAP program staff that they saw their parents as the main source of sexuality education in their lives. Although parents may be uncomfortable talking with their children about sexual topics, teens do want to hear what their parents have to say about sexuality, values, and morals. In the 1998 eighth-grade survey, Cortland teens reported that their parents replaced peers as the most important source of sexuality information.³

Teens also need—and want—help navigating through a media environment replete with sexist and sex-with-no-consequences messages. Just as teens face far more complex issues related to sexuality, parents are busier than ever. Both parents are often working outside of the home, and are often working longer hours. Many are even working two jobs. More single parents are raising children compared with a generation ago. As a consequence, young people are often home alone in the afternoons—a place where teen risk behavior (including sexual activity and drug and alcohol abuse) can easily occur.

Considering these facts, ZAP figured that a parent education project sandwiched into parents' busy lives could prove one of the most important aspects of any teen pregnancy-prevention program. Thus, our Lunch 'n' Learn program was born.

GETTING STARTED

To educate the community about the problems associated with teen pregnancy and to promote the Lunch 'n' Learn program, ZAP developed a video presentation. In it, we explained that teen pregnancy interferes with the development of an educated and skilled workforce. We discussed the health-insurance costs of teen pregnancy. We pointed out that both work attendance and health-care costs are adversely affected when grandparents have to raise babies of teen parents.

We made presentations to the local organization of human resource directors as well as to decision-makers at various companies. This helped us establish relationships and enabled us to propose the Lunch 'n' Learn program for parents at many work sites. We explained that the classes were free and that they should be considered as perk to employees.

BARRIERS

This lunchtime approach is often difficult to arrange. As we planned our own Lunch 'n' Learn program, we had to make certain the classes were convenient in terms of time because of shift work or short lunch periods. We also had to make certain that the sites offered privacy for discussions. Parents are sometimes shy or hesitant to discuss sexual matters with their peers in public work spaces.

Participation improved when we offered free lunches. Food created a welcoming environment and helped people relax. When we had no funds to buy lunch, we asked the parents to bring their own. In the early days, we provided only a beverage or dessert.

SCHEDULE

ZAP's Lunch 'n' Learn programs were scheduled at noon once a week for six weeks. This allowed parents to digest the information without getting bored or overwhelmed. The week between classes gave parents the opportunity to do homework and practice new skills with their own children. Parents liked the homework, and their children loved the idea that their parents had homework!

WHAT WILL THEY LEARN?

Sexuality education programs such as *Can We Talk?*, *Our Whole Lives*, and our own Lunch 'n' Learn program, offer suggestions to educators for course content.

With a good educator, lesson plans can evolve with time and experience. Adapting the best experiential exercises from various sources has worked well for us. Newspaper and television programs can also provide critical information for discussion. ZAP succeeded in contacting national television stations for free access to tapes of relevant programs to use in class. A segment of Evening Shade where Burt Reynolds taught high school "sex ed" was particularly

loved by Cortland's participants. Local community events and sensitivities can influence content as well.

ZAP does a "needs assessment" with parents before each Lunch 'n' Learn series. We list a host of sexuality and communication topics and ask parents to choose the ones they want to discuss. Participants have told us that they appreciate the opportunity to select topics. Among those covered in recent Lunch 'n' Learn classes are:

- Child development
- Communication styles and skills
- Media awareness
- Contraception
- Sexual decision making and values
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and AIDS
- Peer pressure and dating
- Racism, sexism, and heterosexism
- Normal sexual behavior
- Setting limits
- Sexual assault and rape

ZAP also brings books, pamphlets, and videos to every class for loan. Parents love this and often borrow materials for themselves or for their children.

THE INSTRUCTOR

Many variables contribute to a successful class. First, the selection of the instructor is extremely important. The best instructors usually come from the adult education field. Male and female coleaders are best, if possible. They should always support the concept of comprehensive sexuality education.

The instructors should give parents opportunities for questions and dialogue. Parents learn a great deal from the experiences of other parents and feel less isolated when they learn that their own experiences are not unique. This allows parents the opportunity to learn, to examine beliefs, to discuss issues, and to decide what they want to say to their children.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class size is important since discussion is so critical. Classes of six to 10 participants usually work best. Sometimes people are hesitant to sign up alone; we encourage them to bring a friend.

A teller at one bank took our Lunch 'n' Learn course, but tellers on either side of her did not. As soon as she returned from class, she was peppered from both sides, "What did you learn? What did you learn?" Another class participant was pregnant with her first child. It is never too early to learn about talking to your child about sexuality.

OTHER FEATURES

An icebreaker that has worked well for our Lunch 'n' Learn classes involves asking parents to bring photos of their chil-

dren and “introducing” others to their kids. Parents love to share their pictures and stories.

We also provide a question box for parents to tell us what they want to learn or what they want to discuss. To increase comfort level, we tell participants that everyone usually has questions about sex and that even if they do not, they should write something on a slip of paper and put it in the box. Some classes have parents who don’t hesitate to ask questions out loud. Other classes do not.

ZAP often puts a large cardboard poster in the shape of a house on bulletin boards in various businesses with the heading “Sex Education Belongs at Home.” We put questions on the windows and doors that Cortland students in the fourth through twelfth grades have asked about sex. Parents can open the windows and doors to find the answers.

We also give Post-it notes to parents during the first Lunch ‘n’ Learn class. We tell them that they will have an ongoing assignment of writing positive notes to their children (such as “Thanks for helping me with the dishes without my having to ask you.”) Parents usually enjoy reporting on their experiences. Some say that their children started replying with their own positive notes. One mom said that she wrote a lot of notes but never saw them again. At a school open house, she caught a glimpse of the inside door of her daughter’s locker. There were all the notes in a line down the inside of the door.

To help parents reinforce what they have learned during the Lunch ‘n’ Learn classes, we ask them to write a letter to themselves and to their children as a final assignment explaining what they want for their children in the future or how they hope this class will help them. We mail the letters to the parents six months later.

EVALUATE, EVALUATE

We sometimes give parents preclass and postclass tests. Most often, however, we ask parents to complete satisfaction surveys during the last class. This helps our educator determine the effectiveness of the course.

After our first parent education class in 1993 at a hotel-amenities packaging plant, a father told us on his final evaluation that he was certain the classes would help reduce the number of teen pregnancies in Cortland County. How prophetic he was!

The typical final evaluation contains a message such as this: “As a result of this class, I am more comfortable talking with my daughters about any issue. I have already noticed a change in the way I answer their questions.”

Other recent evaluations included these comments:

- “I’ll try to be more patient and understanding and have more serious heart-to-heart talks with my kid. I’ll remember that it’s not a burden, just a challenge.”

- “I now have a stash of resources—both mental and handouts. I’ll be like a true Boy Scout—‘Always prepared.’”
- “I was relieved to see that other people are having some of the same problems and questions.”
- “Now I have more of an idea of how to talk to my children about sex and other problems. I enjoyed the classes. The lunches were great, too.”
- “Before the class, I was afraid of offering too much information. Now I know a simple answer was all that was required.”

CONCLUSION

Parents are most anxious to know what to say to their kids and how and when to say it in an age-appropriate way. One evaluation from a parent reflects the struggle with issues of what to say: “I don’t know how you expect me to talk to my 14-year-old son about using condoms without his getting the idea that I am saying it is okay to have sex,” she said.

In our Lunch ‘n’ Learn classes, the educator asks parents problems they may have and brainstorms possible solutions with the entire class. Parents tell us they like the opportunity to dialogue and the chance to discuss issues in a safe, non-judgmental environment. The different points of view help them learn from each other. Parents should envision their class as a support network and continue supporting each other after the class is over.

Parents also learn in our classes that communication with their children about sexuality is not a one-time conversation and that it involves much more than a discussion of sexual intercourse.

Our Lunch ‘n’ Learn educator often stresses to parents trying to communicate with their teens that “some days we do it right and some days we don’t.” She also says she hasn’t met a parent, including herself, who wants his or her children to have sexual intercourse as a teen. “What I love about teaching this course is that it affirms the parent’s right to play a vital role in such a crucial area of his or her child’s life,” she concluded.

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FAITH COMMUNITY'S OUR WHOLE LIVES PROJECT SUPPORTS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Peggy Brick

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Englewood, NJ

Our *Whole Lives*—what a perfect title for the important sexuality education project developed cooperatively by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries for their fortunate congregations and others who understand that we are sexual beings from birth until death. The title reminds me of the wisdom in a Quaker pamphlet: *Sexuality: A Part of Wholeness*.¹ It reflects a fundamental belief of sexuality educators rarely realized in previous programs.

IDEAL FOR PARENTS

Our Whole Lives utilizes a variety of the best resources available to develop curricula for grades K through one, grades four through six, grades seven through nine, and grades 10 through 12, as well as, happily, for adults. The vision of the task force that spent six years developing the project is further evident in the fact that the basic curricula are appropriate for use for *any* group because faith-based issues are addressed separately in companion handbooks, *The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health and Justice: Resources for Communities of Faith and Sexuality* and *Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Grades 7 through 9*.

The usefulness of the curriculum for young children is greatly enhanced by a *Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives: Grades K through 1 and 4 through 6* by Patricia Hoerdoerfer. It includes a summary of topics for each educational session, questions parents frequently ask about those topics, and ways parents can use teachable moments to supplement classroom learning. Although the curricula are intended for a classroom, some parents will want to teach the lessons at home.

SIX PARENT GUIDELINES

The *Parent Guide* utilizes several key resources in developing its approach to the theory and practice of sexuality education for young children—consistently emphasizing that parents are their children's primary sexuality educators. It begins with an overview of "Children's Sexual Development," taken essentially from Pamela Wilson's excellent book, *When Sex Is the Subject*.² The next chapter urges parents to adopt six guidelines for their everyday interactions with their children:

1. Show love and demonstrate affection
2. Use accurate, age-appropriate language
3. Create an antibias atmosphere in your home
4. Be an "askable parent"
5. Provide opportunities for children to learn through observation and to discover things for themselves
6. Use teachable moments

The rest of the *Parent Guide* consists of guidelines to each of the children's sessions: eight for grades K through one and eight for grades four through six. *Our Whole Lives* is ground-breaking because it puts into practice the SIECUS *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Kindergarten–12th Grade*.³ This is exciting since most schools have been reluctant to provide any deliberate sexuality education in the elementary grades. (I say

deliberate because, of course, children constantly receive all sorts of messages about how their bodies work, how boys and girls are different, and how adults react to their sex-related questions and behaviors. But rarely are teachers consciously "laying a foundation for sexual health and self-esteem by helping children feel good about their bodies, good about being a boy or a girl, and good about adults who are willing to help them figure things out.")⁴

The *Parent Guide*, by demonstrating the wisdom of this early intervention and by

addressing persistent parental concerns, will be vital for the success of the project, which urges us to go where many adults still fear to tread. There are three components in the guidelines for each session: an *Overview* of the topics the children will discuss, a section addressing *Questions Parents Often Ask* about these topics, and a section illustrating how the parent can use *Teachable Moments* to further the child's understanding. The *Overview* is essentially a list of the "developmental messages" on the topic from the SIECUS *Guidelines*. Thus, the first two lessons, titled *Our Wonderful Bodies*, include the topics "Human Bodies: Male and Female," "Body Image," "Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation," and "Gender Roles." The content of each topic is described; for example: "Each part of the body has a correct name and a specific function or functions," "There are no jobs that are only for girls or only for boys," and "Homosexuals are also known as gay men and lesbian women." The section,

"The manual explains the importance of talking in a loving environment."

Questions Parents Often Ask, is savvy in predicting just where parents might get stuck interacting with the child on a particular topic. Thus, when the child's lesson is "Healthy Bodies, Safe Bodies," the manual addresses the parent's concern about "Why do children need to know about sexual abuse at this age? Can't we let them enjoy their childhood?" Here the manual explains the importance of talking in a loving environment about abuse and peer harassment and gives the parent four positive messages for reinforcing body rights and responsibilities adapted from Lory Freeman's book, *It's My Body*.⁵

For parents of older children, a lesson on "Decision Making" brings suggestions in response to parent questions, such as "How can I encourage my child(ren) to make good choices and decisions and practice sound decision-making skills?" The suggestions are supportive and parent-friendly: "...when your child asks you hard questions or makes a shocking statement, it is a compliment. If your child does not learn about sexuality from a parent, he/she will turn elsewhere..."

The *Teachable Moments* section uses a strategy long popular with sexuality educators by describing a tricky situation, asking parents to determine the messages they would want to give the child, and then suggesting possible responses. And in case you are wondering just how a curriculum for young children might address gender identity issues, note a teachable moment in the "Families," session: "In the grocery store, you and your child meet one of the new families in the neighborhood—Debra and her parents, Meghan and Lisa. You say hello and welcome them to the neighborhood. Later in the car, your child asks, 'Debra has two mommies and no daddy. Is that a family?'" The suggested messages to give: "There are many different kinds of families, including lesbian and gay families," and "Families come in all 'sizes and shapes and colors,' and all are part of the human family."

Teachable Moments for the parents of nine to 12-year-old children may be more difficult: "Your 12-year-old son asks, 'How old were you when you had sex for the first time?'" First, the parent is urged to find out what the child is really asking. Does he want to shock you? Does he want to know what age you think is appropriate? Is he testing your willingness to share this private matter? Alternate responses are suggested for the parent who wants to maintain privacy and for parents who decide it would be wise to share their own experiences. Either way, as parents work through the sessions, they will review the basic process for answering questions. They will:

1. determine what the child is asking
2. decide on the message
3. consider how to respond

As they do so, parents will learn the importance of communicating with the child and specific ways to do it.

In addition to *The Parent Guide*, *Our Whole Lives (OWL)* calls for a parent meeting, for a parent-child orientation, and

for parents to have a copy of the *OWL* curriculum their child is studying so they will know the specific goals and objectives of each session and see the activities in which the children will be involved. *Sexuality Education for Grades K–1* was written by Barbara Sprung, who also wrote the outstanding *Teaching Family Life* curriculum published by Rutgers University Press.⁶ The failure of the great majority of New Jersey schools to adopt this superb curriculum, carefully field-tested in schools throughout the state, is further evidence of the importance of the *OWL* project in supporting groups outside the public schools to assume a vital role in the sexuality education of young children. (Some school districts rejected *Teaching Family Life* because the accompanying big book includes outline drawings of naked children labeled with the correct names of body parts; some rejected it because one lesson included a positive image of same-sex relationships; others rejected it because many elementary school teachers are fiercely resistant to teaching any "sex education.")

OWL also enhances the parent-child connection by *HomeLink* exercises, which the children take home to supplement each lesson. Parents of younger children are asked to read a recommended story, help the children write in a journal, or talk about bodies, babies, and families. The older children read specific assignments with their parents in the joyous book, *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health*.⁷

Kudos to the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries for developing a model project that so clearly articulates and facilitates the role of parents in educating their young children about sexuality. What do I not like about *Our Whole Lives*? That so few children will be blessed with it, that so many children who most need it will never receive its messages, and that so few parents will benefit from its supportive approach to teaching children in ways that could enrich their whole sexual lives.

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Organizations nationwide are increasingly offering help to parents and caregivers who want to talk to their children about sexuality related issues.

These eight organizations are among the many that provide assistance through programs, publications, and other resources.

ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

“Parents know how to produce kids,” says Nary Suon, an immigrant from Cambodia who was hired by Plain Talk, White Center, to serve as an outreach worker to the 9,000 Southeast Asian community members of this small, quiet “village” in Seattle, WA. “But they need education to protect them. If you want to help kids, you must put more services in the community, more parenting classes, and more ways to help families.”

Plain Talk for Parents is a basic tool used to address the issue of teen pregnancy. The curriculum, which is free to all residents, is designed to help parents talk with their children about dating, sex, health, STDs, drug abuse, and decision making. The classes focus on communication skills and provide time for questions and conversation.

One Cambodian mother named Yany, who completed the program, explained, “I was taught to be shy about my body. It is my custom. But now I can explain things to my kids. I can talk, you know.”

For more information: *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202; Phone: 410/547-6600; Fax: 410/547-6624; E-mail: webmail@aecf.org
Web site: <http://www.aecf.org>

CORNELL UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Research shows that many parents do not discuss HIV/AIDS with their children even though young people identify their parents as their most important teachers and role models. This fact makes it clear that effective prevention education for children and teens must include strategies for informing, empowering, and motivating parents and guardians as HIV/AIDS educators.

As a result, the Parent HIV/AIDS Education Project of the Cornell University Cooperative Extension created a curriculum titled *Talking with Kids about AIDS* to prepare individuals to work with parents, guardians, and other adults and teach them the skills needed to communicate effectively with children and teens.

The Project invites small groups of parents and guardians to attend a series of three workshops conducted by volunteer peer facilitators in a community setting. The facilitators use interactive adult education techniques to enhance participants’ sense of self-efficacy as well as their

grasp of accurate information about HIV/AIDS.

For more information: *Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Education Center*, 16 East 34th Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10016-4328; Phone: 212/340-2900; Fax: 212/340-2908; E-mail: cenyc@cce3.cornell.edu; Web site: <http://www.human.cornell.edu.pam/extensn/hiv aids/>

FAMILY HEALTH PRODUCTIONS

“One of the best things parents can do for their children is to help them develop a healthy sexuality,” says Barry Zuckerman, M.D., in the *Words that Work* series of booklets, published by Family Health Productions, to help parents teach their children about sexuality. “This means to love and be loved, to trust and be trusted, and to develop healthy relationships. Communication is the cornerstone to achieving the goals.”

Family Health Productions has also produced two 30-minute videos—*Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk about Sexual Health*—designed to help parents gain knowledge and comfort in talking with their children. The videos include interviews with children, parents, and experts.

For more information: *Family Health Productions*, P.O. Box 1799, Gloucester, MA; Phone: 800/600-5779 or 978/282-9970; Fax: 978/282-9550; E-mail: info@aboutthehealth.com;
Web site: <http://www.aboutthehealth.com>

GIRLS, INC.

“This gave me a better idea of where my daughter’s head is,” a mother said after participating in the *Growing Together* program sponsored by Girls, Inc., for parents of young people nine to 11 years of age.

This curriculum is a series of five interactive sessions designed to jump-start crucial conversations between preteen girls and their parents or guardians about sexuality issues. Based on the belief that parents are the major influence and teachers of sexual and family values, the sessions help develop two-way communication skills to give girls an outlet for future questions and dilemmas.

The first session is “adults only” to build parents’ comfort level with sexuality issues and to prepare them to listen to and talk with girls in a nonjudgmental way during the remaining sessions. Key topics during this first session include the changes during puberty, anatomy and physiology, hygiene, adolescent sexual development and feelings, and values and expectations for teen sexual behavior.

For more information: *Girls, Inc.*, 441 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202; Phone: 317/634-7546, extension 21; Fax: 317/634-3024; E-mail: bhumphrey@girls-inc.org; Web site: <http://www.girlsinc.org>

MOTHERS' VOICES

The mother of a young woman who died of AIDS at age 26 said at a recent Mothers' Voices workshop titled *Parents Educating Parents* that "it's difficult to talk about sexual behavior...difficult to talk in the graphic way that you need to. I'd rather have that difficult moment, because the moment you learn your daughter is HIV-positive, your life as you knew it stops."

The *Parents Educating Parents* workshop in which this mother participated is a seven-part curriculum that helps parents with everything from learning the myths and realities of HIV transmission to practicing how to answer children's tough questions about sex. During the workshop, people's values, experiences, and worries come into play.

For more information: *Mothers Voices*, 165 West 46th Street, Suite 701, New York, NY 10036; Phone: 212/730-2777; Fax: 212/730-4378; E-mail: eg@mvoices.org; Web site: <http://www.mothersvoices.org>

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Parents and caregivers are the first teachers of their children. Students bring a foundation for learning when they come to school. The strength of that foundation depends upon the relationship between them and their parents or caregivers.

Such relationships are based upon honest, trusting, and open communication. *Can We Talk?* is a series of workshops sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) that helps parents, caregivers, and educators talk to children about issues that are often difficult to address: sexuality, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, and violence.

The NEA says, "To ultimately make public education the best it can be for everyone, to build confidence in and support for public education, and to sustain a meaningful partnership among schools and families and communities, we need to begin with the basics—the one-on-one relationships that begin in the family, continue at school and in the community, and then return to the family. *Can We Talk?* is a good beginning for this never-ending process."

For more information: *National Education Association, Health Information Network*, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Phone: 202/822-7570. Fax: 202/822-7775. E-mail: psathrum@nea.org Web site: <http://www.nea.org/hin>

PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS (PFLAG)

"Supporting your child now should be a natural extension of your general support as a parent," the PFLAG publication

Our Daughters and Sons points out. "You need to talk, listen, and learn together.... It is up to you to learn how to communicate with your children about their needs and issues concerning sexuality."

Created to promote well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals as well as their families and friends, PFLAG developed the booklet to help parents understand the sexuality of their children and to build meaningful relationships with them. The booklet includes "Question and Answer," "Personal Reflections," and "Resources."

The mother of a lesbian daughter says in the "Personal Reflections" section that it is "really important to talk, to know that you're not alone, that there are other people who have had this experience and are dealing with it in a positive way. And the benefit is that you establish a good relationship with your child."

For more information: PFLAG, 1726 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202/467-8180 Fax: 202/467-8194; E-mail: info@pflag.org; Web site: <http://www.pflag.org>

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF NEW YORK CITY

Parents in the Mott Haven section of New York City's South Bronx are learning to help other parents in the community learn to communicate with their children about sexuality. The need is clear: Mott Haven is the poorest congressional district in the nation and has one of the country's highest teen pregnancy rates.

Over 30 parents have completed training in the Adult Role Models (ARMs) program of Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) in the past year and have already helped over 1,900 parents learn to share their values about sexuality issues with their children.

PPNYC has provided these parents with over 75 hours of training on such subjects as sexual and reproductive health, parent-child communication, child development, and group facilitation. It has also helped parents schedule workshops at community centers, beauty salons, churches, and other organizations that they frequent in their daily lives.

In addition to helping other parents, the ARMs also gain professional skills and earn a stipend for their work.

For more information: *Planned Parenthood of New York City*, Margaret Sanger Square, 26 Bleeker Street, New York, NY 10012. Phone: 212/965-4845; E-mail: tracy.smith@ppnyc.org; Web site: <http://www.ppnyc.org>

TAKE A MINUTE TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEXUALITY

Take a Minute to Talk to Your Kids about Sexuality is the title of a series of one-minute radio spots developed by SIECUS to help parents and caregivers become the primary sexuality educators of their children.

SIECUS believes that the messages parents give their children about sexuality in the formative years are very significant and have a lasting impact. We therefore feel that it is vital that parents begin open and positive communication with their children as early as possible to set a pattern for future discussions.

The following excerpts are from the radio series. *SIECUS Report* readers can find the complete series—in both print and audio format—on the SIECUS Web site at <http://www.siecus.org/parent/radio/radi0042.html>

PARENTS OF INFANTS TODDLERS, AND PRESCHOOLERS

Q: *When does sexuality education begin?*

A: Infants and toddlers begin to learn what it means to be male or female when we talk to them, dress them, touch them, and play with them—even as a result of the toys we buy them. During the first few months of life, infants begin to discover their bodies. Parents should take advantage of teachable moments during bath time and diaper changing to start teaching their children the correct names for the parts of their bodies. This will set the stage for future sexual learning.

Q: *How should parents respond if they walk in on their four-year-old child playing doctor with a friend?*

A: Parents know that young children are naturally curious about their bodies and other people's bodies. Still, they may not know how to respond if they were to walk in on their four-year-old child playing "doctor" with a friend. First, they should stay calm. They could ask the children matter-of-factly what game they are playing. The parents could then calmly tell the children to get dressed and come into another room. The parents should remind the children to keep their clothes on while playing. Parents should also avoid looking at the situation through adult eyes. Childhood sexual play is not the same as sex; it is a combination of curiosity and role-playing. Parents can acknowledge the curiosity and suggest that there are better ways—such as through books—for children to learn about boys' and girls' bodies.

Q: *What do parents do when preschoolers touches their genitals?*

A: As three- and four-year-old children become aware of their bodies, they may discover that touching their own genitals feels

good. How should parents respond? First, they should understand that such genital touching is not masturbation. Regardless of their attitudes about masturbation, parents need to make their children understand that touching their genitals is private, just as using the bathroom is private. If children touch themselves in public, parents should quietly acknowledge the situation and remind them that it is only done in private. Parents should not worry if they have to repeat the lesson. It might take time for children to learn the difference between what is okay in public and in private.

Q: *How do you answer, "Where do I come from?"*

A: Sometime between the ages of two and a half and five, children will probably ask the classic question, "Where do I come from?" Before parents launch into a "big talk" about reproduction, they should ask their children what they are asking. Parents could say, "Where do you think you come from?" or "Do you mean what city we lived in when you were born?" If the child wants to know where babies come from, parents should give a simple, truthful answer. They could say, "Babies grow in a special place inside a mommy called a uterus." If the child asks more questions, parents should offer more answers. Above all, they should show that they are willing to talk openly about sexuality.

PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Q: *What should parents expect from the sexuality education program in their child's school?*

A: Sexuality education in elementary school begins with basic concepts designed to prepare children for future decision making. The curriculum can go beyond anatomy and reproduction to cover such topics as relationships, values, body image, and gender roles. Such a curriculum can also help children learn decision making, communication, and assertiveness skills. It can give children a chance to examine their values and attitudes as well as hear what others think. Sexuality education is not a substitute for what parents teach their children at home, but it can play an important role in preparing their children for the future.

Q: *How do parents explain intercourse to their eight-year-old child?*

A: It is better for children to learn about intercourse from their parents rather than in the schoolyard. Parents can give a simple definition and state their values at the same time. For

example, they can say that intercourse is behavior only for caring adults—or for marriage—and that it is for love and pleasure as well as making babies. Listen for childrens' questions and let them know you are there if they want to talk again.

Q: How do you teach your nine-year-old child about HIV and AIDS?

A: By the fourth grade, nearly all children have heard about HIV and AIDS. Before children begin puberty and face pressures to experiment with adult behaviors, parents need to explain how these behaviors can put children at risk. Preteens are curious about sex and need basic, accurate information. Parents should emphasize that intercourse has consequences, including pregnancy, STDs, and AIDS. They should tell their children how HIV is transmitted and teach them to interact with people who are ill with AIDS. Most of all, parents need to tell their children they are always there to talk about AIDS.

Q: How do parents handle their nine-year-old child watching television programs with sexual content?

A: No matter how hard parents try to communicate their values about sexuality, they will find television to be one of the most influential sexuality educators of their children. So how can parents deal with sexual content on television programs? First, they should set limits. They should determine viewing hours and choose programs based on their own judgment. Next, they should watch television with their children and look for teachable moments. They should discuss such sexual situations during the next commercial or after the show. They should ask their children what they think, and they should share values.

PARENTS OF MIDDLE AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Q: What should parents expect from the sexuality education program in their child's school?

A: School-based sexuality education is essential in middle and junior high schools. What should parents expect from such programs? First, such programs should do more than teach about sex and how to prevent pregnancy and disease. They should be based on a clear set of values. They should teach children that all sexual decisions have consequences and that abstinence is the best protection. Preteens who have a chance to examine their values and learn good communication skills will have a better foundation for eventual sexual decision making.

Q: How can parents prepare their son for puberty?

A: A preteen son is likely to notice signs of puberty before his parents do. How can parents prepare their son for puberty? They should try to notice changes in his body and offer information little by little rather than having a "big talk." They should tell him that his penis and testicles will increase in size and that his scrotum will change color. They should tell him that he will have erections more frequently during

puberty and that he may have nocturnal emissions or wet dreams. They should tell him that he will start to grow and that his voice will begin to change. They should give him some books to read on his own and find some parent-son classes they can attend together. They should let him know that they are available to talk about these changes.

Q: How can parents prepare their daughter for menstruation?

A: Some girls begin to show signs of puberty at approximately nine or 10 years of age. Some girls may show signs even earlier. How can parents prepare their daughter for the changes puberty brings? They should introduce the subject little by little. They should tell her about her first period. They should make certain she knows that a girl can become pregnant once she has her period. They should give her some books she can read in private. They should role-play what to do if she gets her first period when she is away from home. They may also want to consider how they will handle their daughter's first menstruation. This will help the daughter celebrate becoming a woman.

Q: What do eighth graders need to know about contraception?

A: Some eighth graders have boyfriends or girlfriends. Some kiss and make out. Some engage in sexual behavior. Parents should set limits on dating. They should tell their children that abstinence from sexual intercourse is best for teenagers. Parents should tell their children that they should come to them if they are even thinking about having intercourse. Parents should make certain that their children know about contraception and condoms and that they must protect against pregnancy and disease. Parents who help their children make good decisions when they begin to date will set the stage for healthy sexual relationships later in life.

PARENTS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Q: What should parents expect from the sexuality education program in their child's school?

A: By the time they reach high school, adolescents should have a comprehensive base of information about sexuality. A good high school sexuality education program should encourage abstinence while also providing information about contraception and disease prevention. A good program does not just lecture to students; it should include role-plays, group exercises, skill building, and group discussion. Teens need a chance to talk about relationships and sexual behavior, to examine their own values and attitudes, and to build the skills they need to make responsible sexual decisions.

Q: What do parents do when their 15-year-old child tells them he or she is gay?

A: Even the most liberal parents may not know what to say if their 15-year-old child announces he or she is gay. What

should they do? First, parents should take a deep breath and deal with their own feelings, which may range from acceptance to fear to confusion. Science tells us that sexual orientation is not a choice but as much a part of a person as being right- or left-handed. Parents should thank their child for his or her honesty and then explore with the child their feelings and concerns. Parents should find out what the child is really asking—for acceptance or help. Most importantly, they should tell their child that their love and acceptance does not depend on his or her sexual orientation.

Q: Will talking about sexuality lead your teenage child to experiment with sex?

A: Parents may feel perfectly comfortable teaching their toddlers the correct names of all body parts and telling their five-year-old child where babies come from. But what about teenagers? Will talking to teenagers about sexuality encourage them to have sex? The answer is a resounding “No!” Major research shows that sexuality education does

not cause young people to have sex. In fact, in homes where parents talk openly and honestly about sexuality, teens are less likely to have intercourse. When parents talk to their teens frankly about sexuality, they have a chance to offer their values and give their child the tools they need.

Q: How can parents keep their teens from having sex too early?

A: Most parents hope their adolescents will delay having sexual intercourse. But how can they keep their teen from having intercourse too soon? First, parents must realize that their opinions and values do matter. Teens need clear, direct messages about abstinence. One national survey found that teens who thought their parents would disapprove were more likely to abstain from intercourse. Teens who are close to their parents are also more likely to postpone intercourse. Too many parents disengage from their teens’ lives. The best approach is for parents to set clear, reasonable limits on dating, to communicate their expectations to their children, and to stay involved in their children’s lives.

SIECUS PUBLICATIONS FOR PARENTS

SIECUS has a number of publications designed to help parents feel more comfortable and knowledgeable talking to their children about sexuality. They include:

SIECUS Bibliography on Sexuality Education in the Home. See this mailing of the *SIECUS Report* for an updated bibliography on this subject. \$3 each, printed copy. Available on the *SIECUS Web site* at no charge.

How to Talk to Your Children about AIDS. Help for parents who want to talk to their children in preschool through high school about sexuality issues. (Also available in Spanish.) \$2 each, printed copy. Available on *SIECUS Web site* at no charge.

Now What Do I Do? Help for parents of preteens who want to advise their children on subjects such as puberty, love, dating, contraception, masturbation, and STDs. \$3 each, printed copy. Available on the *SIECUS Web site* at no charge.

Talk about Sex. Advice for teenagers to help them communicate more openly and effectively about relationships, sexuality, and STDs. (Also available in Spanish.) \$3 each, printed copy. Available on the *SIECUS Web site* at no charge.

SIECUS also has a section on its Web site (<http://www.siecus.org>) titled *For Parents and Other Adults* that provides help on talking to children about sexuality.

BOOKS ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Parents and caregivers may want to check available resources as they prepare to discuss sexuality issues with their children. This list includes some of the most recent publications. For a more comprehensive list, see the *SIECUS Annotated Bibliography: Sexuality Education in the Home*.

From Diapers To Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children

by *Debra W. Haffner, M.P.H.*

This book is filled with practical advice and guidelines to help parents feel more comfortable talking to children and early adolescents about sexuality issues. Incorporating value exercises, it encourages parents to examine their own sexual values so that they can share these messages with their children. *From Dating to Diplomas: A Parent's Guide for Raising Sexually Healthy Adolescents* is scheduled for publication in 2001.

1999; \$23.95; ISBN 155704385X; Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, New York, NY 10017; Phone: 212/832-3575; Fax: 212/832-3629; E-mail: sales@newmarketpress.com. Also available from SIECUS.

Raising a Child Responsibly in a Sexually Permissive World Second Edition

by *Sol Gordon, Ph.D., and Judith Gordon, M.S.W.*

This book provides practical information for parents to discuss sexuality issues with their children. Chapters include "Promoting Self-esteem in Children," "Becoming an Askable Parent," "What Children Need to Know," and "Fostering a Child's Sexual Integrity in Special Situations." 2000; \$10.95; ISBN 1580621775; Adams Media Corporation, 260 Center Street, Holbrook, MA 02343; Phone: 800/872-5627; Fax: 781/767-0994; Web site: <http://www.adamsmedia.com>

Teaching Human Sexuality: A Guide for Parents and Other Caregivers

by *Judy Cyprian*

This manual is intended for foster parents but is also useful for parents and other caregivers. Offering guidelines and sug-

gestions, it presents basic sexuality information by developmental age. A glossary, referrals, and resources are included. 1998; \$18.95; ISBN 0878686614; Child Welfare League of America, P.O. Box 2019, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701; Phone: 800/407-6273; Fax: 301/206-9789; Web site: <http://www.cwla.org>

Ten Talks Parents Must Have with their Children about Sex and Character

by *Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D., and Dominic Cappello*

This book is intended for parents of children in grades four through 12. Developed to help them talk about sexuality and character building, it offers advice on how to begin and what to say. Topics include safety, character, peer pressure, ethics, the Internet, and the media. Each chapter provides ways for parents to clarify their values and family rules about specific sexuality issues, anecdotes to share with children to foster communication, questions to ask children, opportunity to reflect on responses and identify potential problems, and sample talks.

2000; \$12.95; ISBN 0786885483; Time Warner Trade Publishing; Three Center Plaza, Boston, MA 02108; Phone: 800/759-0190; Fax: 800/286-9471; Web site: <http://hyperion-books.com/>

The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense about Sex

by *Deborah Roffman*

This book for parents is intended to inspire honest communication about sexuality with their children. Chapters include "Age Appropriateness: Too Much, Too Little, Or Just Right?," "Values: Becoming Your Child's Cultural Interpreter," "Sexuality: More Who We Are than What We Do," "Sexual Health: Five Universal Needs Along the Way," "Limit Setting: Keeping Our Children Safe and Healthy," and "Sexual Orientation: Why and How It's Everyone's Business."

2001; \$26; ISBN 0738202932; Perseus Books Group, Customer Service Department, 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, CO 80301; Phone: 800/386-5656; Fax: 303/449-3356; Web site: <http://www.perseuspublishing.com>

BOOKS ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Parents and caregivers often find it helpful to provide their children with books relating to sexuality issues. This list includes some of the most recently available books. For a more comprehensive list, see the *SIECUS Annotated Bibliography: Sexuality Education in the Home*.

The Care & Keeping of You: The Body Book for Girls

by *Valorie Lee Schaefer with illustrations by Norm Bendell*

This book for girls is a “head-to-toe” guide discussing puberty, self-esteem, hygiene, nutrition, eating disorders, fitness, sleep, and emotions.

1998; \$9.95; ISBN 1562476661; Pleasant Company, 8400 Fairway Place, Middleton, WI 53562; Phone: 800/845-0005; Fax: 608/836-0761; Web site: <http://www.americangirl.com>

The “Go Ask Alice” Book of Answers: A Guide to Good Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Health

Columbia University’s Health Education Program

This book provides youth with information and advice on a variety of frequently-asked questions from the “Go Ask Alice!” Web site at Columbia University. Topics include relationships; sexuality; sexual health; emotional health; fitness and nutrition; alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs; and general health questions.

1998; \$15.95; ISBN 0805055703; VHPS, 16365 James Madison Highway, Gordonsville, VA 22942; Phone: 888/330-8477; Fax: 540/672-7542; <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/book.html>

It’s So Amazing: A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families

by *Robie H. Harris with illustrations by Michael Emberley*

Intended for children ages seven to 12, this book provides accurate information about sexuality. Age-appropriate illustrations and humor address conception, pregnancy, birth, anatomy, sexual orientation, HIV, love, sex, gender, and families.

1999; \$21.99; ISBN 0763600512; Penguin Putnam Incorporated, Order Processing, 405 Murray Hill Parkway, East Rutherford, NJ 07073; Phone: 800/526-0275; Fax: 800/277-9604; Web site: <http://www.penguinputnam.com>

My Body, My Self for Boys: Preteens and Teens

by *Lynda Madaras
and Area Madaras*

This journal/activity book for boys eight to 15 years of age is a companion to the “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Boys. It includes exercises, quizzes, and personal stories to help boys learn about the changes that take place in their bodies during puberty.

2000; \$12.95; ISBN 1557044406; Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, Suite 1501, New York, NY 10017; Phone: 212/832-3575; Fax: 212/832-3629.

My Body, My Self for Girls: Preteens and Teens

by *Lynda Madaras
and Area Madaras*

This journal/activity book for girls eight to 15 years of age is a companion to the “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Girls. It includes exercises, quizzes, and personal stories to help girls learn about the changes that take place in their bodies during puberty.

2000; \$12.95; ISBN 1557041504; Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, Suite 1501, New York, NY 10017; Phone: 212/832-3575; Fax: 212/832-3629.

What’s Going On Down there? Answers to Questions Boys Find Hard to Ask

by *Karen Gravelle with Nick
and Chava Castro
with illustrations by Robert Leighton*

This book helps boys to understand the changes that occur during puberty, what causes these changes, and what to expect. The book also addresses sexual orientation, masturbation, intercourse, contraception, STDs, and pregnancy.

1998; \$8.95; ISBN 0802775403; Walker and Company, 435 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014; Phone: 800/289-2553; Fax: 212/727-0984.

BALANCE OF POWER IN WASHINGTON
PRESENTS BOTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

William Smith

SIECUS Director of Public Policy

With the elections over—finally—and the pundits having weighed in on every aspect of this great civics lesson, advocates need to assess the current policy atmosphere and the impact of the ascendancy of a new conservative regime in Washington on issues related to sexual and reproductive health.

Certainly, with both chambers of the 107th Congress and the presidency in conservative Republican hands, the next few years will present significant challenges for advocates of reproductive and sexual health. Still, the presence of a presidency without a mandate and the nearly equal division of power between both parties in Congress suggest that opportunities may also present themselves.

THE CONGRESS

In the Senate, for example, Republicans will rely on Vice President Dick Cheney’s tie-breaking vote as president of the Senate to push through volatile and partisan legislation. While the tactic is possible, their loss of four seats in the recent election and their slim, precarious hold on power in the chamber makes relying on his vote more likely the exception than the rule. In addition, committee membership will mirror the new parity in the chamber between the two parties. Because committees usually decide what legislation the full body will take up, this parity is particularly important.

In the House of Representatives, Republicans maintain a nine-seat majority but still may have to moderate their conservative agenda. Long gone are the days and hubris of the “Republican Revolution” and the “Contract with America.” If representatives hope to pass any legislation, they will need to lure a significant number of Democratic votes. In addition, there is a desire among some members to shake the “do nothing” label of their leadership in the 106th Congress. For advocates of sexual and reproductive health, there is good news in the absence of former Representative Tom Coburn (R-OK), who, though influential and supportive in ushering the Ryan White Care Act to a successful reauthorization and budget increase this past fiscal year, was an ardent opponent of reproductive rights, family planning, and responsible comprehensive sexuality education. Former Representative

“The next few years will present significant challenges.”

Coburn, whose open seat was one of nine that switched from Republican to Democrat, will return to his medical practice and will also join the board of directors of the right-wing Family Research Council.

THE PRESIDENCY

As reported in the August/September *SIECUS Report* (vol. 28, no. 6), the outcome of the presidential election weighed heavily on a number of sexual and reproductive health issues, including matters related to reproductive choice, sexual orientation, and sexuality education. President-elect Bush has said, however, that abstinence-only-until-marriage education will become a major priority for his administration. In response to a question asked of then-candidate Bush by the Associated Press, he said he “strongly support[ed] abstinence programs for America’s youth and favor[ed] spending at least as much on abstinence programs as on teen contraception programs.” He also indicated an interest in studying these federally funded sexuality education programs to determine their efficacy. Such a desire is welcome and suggests a departure from the opinions of other conservatives, most aptly voiced by Phyllis Schaffley in a recent *Washington Times* article in which she characterized such evaluations as “worthless” and an attempt by abstinence-only-until-marriage opponents to drain money from the programs themselves.

THE 2001 FISCAL YEAR

All these dynamics play out against the backdrop of the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education signed by President Clinton on December 21, 2000. Wrangling over the bill between the Congress and the Clinton Administration lasted months and resulted in mixed results for issues related to sexual and reproductive health.

In 2001, Title X family planning is funded at \$254 million, which represents a \$15 million increase. However, funding was \$20 million less than the amount requested by President Clinton in his budget and the amount agreed upon prior to the resolution of the presidential election.

Representative Coburn’s vigilance in over-dramatizing

the risks posed by human papilloma virus (HPV) infection resulted in \$6 million appropriated to the CDC to conduct HPV surveillance and education. It is certainly important to learn more about the disease, but surveillance seems slightly misguided given the fact that three quarters of the adult population will be infected and the vast majority will clear the virus without ever knowing they were infected. Fortunately, this final compromise excluded a provision that would have required condom packages to contain a warning label stating that they are ineffective in preventing HPV transmission. Instead, the bill calls for a reexamination of such condom labels to determine if they are medically accurate.

The Adolescent Family Life Act, while maintaining the \$9 million earmarked for abstinence-only-until-marriage education that conforms to the strict eight-point definition established under the 1996 Welfare Reform Law, includes a welcome addition of \$5 million for services and care to pregnant and parenting teens, including funds for the prevention of second births.

Two other provisions that were also included in the bill warrant mention. First, Mathematica Policy Research, the firm conducting the evaluation of the Title V-funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, has received a four-year extension on the release of their results, from 2001 to 2005. (An interim report is due to Congress on January 1, 2002.) In the long run, the delay is good news because it will give the firm time to study the program's effect over a longer period of time. In the short run, however, advocates relying on the data to inform discussion and debate around the reauthorization of the program set to take place in this Congress, have been denied this important information. Such reauthorization discussions will now

likely take place without any data on the effective use of taxpayer dollars over the past five years.

Finally, the bill also contained a proposal by abstinence-only-until-marriage champion Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK) to delay the release of the \$20 million in new abstinence-only-until-marriage dollars available under the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance—Community-Based Abstinence Education program, or SPRANS-CBAE, until March 2001. The delay is designed to allow the new Administration to fill potential vacancies at the Department of Health and Human Services with individuals more supportive of this flawed and unproven federal policy on sexuality education. Should Secretary of Health and Human Services-Designee Tommy Thompson, the Republican Governor of Wisconsin, win confirmation, the tactic to delay the flow of funding may prove fruitful for proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage education.

CONCLUSION

The challenges in the coming year are significant, to be sure. But SIECUS and many of our colleague organizations have created a strategy involving states, local communities, the U.S. Congress, and other federal entities that will challenge our friends on the other side in both defensive and offensive ways.

All sides agree that it will be an interesting time. A leading proponent of abstinence-only-until-marriage education whose own program has enjoyed the boon in abstinence-only-until-marriage funding, was recently quoted in the *Washington Times* saying, "It's going to be a real war of ideas...and it's going to be a good one."

A good one indeed.

FIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The old adage that "all politics is local" is particularly true in terms of issues related to sexuality education. Local control over curricula in public schools means that local citizens have greater control over what is taught than any elected representative in Congress.

Here are five ways to support responsible sexuality education for America's youth:

1. **Join SIECUS' Advocates Network.** SIECUS maintains an E-mail listserv that alerts our advocates to issues related to sexuality education and that often contains action steps that they can take to support or counter an issue at hand. To join the Network, go the SIECUS Web site (<http://www.siecus.org/policy/Advocates/advo0000.html>).

2. **Get informed about sexuality education in your local schools.** Ask your children, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members about the sexuality education programs that are taught in your schools.

3. **Speak out against abstinence-only-until-marriage education, particularly for older teens.** If such programs are the only type of education taught in your schools, write to each member of your school board and demand that they provide young people with proven education that teaches both abstinence and contraception. Ask to speak on the issue during an upcoming school board meeting.

4. **Write your elected representatives.** Too often, silence is equated with ambivalence among elected officials. If they do not hear from their constituents on a particular matter, they often assume that they do not care. Write your representatives at every level of government and urge them to support sexuality education that teaches both abstinence and contraception. You can usually find their contact information in the blue pages of your local phone directory.

5. **Get the message out.** Recruit other concerned parents, perhaps by encouraging the involvement of your local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Consider writing an editorial on the issue for your local paper, or speak with a reporter from a local media outlet that covers school-related issues and encourage him or her to write a story.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

Submitting Articles and Book and Audiovisual Reviews for Publication in the *SIECUS Report*

Each issue of the *SIECUS Report* features groundbreaking articles and commentary by leaders and front-line professionals in the field of sexuality and education, along with news, special bibliographies on varied topics, book and audiovisual reviews, recommended resources, and advocacy updates. All of this comes to members and other subscribers six times each year.

Manuscripts are read with the understanding that they are not under consideration elsewhere and have not been published previously. Manuscripts not accepted for publication will not be returned. Upon acceptance, all manuscripts will be edited for grammar, conciseness, organization, and clarity.

To expedite production, submissions should adhere to the following guidelines:

PREPARATION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Feature articles are usually 2,000–4,000 words. Book and audiovisual reviews are typically 200–600 words.

Manuscripts should be submitted on 8½ x 11 inch paper, double-spaced, with paragraphs indented. Authors should also send a computer disk containing their submission.

All disks should be clearly labeled with the title of submission, author's name, type of computer or word processor used, and type of software used.

The following guidelines summarize the information that should appear in all manuscripts. Authors should refer to the current issue of the *SIECUS Report* as a guide to our style for punctuation, capitalization, and reference format.

Articles

The beginning of an article should include the title, subtitle, author's name and professional degrees, and author's title and professional affiliation.

Articles may incorporate sidebars, lists of special resources, and other supplementary information of interest. Charts should be included only if necessary and should be submitted in camera-ready form. References should be numbered consecutively throughout the manuscript and listed at the end.

Book Reviews

The beginning of a book review should include the title of the book, author's or editor's name, place of publication (city and state), publisher's name, copyright date, number of pages, and price for hardcover and paperback editions.

Audiovisual Reviews

The beginning of an audiovisual review should include the title of the work, producer's name, year, running time, name and address of distributor, and price.

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On request, authors of articles receive three copies of the issue in which their article appears, and reviewers receive two copies. Larger quantities are available to authors and reviewers at half price if requested prior to printing.

INQUIRIES AND SUBMISSIONS

All questions and submissions should be addressed to the editor, by telephone, at 212/819-9770, by E-mail to medwards@siecus.org, or by mail to *SIECUS Report*, SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350, New York, NY 10036-7802.

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SIECUS affirms that sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living. SIECUS develops, collects, and disseminates information; promotes comprehensive education about sexuality; and advocates the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices.

