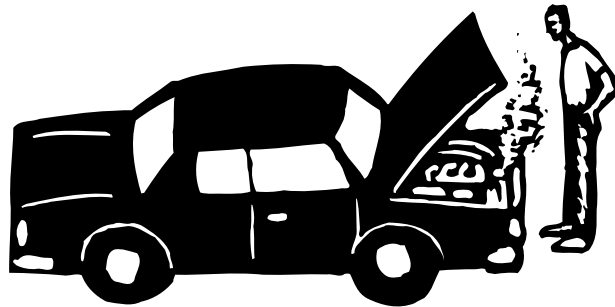


SECTION II: Choosing Your Road Crew



While it's possible for you to advocate on your own, there's strength in numbers. This section explains how to get others involved in your cause.

Contents:

- **Building Bridges: Steps for Starting a Coalition**
- **Creating a Caravan.** How to Organize Your Coalition
- **Picking Up Passengers: A Sample Letter Appealing for Support**

Building Bridges: Steps for Starting a Coalition

Your first step is to build a network of people who are committed to your cause and will help you navigate the road blocks and detours that you're sure to run up against. This is called a "coalition."

The following steps tell you how to create a coalition. But, if you can't get others behind the project, it is possible to begin on your own and then, hopefully, along the way, you will pick up passengers who realize how important it is to get better sex ed in your school.

Here Are Steps to Creating a Caravan:

1. **Solicit Student Support.** Since students are sitting in the driver's seat for this road trip, your first step is to get other students involved. Your best course is to get a student group in your school to take this on as its special project. The student council, an HIV/AIDS coalition, a gay/straight alliance or a peer leader group are a few likely groups that jump to mind. But, it can be any student group that really wants to work hard to convince your school officials and community that you need better sexuality education.

Another advantage of aligning with an existing student group is that they usually come with an adult advisor. Obviously, for the student group to take on the project, you'll need the cooperation of the advisor. That person can help pave the way for you to get permission from your school principal to conduct student surveys and distribute information — important things you'll need to do as you wind down the road. Student groups also often have access to your school copier, computers, telephone and other resources you'll need as you go forward.



But, also remember that if a teacher or your principal refuses to support you, you still have the right to take action. It will probably make it more difficult. But not having their support shouldn't force you to quit. For example, if you aren't allowed to meet at school, you can still gather a group in your home to plan your strategy.

- 2. Map Out a Mission.** Get your student group together, along with your advisor, and agree on what piece of the guide you want to start with. You might also think about creating a "mission statement." It can be something simple: "To bring better sexuality education to students in our school." Or it can be more specific: "To get sexuality education taught in ninth grade, instead of 12th grade."
- 3. Tap into Teachers.** Ask your health teacher, coach (if he/she teaches sex ed) or other teachers in your school if they would be interested in helping. They may be just as frustrated as you are with the curriculum they have to teach. If you can get them on board, you'll be miles ahead.
- 4. Partner with Parents.** Believe it or not, parents are pretty powerful people in your community. They pay taxes and vote, so school officials often listen to them. And they're probably on your side. In most communities, polls show that nine out of 10 parents want their children to have good sexuality education. So talk to your school's Parent-Teacher Association (check with your school secretary for the president's name, address and phone number). Ask if you can attend a meeting to make a short presentation about your project and to solicit advice and support. Also have every member of your student group and your friends talk to their parents and ask them to help.
- 5. Ask About an Advisory Committee.** Many districts have advisory committees that make recommendations about sexuality education in your schools. Ask your school secretary whether your district has one. If so, get the name, address and phone number of the chairman of the board. Ask if you can attend a meeting to make a short presentation about your project and to solicit advice and support.
- 6. Link with Local Organizations.** It's also helpful to reach out to other adults in the community. Your health teacher, group advisor or parents of some of the students may be able to steer you to community leaders or people who run local programs who would be interested in helping. If not, compile a list of organizations in your area and write a letter (a sample letter

follows). For help in compiling a list, check with the reference librarian in your local library. Also, ask organizations that you have identified whether they have a list of other supportive local organizations.

Here are some places to look for help in finding supportive community organizations:

1. A parents or community group that might exist to help guide education in your community (other than the PTA)
2. A local church leader who is committed to helping teenagers
3. Programs that serve youth, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Municipal Alliances
4. Programs that focus on health, like AIDS awareness coalitions and clinics that provide birth control
5. Teen pregnancy programs and coalitions
6. Service organizations, like the League of Women Voters, the Junior League, the Kiwanis Club, the 4-H, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and the Urban League, among others

The following national organizations may be able to help you find a local organization that would want to help:

- 1. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy,** 2100 M Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20037, ph: 202/857-8655, fax: 202/331-7735, Web site: teenpregnancy.org.
- 2. National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention, Inc. (NOAPPP),** 1319 F Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington DC, ph: 202/783-5770, fax: 202/783-5775, Web site: NOAPP.org.
- 3. Planned Parenthood Federation of America,** 810 7th Ave., New York, NY 10019, ph: 800/829-PPFA, 800/230-PLAN (connects callers to the Planned Parenthood nearest you), fax: 212/247-6269, Web site: ppfa.org.
- 4. Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice,** 1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1130, Washington DC 20005, ph: 202/628-7700, fax: 202/628-7716, Web site: rsrc.org. A coalition of 40 national Christian, Jewish and other religious organizations that support access to reproductive health services. They can help connect you with local religious leaders who support your cause.

Picking Up Passengers: A Sample Letter Appealing for Support

(Use to contact community organizations, religious leaders, etc.)

Dear:

I am writing to ask you to support our movement to get better sexuality education in our schools — a movement crucial to making sure every young person graduates from high school pregnancy and disease free.

Consider this. Nationally, one million teenagers become pregnant each year — translating to 2,800 teen pregnancies per day. HIV/AIDS cases are growing fastest among teens and young adults, many of whom contracted the HIV virus while teenagers. One out of every four — or 3 million — sexually active teens gets infected with a sexually transmitted disease each year.

Adults have failed to give young people the information they need to make smart choices. We are asking the school board to pass a resolution pledging its support of solid sex ed for high school students. We are also asking that changes be made to the curriculum to make this possible.

What can you do to help us? First, write or phone our school board members. Let them know you support our cause and believe students should be educated about their sexuality. Second, attend school board and community meetings to voice your support. Third, join our coalition. If you have any resources, special knowledge or other skills that would help us in our quest for better sexuality education, please contact us. We need all the partners we can get. We are planning our first meeting on _____ at _____.

Please join us.

We've enclosed a list of school board members, along with addresses and phone numbers. Also enclosed is a board meeting schedule. We hope to hear your voice added to the chorus of people calling out for an end to silence and shame about a subject that will affect our future. We deserve to graduate from high school pregnancy and disease free. We hope we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

