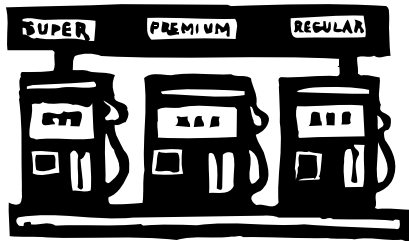


SECTION VII: Priming the Publicity Pump



The media can be a great help in spreading awareness of your advocacy efforts. This section tells you how to work with the media to get your message out.

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- **Tips for Working with the Media**
- **Sample Radio Public Service Announcement**
- **Sample Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed Piece**
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Tips for Working with the Media

The media can help get your message out to the public. Politicians and school board members also pay close attention to media coverage of issues. Here are some ways to get editors and reporters interested in your story.

1. Don't Be Intimidated. Reporters need stories. And stories about young people working for a particular cause always make good copy. Plus, you have sex in your story. And you know what that means. It sells.

2. Know Your Media. Most media — newspaper, radio and television stations — are geographically oriented. That means they are only interested in a particular area. Some are strictly local, so they're interested in a town or group of towns. Others are statewide, regional, national and international.

You'll need to make a list of media that are interested in your town. Your local newspapers are your easiest sell. Read the papers in your area and see which reporter covers your school board. Also, check the yellow pages for a listing of media. Look under "newspaper," "radio," and "television." Your local library should also have books that list media. Ask the reference librarian for help in finding other media that might be interested in your story. Also, organizations that support your cause may already have a media list they would share with you. From all these sources, you can cull a good list of media to contact with your story.

3. Write a Press Release. You can use the sample press release in this kit as a guide, but here are some general guidelines. Put your name, address and phone number in the top right-hand corner. Write a headline. A press release should be written in simple, straight-forward sentences that give the facts about

your cause. (Remember, the who, what, where, when and why.)

Also include information about your group and statistics that support your argument that schools need better sexuality education. Use information in this guide about the teen pregnancy rate, HIV/AIDS among teens and STDs among teens.

Tie the release to an event. It's best if you can send a release in advance of a school board or community meeting. Reporters will often do an advance story on an interesting issue and then cover the meeting.

The release should be typed, double-spaced and, in general, should be no more than two pages long.

4. **Get the Word Out.** Mail the release to reporters on your list. Send the release at least two weeks before the meeting.
5. **Call.** A couple of days after you've sent your release, call reporters and editors. Ask them whether they want to meet with you, other students, parents, teachers, school officials or other adults who are supporting your cause. Offer to help arrange the interview. If they aren't interested in an advance, ask whether they will cover the meeting. Let them know that students and others will be there.
6. **Give Them the Facts...** plus a few personal stories. People make a good story even better so try to have teens who are willing to talk about their personal experiences and how they would benefit from better sexuality education. Also, be ready to explain why students need better sex ed and have information available on the current curriculum.
7. **Get on TV.** Often television and radio stations have talk shows that would be interested in having a group of socially minded youths appear. Watch television and listen to the radio. Cable shows are especially open to this kind of story. When you've found some shows that are interested in health and political issues, call the show's producer or write a letter. Tell them what you're doing and ask whether they might be interested in doing a show on your issue.
8. **Keep in Touch.** Drop a note or phone a reporter after they've done a story to say, "Thanks."

9. **Calendars.** When publicizing your meeting, remember to send a short release to the "Community Calendars" sections of your local newspapers. Just include the date, time, place and subject of the meeting. The newspapers will include it with a listing of other meetings.

Sample Radio PSA

Most radio stations give free air time to community groups that want to advertise an event. Send out a Public Service Announcement (PSA) in advance of the school board or community meeting.

Here's a sample PSA:

Community Forum to Discuss Sex Ed in the Schools

Every young person has a right to graduate from high school free of pregnancy and disease. (Group name) is working to make that happen. This group of high school students is sponsoring a community forum on sexuality education in (school name). The meeting will be held at (time) on (date) at (place). The public is encouraged to attend to express their opinion about what schools should teach students about sex, relationships, HIV/AIDS and other important issues.

Sample Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed Piece

The letter on the opposite page (or your own version) should be sent to your school newspaper and newspapers that cover your area. When sending the letter to newspapers outside your school, address it to: Editorial Page Editor or better yet, find out who that is and address it directly to that person. You can follow up a few days after you sent it to see if they're interested in using it. A quick call is OK.

Young People Need Sexuality Information to Make Smart Choices

Young people today face tough choices, some that can cost us our lives. What's really scary is that so many of us are making the wrong choices. Nationally, about 880,000 teenagers become pregnant each year, according to recent statistics. Forty-three percent of young women become pregnant at least once before turning 20.

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.

We are the first generation to grow up in the shadow of AIDS. We are exposed to more sex on television and in the media than any generation before us. We're bombarded with contradictory messages: "Sex is love. Sex is death." We know the truth lies somewhere in between.

But we need adults to stop beating around the bush. We need them to level with us about the complexities of sex and relationships. We need them to stop being afraid to talk about our sexuality. We need them to acknowledge that sexuality is a natural part of our development. We need them to teach us how to manage our sexuality, responsibly, and in a way that is best for us.

That's why a group of students at (High School name) are lobbying the school board for a better sexuality education curriculum. Our proposed program would provide age-appropriate information to high school students. The idea is to help young people make smart decisions when they are faced with inevitable choices that could change their lives.

Some people argue that educating young people about sex will make us go out and do it. That's crazy. We are not stupid — just misinformed. Besides, the pressure to have sex already exists. In our school hallways. In the shows we watch. In the locker room. On the football field. And that pressure is working. On average, girls begin having sex at about 17. For boys, it's 16.

We're asking the community, parents, teachers and the school board to support us in our quest for better information and better skills. Don't let us roam in ignorance. Give us the information and skills we need so we can make smart choices. We want to graduate from high school free of pregnancy and disease. We deserve that chance.

Navigating the Net

If you have a group member who is a computer whiz, you may be able to create a Web site that champions your cause. Ask your school principal whether your district will host your site. If not, many Internet service providers allow users to create their own site.

If you do create a Web site, remember to include information about your organization, your cause and statistics that support the need for better sexuality education. You can also include the names of people and organizations that support your cause. Be sure to give people a way to get involved. The more partners you have, the better.

BUT BE CAREFUL!!! There are people who use the Internet to lure young people into illegal pornographic sex “chat rooms” and other dangerous activities. Do not give out personal e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, home addresses or credit card numbers. And never agree to meet someone in person whom you’ve met on the Internet. If someone sends you messages or solicits you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable and that seems wrong, follow your gut. Immediately cut off any connection with that person. Then, tell someone!! A trusted adult is best. You, or your parents, should also notify your Internet provider about this person. He (or she) could be trying to hurt others.

SURF SAFELY!

Here are some Web sites to check out for more information:

- 1. The Alan Guttmacher Institute — agi-usa.org**
Provides access to its many publications dealing with sexuality and a way to search back issues of its periodical, *Family Planning Perspectives*, for articles on health and sexuality.
- 2. American Social Health Association — ashastd.org**
Offers news releases, brochures, legislative advocacy information, educational materials, surveys, research findings and answers to frequently asked questions about sexually transmitted diseases.
- 3. Planned Parenthood — teenwire.org; ppfa.org**
Offers a variety of information about teen pregnancy, sexual health, birth control and abortion, as well as resources for parents and other adults. Also offers links to other informative sites.
- 4. SIECUS — siecus.org**
Posts texts of many of its publications that offer many articles about sexuality.
- 5. Advocates for Youth — advocatesforyouth.org**
Offers tons of information about teen advocacy and health.
- 6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — cdc.gov**
The place to go for the latest stats on various health issues. Has a search feature to help you find what you’re looking for.
- 7. National School Boards Association — nsba.org**
The latest information on school board politics and other items of interest to advocates. Also has a special section devoted to school health programs (a great place to find out what others are doing). You can also ask questions of people who are experts when it comes to working with school boards.
- 8. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy — teenpregnancy.org**
A great place for updates and research. Also has tons of links to other great sites.

To learn more about sexuality — and the questions that are on kids’ minds — check out these sites:

- 1. Go Ask Alice! — goaskalice.columbia.edu**
A program of Columbia University’s Health Education Program, “Go Ask Alice!” is an interactive question-and-answer service. Lots of great questions and honest answers on everything from sexuality and relationships to alcohol and drug abuse.
- 2. SEX, ETC. — sxetc.org**
Offers articles written by teens for teens that appeared in *SEX, ETC.*, a national newsletter on teen health and sexuality. Also gives teens a place to ask questions, which are answered by health experts. Live chats, message boards, and links to other teen sites.
- 3. Dr. Drew — drdrew.com**
Dr. Ruth Westheimer — drruth.com
Young people can find information about birth control, pregnancy, STDs and other sexual health issues. “Ask Dr. Drew” and “Ask Dr. Ruth” sections include a list of teens’ questions and answers. Both Web sites also have feature stories and message boards.
- 4. Teen Advice Online — teenadvice.org**
Offers articles by teen counselors on topics ranging from study habits to rape. The site invites contributions from teen visitors.
- 5. Youth Resource — youthresource.com**
For gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning teens.

These are just a handful of useful sites out there. As you start surfing, you’re sure to discover more. Just remember to surf safely!