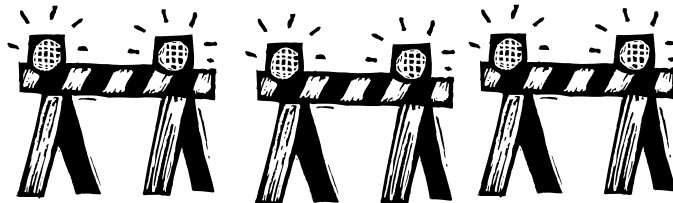


SECTION IX: Wrestling with Roadblocks



We'd be remiss if we didn't discuss the fact that some people are strongly opposed to giving young people any type of sexuality education, unless it teaches only that sex before marriage is wrong.

In fact, many communities allow only abstinence-only and abstinence-until-marriage sex education programs in their schools. And their numbers could grow. The federal government, in its recent welfare reform bill, included millions of dollars in grants to states. Those grants can be used only for programs that teach students they should wait until they are married to have sex and forbids any discussion of safer sex.

Sex is Bad

School districts that take this money cannot allow their teachers to talk about contraception and related issues with their students. Instead, these abstinence-only programs must teach that sexual activity outside of marriage can cause harm — physically, emotionally and psychologically. These programs rarely allow students opportunities to discuss issues with each other, to practice decision-making skills or to develop critical thinking skills.

Some individuals and groups that support abstinence-until-marriage programs often represent certain religious groups that also tend to oppose abortion. You may hear the terms “right-wing,” or “far right,” as you wind your way through the political process; these terms refer to groups that politically support certain programs such as abstinence-only, or abstinence-until-marriage programs.

Of course, everyone is entitled to their opinions. But, you may find that a strong (though not necessarily large) contingent of people who hold these views can impose those beliefs on an entire community. They can stop a quality sexuality education program in its tracks. And it can be very difficult for young people to fight it.

More Adult Support

If this happens in your community, you really need, more than ever, strong support from adults in your community. Chances are you'll have to take your cause to the state Legislature. The goal would then become to convince state lawmakers to pass a law that mandates comprehensive sexuality education. Those laws, hopefully, make it more difficult for one group on a local

level to oppose a quality program.

State politics is different from local politics. And while some of the strategies offered in this guide would be helpful on the state level, it really is a different arena that requires a different approach.

If you find yourself blocked on the local level, your best detour course is to seek out groups or a coalition that support comprehensive sexuality education. They might already be working with state lawmakers to change your state's laws. Ask the community contacts you've made throughout the kit whether they know of such a group. If they don't know, check with your state departments of health, education and/or human services.

Statewide Focus

If such a group does not exist, then maybe, through your coalition building, you have brought together enough like-minded adults to start one. If so, you can support the adults in their advocacy, continue to organize teenagers to lobby your state lawmakers and state board of education and continue to act as youth spokespeople so that your views are heard in the continuing debate over sexuality education.

