



ADVOCATES • FOR • YOUTH

# ADVOCACY KIT



## **Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health**

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## Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health

# ADVOCATING FOR ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Advocacy is critical in efforts to ensure that adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs are enacted, funded, implemented and maintained. Advocacy (like lobbying) seems intimidating to many—but the idea is more frightening than the activity. All advocacy involves making a case in favor of a particular cause using skillful persuasion and/or strategic action. In other words, advocacy simply means actively supporting a cause, and trying to get others to support it as well.

Advocacy involves attempts to influence the political climate, public perceptions, policy decisions and funding determinations in order to improve adolescent reproductive and sexual health. Advocates work not only to promote a defined solution, but also to defeat unacceptable proposals.

Advocacy takes many forms. A comprehensive advocacy campaign will first and foremost influence political support for a program by educating policymakers. Depending on the situation, policymakers can include national, state or local legislators; county or city council members; school board members; or anyone else in a position to promote or reject proposals that you care about. Another important target for advocacy campaigns is the public, since public desires affect political decisions. A campaign aimed at the public could target a general community or a specific group such as parents in a particular neighborhood.

The only prerequisite to being an advocate is being committed to the issue at hand. Too often, people who work with and for youth do not see themselves as appropriate advocates because they are not lobbyists for their organizations. In fact, staff of youth-serving and community-based agencies, teachers, health care professionals, parents and teenagers can be articulate and compelling advocates for teen health programs. First-hand experience in helping young people build skills, education and motivation to make responsible choices about sexuality provides a remarkable body of expertise that can, and should, be more available to the policymakers.

This Advocacy Kit contains information on the basic components of an advocacy campaign. Specific sections address working in groups to achieve your goals (Coalition Building in Community Education and Advocacy), promoting your goals to the public (Education and Media Campaigns) and influencing the legislative process in your favor (Lobbying: the Art of Persuasion).

**The staff of Advocates for Youth hopes this information is useful to you in promoting teen health in your community. Please call (202) 347-5700 if you have questions, or require further information.**

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## What's wrong with teaching abstinence?

All comprehensive sexuality education programs teach about abstinence, and help teens build their skills to remain abstinent if they so desire. These topics include decision-making, negotiating health care and contraceptive use, disease prevention and avoidance of peer pressure. When abstinence is taught as the only option for young people, however, teens are denied information and skills that will be vitally important to them at some point in their sexual lives.

Furthermore, sexually active teens feel stigmatized by messages that only abstinence is safe or appropriate, and may be less likely to use contraception when they have intercourse. After all, condoms provide 10,000 times more protection than no contraception at all. Withholding information does not help young people make informed and responsible choices.

## How can you teach abstinence and contraception at the same time? Doesn't that send a mixed message?

Teaching abstinence along with contraception does not send a mixed message. Instead, it realistically acknowledges the complicated nature of sexual relationships and the important decisions that being sexual people involves. Comprehensive sexuality education provides young people with facts about a wide range of behaviors and choices, including abstinence and contraception. This information empowers teens who are both having and abstaining from sex to make healthy decisions based on knowledge and their personal values. Research indicates that school programs that promote both abstinence and protected sex are more effective in reaching teens and help them make responsible decisions.

## How can sexuality education be good if so many people oppose it?

Actually, most people (including most parents) support sexuality education. A recent study indicated that 85 percent of adults support comprehensive sexuality education in the schools, and 94 percent support HIV prevention education in the schools. Public health organizations recognize that sexuality education is beneficial; a list of organizational supporters appears on the reverse of this page.

Most opposition to sexuality education comes from a small minority of people, unusually conservative in their political and religious values. These critics usually fear that any discussion of sexuality will lead young people to have sex or that openness about homosexuality will somehow "recruit" teens into lesbian or gay relationships. Another misperception is that programs which are not comprehensive and only discuss abstinence can be effective. Not one of these beliefs is true. Educating the public about the real content and effects of sexuality education will help allay fears and make visible the overwhelming public support for comprehensive sexuality education.

# THE ROLE OF COALITION BUILDING IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

Coalition building and public education play vital roles in implementing policies and programs for adolescent reproductive and sexual health. Coalitions provide a structure for allied groups to pursue a unified goal, coordinate strategies pool resources. Broad-based coalitions demonstrate wide support for particular policies or programs.

Coalitions can serve the purpose of educating policymakers and the public regarding adolescent reproductive and sexual health services. Coalition members act to lobby policymakers, write letters to the editor, speak with the press, attend community meetings and give public testimony. By so doing, policymakers and the public are afforded accurate and compelling information regarding adolescent health and are therefore more likely to demonstrate support for related policies and programs. Coalitions act to mobilize this support, demonstrating to policymakers that constituents care about improving or maintaining adolescent access to sexuality education and health services. Coalitions also provide a powerful counterpoint to organized opposition.

The following are some basic tips for creating and maintaining a coalition. Activities through which the coalition can promote adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs and policies are also included.

There are four steps to increasing community involvement and building support for adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs:

- Work in coalition
- Conduct research
- Prepare materials
- Conduct educational campaigns

The following explains each step in greater depth.

## Step 1: Work in Coalition

Coalitions are invaluable because they bring people and resources together from all sectors of the community and provide visible signs of community support. Working in a group helps increase quality as well as the quantity of work, and prevents burnout by spreading responsibilities. Coalitions allow individuals and groups to contribute their unique expertise, as well as to educate and mobilize their particular constituents. Coalitions can help identify genuine concerns and engage in group problem-solving. Once a program is implemented, coalition members are ideal for providing services and resources for program operations.

Coalitions are hard work, however. Keep in mind the following pitfalls and work to minimize the usual problems found in coalitions:

- Coalition members' interests may conflict

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- Building consensus is a time-consuming process
- Logistics become more complicated
- Guidelines for Effective Coalitions.

**Develop a statement of purpose and goals.** The “statement of purpose” can be broadly worded to reflect the philosophy of the coalition and permit a wide range of groups to participate. “Goals” should be specific, achievable and measurable. An organization’s membership in the coalition symbolizes their commitment to the goals, and is indicated by endorsement of the coalition’s statement of purpose.

The statement of purpose should be broad, but not so broad that groups who would actively impede the overall purpose are eligible to be members. For example, if the coalition seeks comprehensive sexuality education, a group that opposed any discussion of abortion would not be an appropriate member. The coalition could work with non-member groups on other projects, but without jeopardizing the strategic work of the coalition.

The statement of purpose is also a place to clarify that your program is comprehensive and to address obvious criticisms. Highlight program components such as “involving parents” and “promoting abstinence” to forestall criticism and prevent misunderstandings. For example, a coalition seeking comprehensive sexuality education might adopt a statement of purpose that the coalition seeks sexuality education which includes information about abstinence and the full range of family planning options, as well as builds skills to communicate with parents and peers about sexuality.

**Establish a structure and leadership roles.** Coalitions are most effective when all members have a voice and know they will be heard. Creating maximum involvement does not negate, however, the need for organized leadership and structure.

**Select leaders.** Choose chairs and clearly define their responsibilities. It often helps to have co-chairs whose skills complement each other and who represent organizations willing to commit significant time and/or resources to coalition efforts. Roles can be shared or rotated.

**Create a broader leadership team** that includes representatives of the major interest groups. A diverse team will be more successful in providing effective leadership on an issue as complex and multi-faceted as teen reproductive and sexual health.

**Select spokespeople who will represent the coalition to the media.** These should be people with experience in interacting with the media, who are comfortable in that role. The spokespeople may or may not be the same people as the leadership team, but this may simplify communication. One of your spokespeople should be an articulate teenager. Agree on a process for handling media requests and opportunities.

**Share responsibilities for the work through task forces or committees.** These allow more people to become invested in the group, and can either be permanent or just for a specific project. Define responsibilities and the decisions that can be made without the broader coalition.

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### **Organizations and Groups to Involve**

- young people
- school faculty and staff, including health educators and nurses  
teachers' unions
- public and community health professionals and officials
- social service agencies
- adolescent pregnancy prevention organizations
- family planning providers
- youth-serving agencies
- religious leaders and organizations
- racial and ethnic associations
- civil rights groups
- gay and lesbian advocacy groups
- local chapters of national advocacy organizations
- civic groups
- elected officials
- AIDS prevention and service organizations
- school-based and school-linked health center staff
- child abuse and neglect groups
- women's groups

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remain true to its mission. Moreover, youth are excellent spokespeople for programs designed to address their needs. Young people can also organize students and other young people to support the program. Many community groups already work closely with youth and should be targeted for involvement with the coalition. Teens know their peer opinions and needs better than most adults; be open to young people's suggestions, and seek their input. Involve youth in meaningful ways, and encourage them to represent the coalition to the media.

**Develop materials.** Create 1-2 page materials describing the problem you are concerned about and the proposed program's ability to address it. Compile a larger packet of materials that can be distributed to the community and to the media. See Step 3 (below) for more information on what types on information to create.

**Develop educational campaigns.** In order to win support for your program, you must be ready to advocate on its behalf. Survey the policymakers who will be involved in approving, funding and implementing your program, and start educating them. Start with firm supporters and move on to moderates and undecideds. Coalition members can testify at hearings, organize letter-writing campaigns, write letters to the editor, etc. Refer to the Lobbying and Media handout as well as the Public Education Campaign section below.

**Monitor planning and implementation of the program.** Once legislation has been passed, the expertise of coalition members can be useful in design and implementation. Members may be asked to sit on the design team or advisory committee, provide education in classrooms, train program staff, develop written or visual materials or accept referrals for other services.

### Step 2: Conduct Research

Poll after poll shows that most Americans support adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs. Those who are not initially supportive usually need more information to convince them to be proponents. They may just need to understand why the program is important and what its components are in order to become supporters, or they may have specific questions or concerns that can be easily answered. Others need to feel that representatives from their community have been involved in developing the program in order to become its champions.

Three types of research are necessary in order to answer these questions and maximize public support.

**Prepare a needs assessment.** The coalition cannot build support for a program unless it can make a compelling case for why this program or policy is needed, and what its effect will be. This analysis is typically called a "needs assessment." Research the situation in your community and make comparisons with national rates. What has changed over time? A list of needs assessment components is included in this packet.

**Asses the current political situation.** The coalition cannot work effectively for change without understanding the political environment and the players. Who does the coalition need as a supporter of the program, and

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what is their background and viewpoint? What policymaking body will make this decision, and what is its structure for doing so? Who is running in upcoming elections, and how will their success affect program implementation?

**Know the opposition.** Strategic planning for program success must include an understanding of what opposition the program will face, and from where this opposition will come. Research the most likely concerns and criticisms to be raised and prepare in advance to respond with current research and facts. Answers to the most common questions about specific adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs are included in this packet.

It is vitally important to anticipate organized opposition from extremist conservatives. Programs designed to address sexual and reproductive health are a flash point for extremist groups, and may generate vocal and sustained criticism. The Extremists effectively publicizes misinformation about adolescent reproductive and sexual health which must be corrected if the public is going to support programs under attack.

Research any extremist group affiliates in your community and collect their materials on the issue at hand. Find out which decisionmakers are associated with these groups and what their arguments are likely to be when approached about proposed programs. Information on the Far Right's most common misinformation tactics is included in this packet, along with an overview of extremist groups.

### Step 3: Prepare materials

Advocacy is easier if the coalition has gathered or created information persuasive to groups being approached for support. Materials may be created for specific audiences whose concerns vary, since parents, the press, legislators, business people and teens will be interested in and/or concerned by different aspects of the problem at hand and the coalition's suggested solution. Leave materials behind whenever coalition members visit policymakers or other interested groups.

Educational pieces should be short, easy to read and to the point. They should explain the need for the program as well as describe the program's components and its intended effects. Educational materials are an appropriate place to respond to questions, concerns and misinformation about the program. (See the Media section for more information on press-related materials and the Needs Assessment for useful data.)

Materials to create:

- Information about the coalition: list of members, statement of purpose and goals
- National, state and/or local statistics on adolescent reproductive and sexual health connected to the proposed program or policy, such as rates of sexual activity, lack of access to medical care, rates of pregnancy, reported AIDS and STD cases
- Factual information that describes the local situation, explains why the proposed program or policy is necessary and describes its intended effects

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- Information on similar programs implemented elsewhere
- Research and other facts that rebut expected criticisms from the opposition
- Supportive media coverage of the issue such as a newspaper clipping or editorial

### Step 4: Plan and Conduct Education Campaign

A successful strategy for program implementation must include education targeting three distinct groups that, while distinct, influence one another: policymakers, the public and the media. Without public support, policymakers will be reluctant to back potentially controversial programs. Media coverage educates the public about the need for and structure of the proposal. An educated public is more likely to press for political support of the program. Without political support, the program cannot succeed, particularly when legislative approval is required. Specific educational activities are listed later in this section.

Ensure that factual information presented in clear and accessible language reaches the public BEFORE misinformation about a proposed program does. Communicate about why the program is needed, what the program goals are, how teens will benefit from it and how the public can observe and participate in the program. Never let a communication void be filled by misleading, inaccurate information; instead, reach out with information before there is a crisis of communication and public trust.

The best way to educate is to **USE THE MEDIA**. People who oppose adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs use the media, and program proponents must also. Use the media and other forums to challenge misrepresentation and ask for clarification. Never allow misinformation about a proposed program to stand unchallenged.

The Media section of this Kit gives tips on working with press to promote a program, but several points bear repeating. Use the media to respond to concerns about the program, particularly those originating in press arenas such as letters to the editor or op ed columns. Write articles for the local paper and promote coalition members for interviews on television and talk radio. Use press releases and news advisories to keep the media informed about the state of teen health in your community, and how the coalition goals will help improve the situation.

An educational campaign involves targeted advocacy. The Lobbying section gives specific tips but, in general, the coalition should plan to visit everyone involved in promoting, approving and implementing the program. Meet first with the most supportive individuals or agencies, and ask them to join the coalition. Their name on the coalition membership will invite others to join.

Coalition members should go directly to influential and supportive community members and groups, describe the program and why it is needed, and ask them to publicize the coalition's goals. Providing materials for organizational newsletters and meetings is an easy way to provide information to a broad group of people. Speaking at meetings and other group activities is another effective way to get out the word on the coalition's program.

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### Other Activities for Educating the Public

All of these events present opportunities to reach the public with detailed information about the proposed program. The following opportunities can be used to answer questions, respond to concerns or questions, and encourage broader participation in the group working to promote the program.

- Give a presentation at board or membership meetings of civic, professional and/or advocacy groups and ask them to endorse the coalition's goals.
- Create and distribute materials targeted for a specific audience, such as parents; these materials can include questions and answers, reports, fact sheets, etc.
- Hold or participate in community forums or briefings for parent groups, PTAs, neighborhood associations, etc.
- Testify at meetings of policymaking bodies such as school boards, city councils, legislatures.
- Organize coalition members' constituencies to engage in a letter writing campaign to policymakers and/or the papers.
- Conduct a petition drive among the general population or among specific groups such as students; then hold a press conference and present these petitions to policymakers.
- Conduct polls or surveys to gauge and/or illustrate community support.
- Write articles about the program for organizational newsletters.
- Hold speak-outs, protests or rallies to illustrate support for the program.
- Write letters to school boards, Department of Education and other government agencies concerned with the issue.

# WORKING WITH TEENS

Following are tips for working with young people and involving them in your advocacy efforts. By and large, these are simply the common-sense courtesies that make any group effort successful.

If you don't have contact with any adolescents, contact peer education, youth service and youth leadership programs in the community, especially those focusing on youth and sexuality. Start with your local AIDS prevention, pregnancy prevention, health education and youth development programs.

### **Integrate young people into coalition and group efforts.**

Meetings should be scheduled when teens can attend, in an accessible location. Like everyone else, young people should be kept informed about plans and meeting times.

Enable young people to participate in coalition and group activities in meaningful ways. Youth should participate as much as possible in the coalition's decision making process, and should have equal rights to vote and hold leadership positions. Be clear with other coalition members that young people are equals in the effort.

**Be open and nonjudgmental about young people's insights and suggestions.** Let them know that their involvement is important. Guard against dismissing, or otherwise reacting negatively to, young people's suggestions.

Many young people are intimidated by adults; they may not be accustomed to being included in planning or other strategy discussions. Be aware that it may take time and effort to get young people to participate fully in the coalition. Work to help teens feel comfortable. Don't assume if a teen isn't speaking up that he or she doesn't have an opinion. Solicit contributions and opinions from teens during meetings and discussions.

**Take advantage of the expertise teens offer.** Young people know about their peers. Encourage them to share their knowledge about a proposal's positive or negative impact on young people. Affirm teens' input!

Be honest about your expectations for the project, the teens' contribution, and the coalition's benefit from teen participation. Keep your expectations realistic. Check in with coalition members to make sure people's expectations and needs are being met.

**Be prepared to offer support for young people.** Think about kinds of support it may take to involve a broad variety of community members (including teens) in the project. Support can include financial assistance, transportation, training and information. Encourage coalition members to interact with each other to provide this support in order to maximize everyone's participation.

**Make the work interactive and fun.** Like adults, young people are more likely to become and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling. Volunteer work should be pleasurable!

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### **Help build teens' skills so they can become more involved.**

Young people may need information about adolescent health statistics, the overall political situation or the community's need for a particular program. They may need help learning how to be effective communicators and to feel comfortable speaking with the media or with policy makers. Provide young people with opportunities to build their skills and you expand the coalition's effectiveness.

Don't make assumptions about what individual young people are like.

Things that teens could do (anything adults can do!)

- Petition drive
- Conference
- Media interviews
- Educate legislators
- Plan a program
- Evaluate a program
- Provide information to media, etc.
- Get other young people involved
- Plan strategy
- Design educational materials
- Educate the community, their peers, etc.
- Coordinate parts of the program
- Conduct research or needs assessments
- Fundraise
- Write letters to the editor
- Testify before government bodies

# WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES OF FAITH TO PROMOTE ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

## Confronting Extremists

Advocates for progressive issues often meet opposition by determined conservative activists who claim to speak from the sole acceptable moral and religious perspective. Opposition based on religious issues is particularly likely when the issue at hand is adolescent reproductive health, since this combines two potentially explosive topics: the rights of young people and sexuality. Advocates working on behalf of young people's reproductive rights desperately need the support of communities of faith in order to confront extremist opposition. Progressives especially need Christian clergy to stand up to the intolerant, bigoted and oppressive use of the faith by well-organized religious political extremist groups, such as the Christian Coalition.

Progressive advocates working together with supportive members of the faith-based community can successfully combat religious political extremists' powerful rhetoric. Without any dissenting voices from within the religious community, public debate over adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues can become polarized between the "religious" and the "secular" point of view. The extreme political agenda of certain visible and vocal groups can become automatically associated with what is "holy" or "morally right". The secular and progressive view, by disassociation, will be rendered "wrong" or "immoral" in the public's eye.

By wedding social and political views to their religious affiliations, extremists have successfully characterized any criticism of their positions as anti-religious bigotry. They hypocritically seek protection behind the First Amendment while attempting to abridge the First Amendment rights of others. Advocates therefore need to work with members of the religious community to broaden the public definition of the "religious position" on various issues and to deny extremists the sole power to define what is "morally correct" for society.

When building coalitions, progressive advocates should not attempt to separate public health and spiritual issues. Too often, public health officials address an issue such as AIDS prevention from a purely medical angle without any acknowledgment that attitudes towards sexuality are often influenced by people's religious/spiritual convictions. People tend to make decisions through a mix of pragmatism and moral conviction. It may well be that the success of progressive programs now rests on advocates' ability to address peoples' wish to integrate their spiritual and secular lives. Including vocal representatives from religious communities in advocacy and public education campaigns is essential to this goal.

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### Reaching Out to Religious Leaders

#### Be Patient

While it is vital to enlist the support of faith-based communities, it is necessary to have realistic goals and not expect overnight success. Coalition building is difficult, no matter the topic or audience. Adolescent reproductive and sexual health activists face unique challenges, especially when seeking religious support. Leaders in the religious community you most desire to involve in advocacy efforts may be reluctant to step forward when first approached. Clergy often face difficult decisions, being doubly charged with an expectation that they will offer guidance not only in nonspiritual matters but also maintain spiritual unity in a congregation which may be divided along political and social lines. Clergy may choose to avoid discussing political matters for fear of dividing their congregation. Like political figures, religious leaders may be attacked by extremists for their stands on issues. This is especially burdensome in denominations and faiths where the clergy is hired by the congregation rather than appointed by a higher governing body. An unpopular stand on a political issue like abortion or gay rights could cost jobs. Know that it may take time to encourage clergy to participate in adolescent health promotion efforts.

#### Show Community and Congregant Support

It is most effective for congregants to approach their own clergy when seeking support. Given the potential level of opposition around sexuality issues, clergy may need reassurance that a large number of their congregants favor activism on progressive issues before they will give support. It is also useful to work with groups such as sisterhoods, parent groups, youth groups, or social action groups already established within the religious community. Additionally, some clergy may need to feel that there is consensus among their clerical peers before they will be comfortable getting involved in an advocacy campaign.

#### Be Prepared to Educate

Clergy hear the same extremist rhetoric as everyone else: condemnations, exaggerations, and mistruths about progressive issues, particularly around sexuality. They may be influenced by the images of extremist propaganda and distortions of right wing candidates; even clergy sympathetic to progressive causes may unconsciously carry ideas of “seedy abortion mills,” “sex instruction,” and “sex clinics”. Prepare materials that provide information about the issue at hand in order to help make your case for the clergy’s involvement and commitment.

Be willing to meet clergy people “where they are” on an issue. Do not expect even sympathetically-minded clergy people to simply parrot progressive positions. Clergy have unique responsibilities and unique restrictions placed on them by their vocations. Respect the clergy’s position and the constraints which they may feel.

Clergy willing to speak publicly about adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues may still need education and resource materials. They may need help understanding the complicated issues today’s young people face around sexuality: STDs, AIDS, rape, pregnancy, incest, homosexuality, abortion. While teens, parents, and other concerned individuals may wish to seek counsel from

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clergy on reproductive or sexual health issues, few seminaries address sexuality in practical terms or give clergy the skills to talk about reproductive health. Providing clergy with materials and support can help them become better counselors as well as advocates.

### **Be Respectful of Time Commitments**

When approaching clergy remember that most have great demands placed upon their time. They may have little time to devote to other causes, between planning and leading services, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, welcoming newcomers, supervising staff, attending to church finances and property, and participating in community projects. Even clergy who want to help may feel unable to take on another obligation. Avoid requesting things that others could do just as well; make every effort to create specific (and time-limited) avenues of involvement and be prepared to work with clergy who only want to take limited roles.

Concentrate on asking clergy people to undertake activities that will have the most effect in helping policy makers and the public understand that many religious people support adolescent health programs. Delivering testimony before a policy making group, working with the media, conducting interviews, or speaking to parents' groups are very specific—and very effective—ways religious leaders can help broaden public understanding of young people's reproductive health needs.

### **Finding Religious Support for Youth Programs**

It may seem overwhelmingly difficult to bring spiritual leaders into your advocacy campaign, but the energy and time will be well-invested. Here are some tips:

**Begin at home.** Progressive advocates need to speak out about their own spirituality, and the moral necessity of public health programs. Being vocal about your own religious and spiritual perspectives and practices is an important way to make clear that extreme conservatives do not hold the only perspective on faith. Speak out about the need to protect teen health, and how your commitment is connected to your personal belief system. Ask your own clergy member to get involved in promoting teen health in your community.

**Start with progressive religious leaders and communities.** Almost every community is home to at least one outspoken, progressive religious leader. As with any other advocacy campaign, begin your outreach to religious leaders by identifying those who are already committed. Reach out to religious groups which have passed policy statements in support of reproductive choice or other progressive issues. Many, many denominations support abortion and other progressive public health issues. The Resource List at the end of this article provides contact information for these groups.

**Contact national advocacy organization concerned with your issues.** National organizations can be very helpful in identifying organizations and individuals who are willing to get involved in advocacy efforts and countering religious extremists' claims about morality. These organizations include the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the Interfaith Alliance, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (see the Resource List).

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**Know when to stop.** You don't need every religious leader in the community to actively participate in your efforts. The enthusiastic and vocal support of a few well-respected and committed individuals will aid your efforts immeasurably and help demonstrate that adolescent reproductive and sexual health is a mainstream issue.

At no other time has there been a greater need to involve members of the community of faith in advocating for adolescent reproductive and sexual health. The opposition is well organized and increasingly successful at electing legislators who are willing to pass regressive public health policies. Yet those legislators—and the groups who support them—do not speak for all Americans. They are an extremist minority. Broadening the progressive advocates' base to include clergy and communities of faith is a crucial and realizable goal. Advocates for adolescent reproductive and sexual health are not alone in their view that young people need to make healthy and informed decisions about their lives. We must seek out allies from many communities, and stand united; together progress can and will be made.

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# RESOURCE LIST

The following national organizations support progressive reproductive health platforms. They can be of great assistance in building activist coalitions in your community as well as providing a starting point to reach other communities of faith for progressive issues.

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice  
1025 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Suite 1130  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 628-7700  
(202) 628-7716 (fax)  
info@rcrc.org (email)  
www.rcrc.org (web page)

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice represents forty national Christian, Jewish, and other religious organizations that support a full range of reproductive health options. Call for a list of the Coalition's members.

Catholics for a Free Choice  
1436 U Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 986-6093  
(202) 986-332-7995 (fax)  
cffc@igc.apc.org (email)

Interfaith Alliance  
1511 K Street, NW  
Suite 738  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 639-6370  
(202) 639-6375 (fax)  
tialliance@intr.net (email)

Americans United for Separation of Church and State  
1816 Jefferson Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 466-3234  
(202) 466-2587 (fax)  
amerunited@aol.com (email)  
www.netplexgroup.com/americansunited/ (webpage)

This article is based on How to Organize and Mobilize Religious Support for Choice from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Call or write the Coalition for a complete list of their publications.

# EDUCATION & MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Media coverage is important because it carries your message to a much larger number of people than can be reached independently. Carefully planned media strategies help identify supporters, answer people's concerns and persuade those who are undecided. The media also can diffuse criticism by providing a forum to explain a program and demonstrate thoughtfulness, sensitivity and candor.

Luckily, adolescent sexuality is a story that will attract press attention. Unluckily, it is also a story too-often covered irresponsibly or without a great amount of depth. Given our society's discomfort with adolescent sexuality, media coverage of the issue often fails to explore the complicated and inter-related aspects of teen health and the prevention programs designed to improve adolescent futures.

Successful media plans usually follow a four-step process:

1. Define the role of the media in outreach efforts. Be aware of media coverage of related issues (sexuality, HIV, adolescence) and provide copies of past coverage in briefing packets. Keep records on local and national press (both those who have been contacted and potential contacts). Keep accurate mailing, telephone and fax lists of the press in your area.
2. Determine what press activities to hold and which materials to have on hand as background or current information. Consider sending out press releases, creating a press packet, holding a press conference or using a variety of other techniques.
3. Be aware of the leading spokespeople for the opposition and the media strategies they employ; be prepared to respond.
4. Evaluate your press campaign. Keep track of stories, determining how the story was presented, who was quoted and what kind of follow-up may be necessary.

## The Spokesperson and Interviews

**The Spokesperson:** Press calls should be routed to a designated spokesperson (or spokespeople) to establish a regular contact for the reporter and to allow for follow-up. This person should be articulate and well-versed on adolescent health and pregnancy prevention issues. They should be able to speak clearly and directly to the issue without using jargon or terms unfamiliar to the audience. If the respondent is not a spokesperson for the organization, but is providing background information, make the relationship clear and let the reporter know who to talk to for attribution.

**When You Don't Know:** If the spokesperson does not know the answer to a question, it is important to say so. Reporters have the right to ask anything and expect that the spokesperson will answer to the best of his or her knowledge. The respondent has the right not to be drawn into issues that

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are inappropriate for comment. ANY remarks made to the media are liable to be used. If you don't want something published, don't say it. If there is a subject on which you don't want to be quoted, the safest rule is to not talk about it. Do not be drawn into criticism of colleagues or other organizations. Reserve criticism for real adversaries or for motivating public officials.

**The Story:** It is crucial that the spokesperson plan in advance what points to make and how to make them succinctly. Anticipate difficult questions and practice answering them in a role-play situation before interviews. Focus on two to three points, and stress these points in your conversation or interview. Short snappy sentences (15-20 words) that stand alone are "sound bites;" make it easy for the media to use your words by providing them in this format. Use a technique called "bridging" to ensure that your points are made. For example if the interviewer asks an irrelevant question, say "I think the real issue [or question] is..."

### The Press Information Packet

One of the most important items for a media campaign is the press information packet. It contains basic background material on the program's issues and describes the coalition. It can be used to insert press releases and advisories for conferences or briefings. A standard packet includes:

- Information about the coalition: a list of members, statement of purpose and goals;
- Contact information for the press spokesperson, including a phone number;
- Background (such as fact sheets) on adolescents and AIDS, STDs, sexual activity and pregnancy/birth/abortion rates;
- Information on similar prevention programs across the country;
- Favorable press coverage of the coalition or similar prevention programs;
- Information on how the proposed program can address a need in the community;
- Materials for a press conference, such as news advisories, news releases, statements from the coalition leadership, copies of their speeches or testimony.

### When the Press Calls

Calls should be directed to a spokesperson who will either respond to the inquiry or refer the reporter to an appropriate person for additional information or an interview.

Respond to all media calls. Don't avoid press calls. Leaving a "no comment" impression may arouse suspicion. Responding quickly will increase the chances of being quoted and cited in the final story. Practice making your 1-2 points before calling the reporter back.

Be aware of "sensationalist" journalists, those who have stated their opposition to your program, or those who work for newspapers with an editorial position against it. Be especially cautious when working with these journalists. Think about how to work with these journalists before they call; you may decide not to give interviews to these organizations.

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## When Contacting the Media

Develop a press list including contact information for the various departments you will be contacting (PSA, events listing, health writer). Your press list should contain the television, radio and newspaper outlets in your area, including university papers, community newspapers and radio stations, regional magazines and military press officers.

- Learn the deadlines for the media outlets on your press list and research the demographics of their target or primary audience (e.g. teenagers, sports fans, affluent). To be most effective in dealing with the press, also research the contact for your calls and materials. The following are some suggestions:
- Newspapers and Magazines: Contact the assignment editor or the assignment desk.
- Television: Start with the assignment desk. TV public service directors and editorial directors also are good contacts, particularly for public affairs programming. Some correspondents also take part in deciding which stories are covered.
- Radio: Identify news directors and talk show producers to whom the interview may be suggested. Shows whose primary audience is teens are a particularly good place to call for coverage.

## Evaluating Press Relations

Keep copies of press coverage that mention your efforts, as well as records of press materials, media contact information. The crucial factor in understanding and evaluating press experience is in setting realistic expectations.

A news story should present the proponents' side of the story fairly and evenly and present other viewpoints. It should incorporate at least one of the major points raised in the interview. It will quote spokespeople accurately. But most important, a press piece should not only educate the community about challenges the program confronts but also lay the foundation for greater awareness and support.

## Media Activities

**News Releases.** A news release is a one-to-two page (500-800 words) description of an event, program or activity. It can stand alone or be enclosed with additional materials and resources. News releases should be distributed with sufficient lead time and include the following: one or two quotes from spokespeople; date on which the information can be released; facts: who, what, where, when, why and how; contact name and telephone number. Make your point in the first few paragraphs. Distribute a news release by mail, fax, messenger or at conferences and press briefings.

**News Advisories.** A news advisory is sent to announce an event or specific news; it is a simple one-page document that invites coverage of an event. Include a description of what is happening, when, why, where and who is participating. Fax the advisory to your contacts 1-2 days prior to the event.

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**News Briefings and Press Conferences.** Briefings should be reserved for announcements that cannot be communicated well in a press release. When possible, schedule the briefing to last up to half an hour between 12-2 pm. Use a location convenient to the reporters such as a press club or downtown site. Have press kits available at the event, and designate someone from the coalition posted at the door. A briefing on the overall issues of the program is appropriate at the beginning or after a great deal of change.

**Public Service Announcements (PSAs).** PSAs are a good way to publicize events. For radio, write a 15-to-20 second statement or announcement and submit it by fax or mail to PSA contact. Television PSAs will need to be produced, but your only cost is for production, not distribution. Many newspapers will print information from PSAs in their community calendars and announcements sections.

**Local Cable Access Programming.** Cable access channels offer access to equipment, air time and consulting and are an excellent venue for local issues. PSAs, panel discussions or other programming are possible; contact the local cable company for more information. In many areas, cable channels will film public forums or debates.

**Buying Space or Time.** Buy space for a prepared advertisement to appear in local newspapers or magazines. Newspapers and magazines have rate cards that explain ad sizes and prices. Buying time for radio advertisements is relatively inexpensive. Check with local stations for rates, listenership and technical requirements for submitting advertisements. Some stations allow radio personalities to read ad copy on the air; others use only advertisements that are produced on tape.

**Letters to the Editor.** Newspapers frequently print letters to the editor that address an issue which has been in the news recently. The letters to the editor section is one of the most-read sections of the paper, and an ideal place to respond to criticism or concerns. Letters should be persuasive, brief and use statistics from reputable sources. A prominent member of the community could be asked to write a letter, or sign a letter drafted by another coalition member.

**Guest Editorials.** Guest editorials, or “op-eds,” are brief opinion pieces or essays on topics in the news. Op-eds should be approximately 500-800 words in length and make one major point, backed up by reputable statistics and compelling stories. As with letters, a prominent member of the community could be asked to write an editorial or sign one drafted by another coalition member.

**Letters to Media Professionals.** Maintain press contacts through letters to reporters, editors, talk show producers and editorial boards. Use letters to suggest interviews or topics for press consideration, to acknowledge good coverage of an issue or to praise a reporter or editor.

**Appearing on TV or Radio.** TV and radio stations often look for community members to comment on current events. You and the coalition can call or send information suggesting yourself/ the spokesperson as an appropriate guest for a specific show. Once you are invited onto a show, research the other guests' views. To make the case more compelling, use stories to illustrate your points in addition to facts. Speak in short, crisp sentences. It's harder to

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provide background in these mediums than in print, so assume no prior audience knowledge when you make your case. On TV, wear bright solid colors, and avoid wearing glasses.

### **Other Activities for Educating the Public**

All of these events present opportunities to reach the public with detailed information about the proposed program. The following opportunities can be used to answer questions, respond to concerns or questions, and encourage broader participation in the group working to promote the program.

- Give a presentation at board or membership meetings of civic, professional and/or advocacy groups and ask them to endorse the coalition's goals.
- Create and distribute materials targeted for a specific audience, such as parents; these materials can include questions and answers, reports, fact sheets, etc.
- Hold or participate in community forums or briefings for parent groups, PTAs, neighborhood associations, etc.
- Testify at meetings of policymaking bodies such as school boards, city councils, legislatures
- Conduct a petition drive among the general population or among specific groups such as students; then hold a press conference and present these petitions to policymakers
- Conduct polls or surveys to gauge and/or illustrate community support
- Write articles about the program for organizational newsletters
- Hold speak-outs, protests or rallies to illustrate support for the program
- Write letters to school boards, Department of Education, and other policymakers concerned with the issue

# LOBBYING: THE ART OF PERSUASION

People use the voting booth to let their elected officials know how well they're doing. But there are other opportunities to communicate with decisionmakers, and many different methods for doing so, such as visiting, calling or writing legislators or presenting testimony.

Advocacy can occur any time. Particularly in local policy bodies (such as school board or city council), many opportunities exist for sharing opinions. Advocacy can occur when you encounter a legislator in the hallway or the post office. You can sign up to speak at a public hearing or write to legislators about your viewpoint. There are also specific points in the legislative process when bills are most readily affected. The state legislative research office, League of Women Voters or the Secretary of State's office can provide information on the legislative process in your state. Use this material to help decide upon the most effective strategy for making your views known to decisionmakers.

It is also useful to understand Parliamentary procedure, which is an operating system used by legislators. Parliamentary procedure is complicated, but well worth understanding. Little-known rules and procedures are often used to defeat or weaken proposals without generating public notice or allowing legislators much opportunity for negotiation. Likewise, rules and procedures can be used to advance legislation and bring it to a vote. Familiarity with the parliamentary procedure used by the targeted political body will increase advocates' abilities to strategize for success under many scenarios.

## General Tips for Advocacy

Target your efforts. Survey the policymakers who will be involved in approving, funding and implementing your program, and decide who you will approach, and in what order. Start with firm supporters and move on to those who are moderately progressive or undecided in their views. You may want to begin with legislators on the committee that will first hear the bill and members of a friendly caucus, such as the Women's Caucus. Be certain your own legislator knows your position on the bill.

**Be gracious.** Always begin by thanking the legislator for providing the opportunity to hear your ideas, opinions, etc. Legislators who support adolescent reproductive and sexual health, in particular, receive a lot of negative attention from the opposition. A sincere "thank you" will be greatly appreciated.

**Be professional.** Be professional in both dress and manner; don't say negative things about other legislators or public figures.

**Be focused.** Stick with one issue per call or letter. Information about more than one topic will only confuse the message and dilute your point.

**Do your homework.** As part of your preparation, research the legislator's position on your issue. You can find out through voting records, speeches, newspaper articles, debates and other organizations that work on this area. Advocacy organizations, particularly those with Political Action

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Committees often track legislator's votes, and can provide voting guides. Explore the legislator's personal connections with the issue: do they have teenagers themselves? Frame your presentation for maximum effectiveness based on your knowledge about the legislator's constituency, views, background, interests. Different arguments are compelling for different people; use the most persuasive argument for this person. It might help to role play what you want to say at the meeting, and practice responses to possible comments.

**Make a personal connection.** No matter how insignificant you may feel it is, if you have friends, relatives and/or colleagues in common, **let the legislator know!** In particular, let the legislator know if you are a constituent. The legislative process can be very informal and, although a personal connection makes no difference in your presentation, it may make the difference in your effectiveness.

**Consider yourself an information source.** Legislators have limited time, staff and interest in any one issue. They can't be as informed as they'd like on all the issues—or on the ones that concern you. **YOU** can fill in the information gap. Encourage the policy maker to ask questions about the program or the issue.

**Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator.

**Know who else is on your side.** It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators are working with you on an issue. Providing this information also illustrates that your group represents many more voters. Bring coalition members and young people with on lobbying efforts. It is also important to keep in touch with your allies so that advocacy efforts are coordinated and relevant information is shared.

**Know the opposition.** Anticipate who the opposition will be, both organizations and individuals. Tell the legislator what opposition arguments are likely to be and provide clarifications and rebuttals. The ability to anticipate criticism and defend your position will make a difference.

**Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** If a legislator wants information you don't have, or asks something you don't know, tell them. Then, offer to get the information they are looking for, and **DO IT!**

**Be specific in what you ask for.** If you want a vote, information, answers to a question, signature on a petition; whatever it is make sure you ask directly and get an answer.

**Follow up.** It is very important to find out if the legislator did what they said they would. Send a thank you letter after your conversation, restating your position. It is also very important that you thank the legislator for a supportive vote, or ask for an explanation of an unsupportive vote.

**Stay informed.** Legislation changes status quickly and often. Amendments or other committee actions can radically change the effect of a bill without receiving much publicity. The sponsor or legislature's research office can help identify where in the process the bill is currently located, and what it's current language is.

**Don't burn bridges.** It is easy to get emotional over issues you feel strongly about. That's fine, but be sure that you leave your relationship with the legislator on good enough terms that you can return to them on that or another issue.

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Don't get into a heated argument with a legislator, and never threaten them. Your strongest opponent on one issue may be a great proponent on another!

**Remember, you're the boss.** Your tax dollars pay legislators' salaries, pay for the paper they write on and the phones they use. **YOU** are the employer and they are the employees. Be courteous, but don't be intimidated. They are responsible to you and, nine times out of ten, legislators are grateful for your input.

### Communicating with Legislators by Letter

**Identify your target legislators.** You can send a letter to your own representatives, to all members of a committee dealing with your issue, or to the entire legislative body.

**Mention a specific issue and/or bill.** Your letter will be more effective if it concentrates on a specific issue or a particular bill. When referring to a bill, cite the sponsor, bill title and number. If possible, include the bill's status: what Committee it has been referred to, when the public hearing was held.

*Dear Representative Jones:*

*I am writing to urge your support of L.D. 2214, An Act to Ensure Safety for Workers, which was presented for public hearing before the Legislature's Labor Committee last Tuesday, February 10th.*

**Be brief and succinct.** A one-page letter has more impact than a ten-page letter. Outline your main point in the first paragraph and try to cover only one issue per letter. Make it clear how you want the legislator to vote. For background, you could also include a newspaper clipping or fact sheet that discusses the issue in greater depth.

**Make it personal.** Policymakers and their staff are more likely to pay attention and remember letters that include real life experiences. Explain why the issue is important to you, how the legislation will affect you and others in your area. Describe an experience you've had that illustrates your point. Organized campaigns do not impress legislators as much as heart-felt constituent communication; don't let it appear that you are part of an organized advocacy effort.

**Identify your relationship with the legislator.** If you are a constituent or have another connection with the legislator say so at the beginning. Include your name and address. This enables the legislator to respond to your letter. Your address also indicates your voting district, and gives an extra incentive for the legislator to pay attention to you.

**Ensure that they receive the letter.** When the legislature is in session, send your letter to the state house; out of session, use the district (or home) address.

**Follow up.** Make a quick call to confirm receipt of the letter. You can simply say to the receptionist: "I'm calling Representative X to make sure she received my letter about L.D. 2214, the Act to Ensure Safety for Workers." Leave your name and phone number. Call or write until you get an acknowledgment of your letter.

**Send a final reminder about the bill.** Find out when the bill will be voted on and, just before the vote, send a postcard (or leave a phone message) about your position. As before, include the bill number and title. This

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will let the legislator know you are following this issue, and that the vote is still important to you.

**Thank the legislator** if he or she voted with your position.

### Face-to-Face Visits:

**Schedule a meeting.** Call the legislator's office and schedule a meeting enough in advance that you have time to prepare. Make appointments well enough in advance to prepare, confirm the meeting and invite other people working on this issue. Keep a record of who attended, what information was shared and any actions promised.

**Be flexible.** Expect interruptions, changes in schedule or staff availability. If you can't meet with a legislator, try to meet with an appropriate staff member or reschedule for another time.

Staff people are extremely important, and may have great influence on a legislator's views.

**Be prompt.** Don't be late, as it sets a bad tone for the meeting before it has even started. If you are running late, call ahead and let the legislator's office know.

**Be prepared.** Make the most of your visit: plan your presentation in advance and divide up roles for group members to take on, including a note taker. Plan a 5-minute presentation (10 minutes at the most) and expect to spend no more than 15 minutes with the legislator. Make your important points in a clear and succinct manner. Note personal relationships and constituents.

**Take advantage of opportunities.** Meetings with legislators can take place anywhere — in the state house hallways, the district office or the local grocery store. Take advantage of unexpected opportunities to speak with legislators.

**Leave something behind.** Develop a handout packet to leave with the legislator. It should include a short (1-2 pages) summary of your group, the issue you are working on and your request for action, background information about the issue, and press clippings such as editorial support for your position.

### By Telephone

**Identify yourself** using your name and address. If you are a constituent, say so.

**Identify the issue** you want to talk about; when referring to a bill use its number and its title.

**State both your position** and how you would like the legislator to vote.

**Ask for the legislator's position** on the bill or issue. If supportive, ask for a commitment to vote for your position. If opposing or undecided, thank them for the information—don't argue with them on the phone. Ask what information would be helpful in helping the legislator become a proponent.

If the legislator is unavailable, **leave a detailed message** with a staff member. The staff member may be able to describe the legislator's position.

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**Follow up** by sending a note thanking the legislator for their time. Include any information that the legislator can use to solidify their position, or which may move them to support your position.

### In Testimony

When committees and subcommittees hear views from constituent on a certain topic, it is called “testimony.” Arrangements for presenting testimony vary by state: the state legislative research office or your legislator will be able to describe the procedure in your state. In most areas, you can arrange to present testimony by calling the bill’s sponsor, the chair of the committee considering the bill, or your legislator. Once you’ve scheduled your testimony:

- Draft a 5-minute speech on the bill. Begin by thanking the committee for allowing you to present your views. Make the testimony interesting, personal and compelling.
- Include information about what the bill’s effects would be, as well as a few compelling statistics about the situation the bill is designed to address.
- Print your testimony, include your name, address, organizational affiliation and the bill number at the top of the first page. Find out from the committee staff how many copies of your testimony to bring to the hearing.
- Attach easy to read background information (such as a fact sheet or newspaper article) to each copy of your testimony.
- Practice delivering your testimony so you won’t be nervous. Time your delivery to ensure that you have enough time.
- Expect questions from the legislators, particularly from those opposing your viewpoint, and be prepared to address their concerns.

### What to do if the Legislator:

#### **Strongly agrees with your position:**

Thank them.

Ask them to take a leadership role in the legislature, the media and/or the community.

It is appropriate to ask for any of the following, and more: an agreement to write an article for a newsletter; signature on a petition or letter of support; public use of legislator’s name; sponsorship of a bill; agreement to offer amendments to legislation; speeches at public forums; agreement to vote for or against a resolution.

Ask their advice about who else to talk to, what arguments best make the case for the bill, what media strategy will be most effective in gathering support for the bill.

Ask what information or constituency would be helpful in swaying additional legislators to your position. Then work to produce these materials or advocates.

Ask them to “lobby” undecided legislators, and give them a list of these legislators.

Thank them again.

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### **Agrees with your position:**

Thank them.

Assure them of your continued interest in the issue and your continued support for their position.

Ask if they would be willing to help in any way beyond their vote. If yes, refer to the tips above.

Thank them again.

### **Is undecided or noncommittal:**

Inform them of your interest in the issue or legislation.

Present the case as clearly and concisely as possible, if possible have constituents and/or teens make the presentation.

Ask about their viewpoint to investigate whether their position results from personal or political factors, a lack of information, misinformation, or a combination. Adjust your strategy accordingly.

Ask if there are specific groups or individuals from whom they would like to hear.

Offer to provide information that will help inform them about the issue.

Follow up by providing information they requested, or information addressing their reservations.

Once they have indicated a position, thank them for their support, or send a letter stating your disappointment in their position.

Keep in touch to nurture the relationship.

### **Is opposed to your position:**

Thank the legislator for the opportunity to discuss your views.

Determine how strong their opposition is, and upon what it is based. If the opposition is not vehement, it may be worth trying to change the legislator's position.

If the legislator appears movable, present information that addresses his or her concerns. Make sure that the legislator hears from constituents who support your position. Strategize and present the case most likely to resonate with this particular legislator.

Stay in touch to nurture the relationship with the legislator

If the legislator is not movable, ask them not to lobby their colleagues on the issue. With a close vote, where you cannot win unless the legislator cooperates, ask them to "walk" (be absent) when the vote occurs

If the legislator's opposition is strong, write and express your disappointment in their position (and/or their vote). Don't waste your time and energy trying to move them.

# RESPONDING TO OPPOSITION & CRITICISM

Every program has critics. Proponents of adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs must be prepared to address objections and opposition. Conflict is unpleasant but provides an opportunity to educate and communicate with the public. Responding to critics through open discussion allows everyone to be heard and competing ideas to be tested. Open communication often leads to compromise that maintains the integrity of a program while building the broadest possible support.

Addressing opposition effectively involves listening to many different interests and conflicting views and then cooperating to achieve agreement.

Since a debate of some nature is guaranteed when adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs are considered, proponents must prepare in order to succeed. The majority of Americans support programs to improve adolescent reproductive and sexual health, but too-often are not active and/or vocal about their support. Even those who initially oppose adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs can be made supporters if they receive information, have their questions answered and are invited to contribute to the debate. Provide information and the opportunity to hear differences, answer questions and respond to concerns, and most of the community will be supportive.

It is vitally important to know who opposes the program or proposal under consideration, why they do so, and what strategies and arguments these critics will use. Opposition can arise from many sources. Some individuals may oppose a program because they have questions about what is being proposed, what will be accomplished and how the plan will be implemented. These critics may be turned into supporters by providing information about how the local situation demonstrates that the program is needed, what the program's goals and components are and how the program will be funded and evaluated.

Other individuals object to a planned program because they feel they have been left out of the development process. Program planners should make every effort to involve representatives from all areas of the community from the earliest discussions about a desired program. It is particularly important to involve supportive members of the religious community as well as parents. Documenting a large and diverse coalition whose members support the proposal assures those who might otherwise feel ignored that their community is involved in creating the program plan.

Other critics may think teen reproductive and sexual health programs are simply unnecessary. A broad public education campaign is an effective way to build public awareness about teen health issues. By highlighting relevant local teen health indicators and describing how they will be improved by the proposed program, proponents can persuade many people to support the

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proposed program. A sample needs assessment, which serves as a guide for collecting information about the community, is included in this Kit.

Some people oppose school-based programs that target reproductive and sexual health as representing an effort to divert schools' attention from providing the best possible education. Present facts about how school-based health programs can improve young people's health and about the correlation between health and improved school performance. Additional information about the long history of public health and educational campaigns focused in the public schools can be effective in many communities.

Some people will never change their minds and become supporters of a proposed program, so don't waste your time attempting to convince them otherwise. There are plenty of people who will listen to and benefit from an information campaign—concentrate on this audience.

The most important tool in fighting for a program is clear and concise information about the need for the program and the manner in which the proposed program will improve teen health. Engage the community in order to publicize this information and the program stands a good chance of being approved and supported by the public. By listening to people's concerns, proponents can identify the most effective means to persuade the greatest numbers to support the program or policy under consideration.

### How to Deal with Opposition and Criticism

**Create a broad-based coalition of vocal supporters.** Extensive community support and participation clearly indicates the popularity of your program. See the Coalition section for more information. Support one another when times are rough. Let young people remind you of what the issues are all about: their reproductive and sexual health!

**Be prepared for opposition.** Know in advance that there will be objections to your proposal, and watch for them. Know not only who the opposition is but also what objections will be raised. Read opposition materials, study the newspapers, watch and listen to talk shows, learn about area organizations that will oppose your program. Check the lobbies and parking lots of religious organizations, as well as religious bookstores, to see if opposition literature on the issue is being handed out: this type of literature has been used to misrepresent the goals and effects of progressive programs.

**Explain the program to the public.** Many Far Right successes come from their ability to twist the meaning of educational, public health and public policy terms that are unfamiliar to the general public. Move beyond Far Right descriptions by explaining why the proposed program reinforces families, will not corrupt children and addresses existing problems in the community. Use descriptive and accurate language: for example "contraceptive availability" is preferable to "contraceptive distribution," since these programs do not force contraception on anybody, but rather make it available to those in need.

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**Defend your program.** Prepare to answer criticism with data, statistics, anecdotes and other information. Ignoring opposition statements makes them appear to be more popular than they really are and permits distortions to be accepted by the public. Check opposition statements for truth and publicize any distortions. When terms are unclear, or appear to be manipulated into different meanings come up, ask for an explanation. Responding to opposition can be accomplished by writing letters or op-eds for newspapers, speaking out at meetings, calling radio talk shows, offering your position as a follow-up interview to TV or radio stations covering the issue.

**Encourage open and civilized debate.** Communication is essential to the democratic process and is the only way to address the fears of the general population and objections of the opposition. Investigate and participate in the mechanisms by which schools and other public organizations address questions about programs. Ensure that all public meetings adhere to rules to encourage order. Ask members of the press to sign in and show their credentials. Require speakers to sign up in advance, give their name and address (and, when relevant, how many children they have in the schools); set time limits; select a moderator who will control personal attacks or diatribes. Some communities hold hearings for specific groups: parents, health care workers, teacher, students, etc. This is time-consuming, but can yield open discussion instead of heated exchanges in which only one viewpoint is expressed.

**Don't be afraid of threats.** Urge policymakers not to be intimidated when faced with demands that programs be abandoned. Threats of lawsuits are common when communities consider progressive programs, such as contraceptive availability, but few carried out and/or successful. Holding community meetings in response to criticism can help generate broader discussion and answer the public's concerns.

**Follow the debate.** Find out about the different news outlets in your area and watch for coverage of your issue. Participate in the debate by contacting these outlets with news, objections, clarifications, etc. Sometimes opposition groups spread misinformation about programs and policies through leafletting and flyers. If this happens, respond with correct information through the press or community and/or religious groups.

**Be active in your campaign.** Provide information and the framework for the discussion so that the real facts are made public and all have a chance to get involved. Set the tone of the debate by taking the lead. See the Media and Coalition sections for specific activities.

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### Religious Political Extremists

Some groups are not open to persuasion. Organized groups opposing progressive programs may be part of the Far Right movement, known for its extreme political agenda. Religious political extremist organizations (also known as the Religious Right) believe that their worldview and theology (typically fundamentalist) should be the dominant one in American culture and that the government should enforce Biblical law.

Almost universally, religious political extremist groups favor:

- limiting access to contraception
- denying women access to abortion information, counseling and services
- prohibiting equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans
- abandoning multicultural and cultural diversity educational programs
- requiring abstinence to be taught as the only acceptable method of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases
- denouncing sexual expression outside of marriage
- censoring books in public schools and libraries
- closing school-based and school-health centers

It is very healthy for a young girl to be deterred from promiscuity by fear of contracting a painful, incurable disease, or cervical cancer, or sterility, or the likelihood of giving birth to a dead, blind or brain-damaged baby (even ten years later when she may be happily married.)

*Phyllis Schlafly, Eagle Forum*

The extremists' ultimate goal is to impose a narrow religious agenda upon the American people. Tactics used include misrepresenting evaluation data, lying about program components and goals and fomenting public hysteria about progressive organizations and programs. Adolescent reproductive and sexual health proponents must reveal and contest the religious political extremists' agenda in order to succeed in promoting progressive programs.

The Pro-Life Action League opposes all forms of contraception.

*Joseph Scheidler, Pro-Life Action League*

Magic Johnson wants us to believe AIDS can happen to anybody. Sure, anybody with numerous homosexual partners, or several hundred heterosexual partners, or an illegal IV drug habit. It will not happen to you if you have one mutually faithful uninfected partner for life. That is the only "safe sex."

*"Quick Facts on Safe Sex," Focus on the Family*

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Extremists typically utilize three tactics: stealth, demonization and misrepresentation.

**STEALTH** candidates attempt to win political office by concealing their agenda from all but their most ardent supporters. While everybody has the right to participate in the political process, extremists tend to infiltrate the political sphere rather than engage in the democratic process. The problem is not that these candidates have views or allegiances, but that they hide them. Certain extremist conservatives concentrate get-out-the-vote efforts on sympathetic organizations and hide from the general public. Stealth tactics keep turnout low, because voters don't know enough about a candidate to know they would not support them. Because of reduced voter turnout, stealth candidates can win, particularly in a non-presidential election year (such as 1994) or in local elections that not coinciding with national elections.

We don't have to worry about convincing the majority of Americans to agree with us. Most are at home watching Falcon Crest. They're not voting.

*Guy Rodgers, Christian Coalition*

When we get an active Christian parents' committee in operation in all districts, we can take control of all local school boards. This will allow us to determine all local policy, select good textbooks, good curriculum programs, superintendents and principals. Our time has come!

*DI Bedmark, Citizens for Excellence in Education*

**MISREPRESENTATION** is a tactic by which the extremists raise support for their cause by distorting and falsifying program goals, components and effects. Misrepresentation incites opposition by frightening and misleading the public. The religious political extremists manipulate statistics and research to support their agenda. They have fabricated and misrepresented quotations, program goals and evaluation outcomes in order to portray progressive programs as faulty, ineffective or offensive. For example, some extremists misrepresent psychological health, substance abuse prevention and self-esteem raising efforts as occult brainwashing programs. People who have not been informed or who feel they are prevented from getting involved are excellent targets for misinformation campaigns.

The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.

*Pat Robertson, Christian Coalition*

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The separation of church and state is a foreign idea to God and U.S. history. It is found nowhere in Scripture or any U.S. Constitution or official documents. It is found in the Soviet Union Constitution.

*Bob Simonds, Citizens for Excellence in Education*

**DEMONIZATION** is a tactic that channels public discontent into active opposition by blaming current social woes on a specific group such as program proponents, educators and political candidates. This tactic plays on people's fears of change and of their social condition. Demonizing terms include: Feminazis, the homosexual lobby, secular humanists, Godless socialists and New Agers. Extremist materials often portray the target group as agents of Satan. These labels make reasonable people who care deeply about teens seem to be dangerous and subversive forces with an agenda of harm and control.

The humanism that is being taught in schools, media, and intellectual circles will ultimately lead people to the Antichrist, because he will be the consummate figure of humanism.

*Pat Robertson, Christian Coalition*

We have meticulously followed God's plan and His biblical principals in CEE's plan to redeem America's children from the clutches of atheism, immorality and psychological brainwashing. Godless socialism and the plethora left-wing agenda items must be stopped.

*Bob Simonds, Citizens for Excellence in Education*

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In its publication *Winning Through Reason, Not Fear: Meeting the Challenge of the Religious Right*, People for the American Way has designed ten rules for engaging in a debate with religious political extremists (Religious Right).

1. Do not focus the debate on the extent of the Religious Right's strength or exaggerate the "threat" it poses. It is not the Religious Right's existence—or its putative power—that Americans object to, but rather what it wants to do.
2. Always remember that this is a fight for the mainstream, which will be won by addressing the concerns and values of ordinary Americans. Voters often feel left out of today's arguments between the Religious Right and progressives. This leaves both these sides on the margins, with the middle up for grabs.
3. When appropriate, criticize the Religious Right for trying to use government to impose its religious values on others, thereby mixing religion and politics in an inappropriate way. This is what most limits its appeal with voters.
4. Whenever possible, engage the Religious Right on fights over specific issue positions rather than general values, and force its leaders to defend their most extreme positions. Progressives can win on the issues, especially when they develop a competing agenda for change.
5. Speak to Americans' strong conviction that the nation is experiencing a serious decline in moral values. Avoid getting positioned outside the mainstream on questions of core values.
6. Highlight the limited range of values advocated by the Religious Right, and challenge its claim to speak for all moral and religious Americans.
7. Do not allow the Religious Right to define political differences as a debate over the importance or value of religion. Although Americans do not favor government promoting particular religious views, they do want more religion in their society.
8. Do not compromise your credibility by employing exaggerated language. Progressives' descriptions of the Religious Right must ring true with voters.
9. Reach out to less-educated and lower-income voters, who often do not have liberal social values.
10. Educate younger Americans about the Religious Right; they reject much of its agenda, but are also the least concerned about its influences.

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### **RESPONDING TO CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION: Selected Bibliography**

In addition to Advocates for Youth's Fact Sheets and advocacy manuals, the following materials offer insight into dealing with opposition to adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs.

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- . *The San Diego Model: A Community Battles the Religious Right*. Washington, DC. May, 1993.
- Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S. Community Action Kit: *An Information Pack to Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. New York. 1993.
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# COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The following are some questions commonly raised by opponents of comprehensive sexuality education, along with responses that have worked for other communities. Other criticisms may arise and sexuality education proponents should decide in advance what their response will be.

### **Shouldn't parents be the ones responsible for teaching their children about sexuality?**

Open communication between parents and children is extremely valuable, and young people consistently say they want to be able to talk with their parents about sexuality. Unfortunately, most parents report that they do not know what to say, or when to say it. Parents often feel uncomfortable talking with young people about intimate issues: 67 percent of parents say it is hard for them to talk with their children about sexuality. Ninety-eight percent of parents say they need help in communicating better.

Supplementing education received by parents with sexuality education provided in the schools helps parents overcome the difficulties they face when they are the sole providers of information and guidance. Sexuality educators work in concert with parents to promote healthy sexual development by adolescents. Links between parents and schools can aid parents in their efforts and help them to build skills along with their children.

### **What advantage is there in offering sexuality education in the schools?**

The goal of sexuality education is to promote positive sexual health. Quality sexuality education focuses on both factual information and skills development. Skill-building components address setting goals, communicating about whether to have sex, negotiating abstinence or contraceptive use, resisting peer pressure and other important abilities.

While sexuality is a normal, healthy part of being alive, too many families maintain a harmful silence about the issue, giving young people the message that sexuality is bad. Ignorance flourishes in such a climate, preventing teens from making informed and responsible decisions about abstinence, contraception, sexuality and relationships.

School-based programs can play an important role in educating young people about sexual health and decision-making. Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education (preferably from kindergarten through 12th grade) can reach young people before they start having sex and increase motivation to delay initiation of sexual intercourse and to use contraception consistently.

Comprehensive sexuality education also allows students the opportunity to examine behavioral values and norms in order to weigh the consequences of their decisions. School-based education helps young people learn to identify

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their own and their families values, and to use these values to make healthy choices throughout their lives.

### **What are the effects of sexuality education?**

Sexuality education, combined with access to contraception, can help teens delay sexual intercourse and to use contraception better. Other industrialized countries that have comprehensive education and confidential access to contraceptives have much lower rates of teen pregnancy, childbearing and abortion than does the United States. In fact, these European rates are 2-7 times lower than rates in the US, even though teen sexual activity is similar for US and European teens.

Research shows that young people who receive sexuality education in the schools are more likely to talk with their parents about sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education enhances young people's knowledge, clarifies their values, improves their communication skills and encourages sexually active teens to use contraception. Comprehensive programs have been found to help teens delay having sex and to improve their contraceptive use when they do have sex.

Because most contraceptive failure is due to error on the part of the user rather than a flaw in the product, sexuality education can decrease contraceptive failure. For example, correctly used condoms are about 98 percent effective. Comprehensive sexuality education can help reduce user error by improving communication about contraception, as well as educating people about correct use.

### **Doesn't sexuality education promote sex and lead to sexual experimentation?**

No, providing information about sexuality does not lead young people to experiment with sex. Age appropriate comprehensive sexuality education that begins early and is sustained can help teens delay sex and use more effective methods of birth control once they become sexually active.

In fact, a recent World Health Organization review of sexuality education programs from all over the world found that young participants engaged in neither earlier nor increased sexual activity. Studies consistently show that teens who receive quality sexuality education are more likely to report contraceptive use at first intercourse than teens without sexuality education.

### **What's wrong with teaching values?**

Sexuality education programs do stress values. The values-based components help young people identify their own values based on their culture, family and religious background. Comprehensive sexuality education programs do not attempt to replace family values, but rather to help young people identify them so they can be more aware of which decisions are right for them, and why. Education which explores differences in American society fosters respect for diversity in our country while validating commonly held social values: honesty, dignity and responsibility.

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## What's wrong with teaching abstinence?

All comprehensive sexuality education programs teach about abstinence, and help teens build their skills to remain abstinent if they so desire. These topics include decision-making, negotiating health care and contraceptive use, disease prevention and avoidance of peer pressure. When abstinence is taught as the only option for young people, however, teens are denied information and skills that will be vitally important to them at some point in their sexual lives.

Furthermore, sexually active teens feel stigmatized by messages that only abstinence is safe or appropriate, and may be less likely to use contraception when they have intercourse. After all, condoms provide 10,000 times more protection than no contraception at all. Withholding information does not help young people make informed and responsible choices.

## How can you teach abstinence and contraception at the same time? Doesn't that send a mixed message?

Teaching abstinence along with contraception does not send a mixed message. Instead, it realistically acknowledges the complicated nature of sexual relationships and the important decisions that being sexual people involves. Comprehensive sexuality education provides young people with facts about a wide range of behaviors and choices, including abstinence and contraception. This information empowers teens who are both having and abstaining from sex to make healthy decisions based on knowledge and their personal values. Research indicates that school programs that promote both abstinence and protected sex are more effective in reaching teens and help them make responsible decisions.

## How can sexuality education be good if so many people oppose it?

Actually, most people (including most parents) support sexuality education. A recent study indicated that 85 percent of adults support comprehensive sexuality education in the schools, and 94 percent support HIV prevention education in the schools. Public health organizations recognize that sexuality education is beneficial; a list of organizational supporters appears on the reverse of this page.

Most opposition to sexuality education comes from a small minority of people, unusually conservative in their political and religious values. These critics usually fear that any discussion of sexuality will lead young people to have sex or that openness about homosexuality will somehow "recruit" teens into lesbian or gay relationships. Another misperception is that programs which are not comprehensive and only discuss abstinence can be effective. Not one of these beliefs is true. Educating the public about the real content and effects of sexuality education will help allay fears and make visible the overwhelming public support for comprehensive sexuality education.

