

## Insight 3-2

**Dealing with Opposing Viewpoints**

As you read this section, do the following things: (1) cover up the suggested response to the typical item of opposition, (2) read the typical item of opposition, (3) decide how you would answer the opposition item, and (4) compare your answer to our suggested response. Remember, no peeking at our suggestions until you have thought about your own!

As an historic example of opposition to sexuality education, in New Jersey (Knowlton, 1986), it was found that those who opposed family-life education generally fell into three categories. The first group (about 5% of the population of New Jersey) believed that sexual matters should not be mentioned or discussed in public, because it is immoral to do so. These people generated the bulk of meetings, letters, and political or legal opposition to the family-life education requirement. The second group (also estimated at 5%) were convinced that young people who were informed about sexuality will promiscuously indulge in premarital sexual intercourse and become pregnant. The third group did not trust schools to do a good job of sexuality education and thought that if schools did it, then parents, churches, and other socially responsible persons would not.

Informed educators may be able to help many kinds of sexuality education opponents understand that people of all ages have needs related to sexuality education, that sexuality education occurs constantly whether we want it to or not, and that it is not educationally sound to censor certain topics. Certainly, it is appropriate to deal with topics differently with various age groups, but taboo topics have an unrealistic aura around them that inhibits rather than promotes learning.

Before assuming that someone opposed to a sexuality education program is automatically an extremist, it would be wise to assess the person's reasons for opposition. In many cases it may be possible to turn these types of opponents into some of your most avid supporters after they better understand the total program.

**Countering Arguments Against Sexuality Education**

Are you now ready to deal with viewpoints that are opposed to all or part of sexuality education activities? Let us find out.

1. *Opposition argument.* Sexuality education will cause sexual experimentation.

*Suggested response.* It seems that some sexual experimentation is natural. No amount of education

is likely to affect it one way or the other. However, in many cases it seems that those who are the *least* informed about sexuality are the most likely to experiment. In addition, if sexual experimentation does occur, sexuality education experiences may result in a healthier experimentation. For example, people may be more considerate and take fewer risks. Through proper sexuality education programs, people can learn wholesome attitudes and correct information about sexuality that will help them attain a healthy approach to human sexuality. Relatedly, the more information young people have about sexuality, the more likely they are to delay the onset of sexual intercourse. Also, if they do have sexual intercourse they are more likely to be effective users of contraception.

2. *Opposition argument.* Sexuality educators are not trained to handle sexuality education.

*Suggested response.* This is probably the most logical complaint against sexuality education, but it is one that is easily overcome. There should be more concern shown for the qualifications of the sexuality educator than there has been. A sexuality educator who is not prepared to handle the topic of sexuality is likely to do more harm than good. The same can be said for group leaders for individuals of all ages. Today, however, there are many excellent opportunities for in-service programs for sexuality educators and leaders as well as undergraduate and graduate courses concerned with sexuality. Therefore, there is no longer any valid reason why sexuality educators should not be prepared.

3. *Opposition argument.* Some sexuality education programs are started too quickly.

*Suggested response.* A few may be, but this is not the case in most instances. Any new or existing program in the community should be carefully planned, well taught, and constantly evaluated. If these steps are followed and if the community is informed about progress, this criticism will have no foundation.

4. *Opposition argument.* Parents should handle sexuality education for their children.

*Suggested response.* The fact that parents play a major role in the sexuality education of their children is not denied. Religious groups can also contribute to education about sexuality. No organizations should attempt to replace parents in educational pursuits. They simply assist parents. We do not expect parents to be able to teach their children math, English, history, or science. It makes no more sense to expect them to teach sexuality education. Parents cannot be expected to know current research, to have a wide variety of resources, or even to be able to handle the topic objectively with their own children.