

young people who eventually have sexual intercourse have already been strongly encouraged, by their parents and their schools, to believe in abstinence and avoid sexual intercourse. The fatal error is that we ignore the fact that vows of abstinence break far more easily than do condoms.

We know that many young people are already sexually active, and others will decide to become sexually active—no matter what we say. Therefore, educating about responsible sexual behavior is not only necessary, it may save lives. Teaching people to “just say no” is not the only answer in drug education, and it is not in sexuality education either. Also, we must remember that there is a great difference between promoting sexual behavior (which good sexuality educators do not do) and educating about responsible decision making.

15. *Opposition argument.* The curricula promoted by Advocates for Youth, Answer, SIECUS, or some other national group is undesirable.

Suggested response. It is unusual, if it happens at all, for respectable national groups like these to promote a particular curriculum. In fact, they emphasize the importance of individualized approaches to sexuality education as well as community involvement in curriculum planning to meet the needs of a given community. Fortunately, since 2012, we now have the National Sexuality Education Standards, which have been approved by the major groups involved in sound sexuality education (Future of Sex Education, 2012). These standards are available from a number of national organizations, but they can be seen at www.futureofsexeducation.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf.

Although there is some overlap with the list of arguments already presented, here is a list of some examples of arguments, along with suggested responses:

- *Comprehensive sexuality education is a complete failure.* If given the chance, comprehensive sexuality education can help young people delay sexual intercourse and protect themselves if they do become sexually active.
- *Sexuality education just encourages teens to have more sexual activity.* Actually, it is just the opposite. If you educate teens about sexuality, including abstinence and contraception, they are more likely to delay sexual activity.
- *Teaching teens about safer sex is like telling them, “Don’t smoke but if you do, smoke only filtered cigarettes.”* This is like saying if we teach teens about fire extinguishers, they’ll be more likely to start a fire. Research shows that education about abstinence and contraception is not only compatible but preferable.
- *Sexuality education teaches teens how to do it.* Comprehensive sexuality education does not teach sexual techniques.
- *Supporters of comprehensive sexuality education don’t think abstinence is important for teens.* Abstinence is one of many important topics, but teaching teens only about abstinence is irresponsible.
- *Supporters of comprehensive sexuality education just want all teens to participate in sexual behavior.* That is a ridiculous charge. We all want what is best for our young people. We are simply disagreeing on how we can best secure their health and future.
- *The federal government spends much more money on comprehensive sexuality education than it does on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.* Comparing abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and Title X funding is like comparing apples and oranges. The truth is that, until recently, there was no federal money for comprehensive sexuality education.
- *Teaching children about sexuality before the age of 12 interferes with the latency period and disturbs children’s natural modesty.* Modern experts agree that humans are sexual beings from birth until death and that no latency period exists. People of all ages are curious about issues related to sexuality and need accurate, age-appropriate information.
- *Schools are spending so much time teaching about health that kids don’t even know how to read and write.* It is important to teach people basic skills. However, they also need information about health and relationships.
- *People who want sexuality education are saying, in effect, that young people are going to have sexual intercourse anyway, so we might as well tell them how to make it a little safer.* Good sexuality education programs give people skills to make responsible decisions. Researchers have found that these programs help young people delay having sexual intercourse and to use contraception effectively if they do.
- *Teaching young people that they can have sexual intercourse encourages promiscuity.* This is not true. Programs that teach about both abstinence and safer sexual activity can help young people to postpone having intercourse.
- *Teaching that abstinence is the expected standard and leaving out any mention of contraception will set a strong ethical guideline for young people.* Programs most effective in helping young people to abstain discuss both abstinence and contraception. This is why providing comprehensive sexuality education is so important.