

Testimony Regarding Comprehensive Sex Education
By Ross S. Olson MD

I am Ross Olson, a recently retired pediatrician with 4 children and 5 grandchildren. I have practiced for over 35 years, including the US Navy, Pilot City Health Center in Minneapolis, a College Health Service and Emergency Room in Illinois, a Hospital and Clinic in Hong Kong, 23 years with a large HMO here in the Twin Cities and 6 months with a small private pediatric clinic.

My opinions arise from my experience and concern for the long term consequences not only to my own patients, but also to all children and adolescents growing up in our increasingly dangerous world. The most serious consequences of sexual activity prior to lifetime commitment are not the diseases and pregnancies, but the emotional consequences. Many young people become sexually bonded to abusive partners and many others become callous and cynical opportunists who use the bodies of others for their own pleasure with no apparent remorse.

There was a time when I wondered why some parents objected to sex education in the schools. What was wrong with them, were they repressed or something? Then I begin to investigate what was actually being taught and stopped wondering.

Although it may be done with the best of motivations, comprehensive sex education is taught with the assumption that unmarried teens will all become sexually active and the best we can do is blunt the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. It is what I call “the animal model of adolescence.”

With that mindset, there is no significant encouragement for the best behavior — saving sexual activity for a permanent commitment — and in fact, a sexually abstinent teen is often given the impression that he or she is the only virgin left. And the material is often so explicit that the kids are not going to be thinking about math next hour.

Comprehensive Sex Education is also taught with the unwarranted assumption that given information, kids will do the right thing. But the fact is, even adults given complete information do not always do the right thing. And, although adolescents can be wonderful, idealistic and creative, the inconvenient truth is that they are not equipped to make life altering decisions without strong and wise guidance. We now have scans to prove what parents of teenagers have always known, that the reasoning parts of the brain are relatively inactive and the emotional parts are firing on all cylinders.

Some writing curricula or teaching it are just ignorant of the effects, just as I once was. A few years ago, when my own children were in Minneapolis Public Schools, at a parent meeting I stated that no one could argue against the fact that if every teen waited with sex until committed to one partner for life, sexually transmitted diseases would go away. The then health coordinator said, “Well, that’s your opinion.” Of course it is not an opinion but a mathematical scientific fact.

But I suspect that some proponents of comprehensive sex education are, either consciously or unconsciously, justifying their own past or present sexual behavior. And even more sinister is the contingent that actually believes sexual liberation to be the gateway to utopia and the solution to all our problems.

Margaret Sanger, Founder of Planned Parenthood way back in 1922 wrote this: “Through sex, mankind may attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, which will light up the only path to an earthly paradise.” (The Pivot of Civilization, NY Brentano's, 1922, p.270)

Mary Calderone, Founder of SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council of the US) wrote: “Change is the new reality... The unchanging... is unreal, constraining, a false goal.” “(Children) must become familiar with change, feel comfortable with it, understand it, master it, control it.” “If man as he is, is obsolescent, then what kind do we want to produce in his place and how do we design the production line? -- that is the real question facing ... sex education.” (“Sex Education and the Roles of School and Church,” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences 376, March 1968, p. 57).

Minnesota Sociologist Ira Reiss claims that the first sexual revolution did not go far enough because people are still feeling guilty. In *An End To Shame: Shaping Our Next Sexual Revolution*, he envisions a guilt-free society in which no sexual expression is prohibited and everybody feels wonderful. Isn't that just great? Maybe he will entitle his next book, Psychopaths in Wonderland.

Another clue that some march to a different drummer is opposition to any promotion of abstinence. Planned Parenthood and the ACLU have complained in various forums that sexual abstinence before marriage is a religious concept and does not even belong in the public schools.

There is also a growing scholarly literature defending and justifying “intergenerational sex,” what those of us trapped in an “outmoded morality” used to call child molestation. Minnesota’s own Judith Levine in her book *Harmful to Minors* at least gives aid and comfort to this radical movement. She makes statements like this: “Protecting children is one of our chief duties as adults, whether we are parents, professionals, or friends. But we also have to ask: What are we protecting them from? My book says that sexuality is a fact of life, and a potentially wonderful part of growing up for children at all stages of their lives. It's not sex itself that is harmful to children, but the conditions under which they might express themselves sexually that can leave them vulnerable to harms like HIV, unwanted pregnancy, or sexual violence.”

And is it really true that talking about birth control does not influence children’s behavior? As far back as 1986, a Harris Poll showed that teens who had comprehensive sex education – including information on birth control and abortion – later engaged in more sexual experimentation than those who had no sex education at all, and markedly more than those who had the simple biologic facts. The so-called failure of abstinence sex education in Minnesota is actually a failure of programs that said, “Wait until you are ready,” not “Wait until marriage.”

The mythology is that abstinence education does not work but MISH (Medical Institute for Sexual Health, www.medinstitute.org) blew that one out of the water with their 2006 review of the anti-abstinence literature. They found prejudiced selection of data, opinion presented as fact, misrepresentation of the studies, faulty reasoning and downright lies. This is the sort of thing that the tobacco industry did for years to fight the facts about their product.

We now tell teens to never smoke, even though we know that some will not take that wise advice. Do you want to ally yourself with a libertine philosophy regarding sexual activity? Or are you willing to buck political correctness and call for programs that build character and lay the foundation for a successful life. That is what parents want for their kids, even if their own experience has been different. If you want something else, I insist that you level with your constituents.