

Young people deserve sex education

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CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

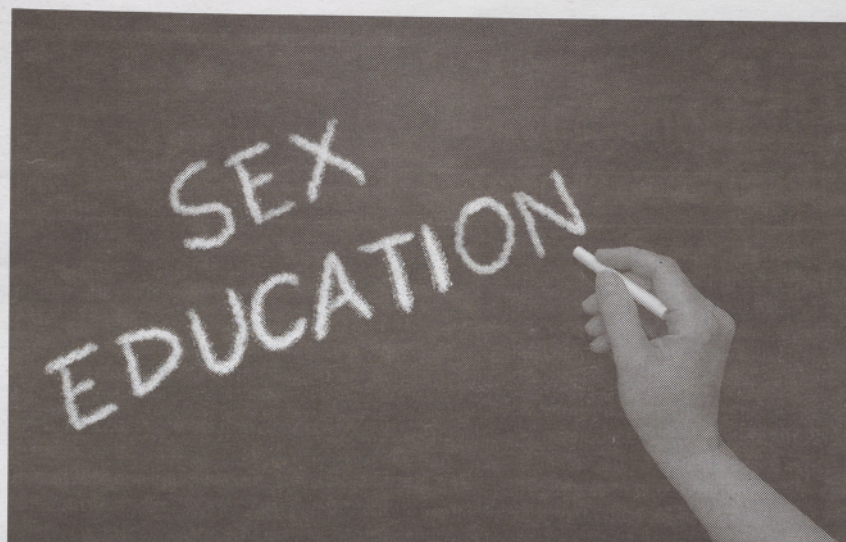
What do you think of when you hear “sex ed?” Your own sex education classes? A condom demonstration? Maybe a movie scene with an uncomfortable gym coach?

Sex education is more than putting condoms on bananas. It’s more than preventing sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. Sex education IS education. It teaches young people communication, critical thinking, self-advocacy — skills that are very similar to the learning benchmarks outlined in other core academic classes. Sex ed has a proven track record of helping young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions about their relationships, their health and their future.

When it’s done right, sex education empowers young people with developmentally appropriate, medically accurate information. It provides answers to their questions about sex and relationships without shaming or judging them for their experiences or feelings. Sex education covers a wide range of topics, including healthy and unhealthy relationships, decision-making and peer pressure, abstinence, communication, consent, gender identity and sexual orientation, body image, media literacy and critical thinking, birth control and STIs. Students can explore their values and practice the skills they need to navigate relationships, access health care and plan ahead to protect their health.

Sex education enables children and young adults to engage in healthy relationships and gives them the opportunity to practice good communication skills before becoming sexually active. Middle and high school is a time when young people are becoming familiar with their bodies and forming new kinds of relationships. It’s important for them to learn what a healthy relationship looks like and have opportunities to practice good communication skills before becoming sexually active. Access to sex education — prior to college and before young people become sexually active — can help prevent sexual coercion or assault and create safer communities. Additionally, sex education that is LGBTQ-inclusive provides young people with opportunities to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity and understand that everyone deserves respect and care, no matter their identity.

The overwhelming majority of Americans want young people to receive sex education in middle and high school. Unfortunately,



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fewer young people than ever are getting any sex education at all, or they’re getting ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs — despite the fact that research confirms that those programs withhold critical information from young people and leave them at risk.

A 2016 study found that the percentage of teens who receive sex education has dropped significantly over the past decade, particularly for those living in nonmetropolitan areas. Fewer teens are being exposed to important information about a range of sex education topics. For example, from 2011 to 2013, 43 percent of adolescent females and 57 percent of adolescent males did not receive information about birth control before they had sex for the first time.

On top of this, the Trump-Pence administration is actively working to make sex education in the United States worse instead of better. It illegally shortened the grants for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, which has been shown to help young people postpone sex and use birth control when they do become sexually active, and has announced two Funding Opportunity Announcements that will radically remake the program to push an ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum. It is more important now than ever that we listen to the needs of young people and advocate for their right to the information and skills they need to make the decisions that are right for them.

Whether you’re a parent, caregiver or student, you can find out how sex education is taught in your school — including how often and when sex education is being taught, what topics are covered, what curriculum is being used and who is teaching the program — and advocate for sex education that supports the full range of sex education topics that young people need in order to stay healthy and meet their life goals.

At Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette, we understand that young people deserve to have the information, resources and skills they need to protect their health and build their future — without shame or judgment. Our in-school and community education program gives young people comprehensive information about sexual health, communication skills and relationships.

In addition, we facilitate Teen Council, a program that empowers and trains high school students to deliver inclusive sex education to their peers and facilitate access to healthcare services — because youth are more likely to seek out information from peers than from an adult. For more than a decade, Teen Council members have been fixtures in local schools, providing resources and teaching presentations to their classmates. They are making a positive impact on their communities, their peers, their schools and their families.

PPCW also offers resources to help parents and guardians open the lines of communication with the young people in their lives to have ongoing conversations about sex and relationships.

As the nation’s leading provider of high-quality sexual and reproductive health care and sex education, we want all young people to have the knowledge, power and resources to make healthy decisions about their bodies. You can rely on Planned Parenthood to provide honest, accurate information and resources about sex and relationships, no matter what.

Hannah Sokoloff-Rubin serves as Community Education & Outreach Coordinator for Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette. To find more information about sex education and resources for parents, young people and educators, visit PlannedParenthood.org.

A Moment

by Dan Newth

It’s surreal
Golden red leaves
Drift upward
In a back draft
As I wait for MAX
How long till they’re gone
I wonder.
Ouroboros
Manifest as civilization
Eating itself
And every living thing.
But now
Now is a moment
To treasure
Now is all we have.

Untitled

by Billy Turner

Here I am sitting at the beach not too far from the ocean.
Letting my body get dark tan.
Looking up at the clouds that are rolling by me. What do I see?
My angel that appears in the clouds.
I knew that you were an angel that got sent from heaven above.
Blew you a kiss, then you disappeared.
When I got home I gave you a call on the phone.
Just to tell you I am home and how much I miss you when you are gone.
And P.S. “I love you when you are gone.” Always on my mind day and night. Good night my sweetheart, talk to you soon.

Trade Winds

by Daniel Cox

Chasing down the wind,
Riding the terrible storm.
Thunderous clouds and a forlorn sky.
Bleak horizon on edge.
And then all is quiet,
like a peaceful dream come true