

Society Must Protect Its Children

A recent study by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that at least one in four teenage girls in the US has a sexually transmitted disease. Sex may be a moral issue to many but to society it is very much a health issue. Our schools have the responsibility to teach health. Nutrition, exercise, and the prevention of communicable diseases are legitimate subject matter. Sexually transmitted diseases are as much a health issue as is any communicable disease and teaching its prevention even more critical since we have reached the pandemic stage.

Society has long accepted the responsibility of protecting its children from abuse and neglect. We have rampant child neglect in the US when one in four of our young girls have contracted a preventable STD. If they have been intentionally deprived of the information they need to protect themselves, it rises to the level of child abuse.

The new slogan emerging from the right concerning sex education in school is that morality should be taught at home. The argument is that schools should teach the bare minimum concerning the process by which babies occur but anything further must be reserved to the parents. Realistically, the significant majority of a child's formative years are under the direction and control of the parents. Morality, or the lack thereof, has always been taught at home and the implication that parents somehow need authorization is absurd. Unfortunately, this training, direct or by example or omission, even when in conjunction with a church, is often ineffective, unpersuasive or even corrupt and the rest of us have to protect society from the results.

There is a fatal flaw in the "morality should be taught at home" and the "abstinence only" concepts. These do not work in the absence of a moral system sufficiently persuasive to a significant number of children. No matter how many slogans or promises are in place, abstinence programs don't work if the children don't have the integrity necessary to abstain. Many parents all but admit this weakness when they fear cervical cancer vaccines or sex education in school will encourage promiscuity (and these are nothing compared to the challenges our children face from peer and biological pressures); they know that even vague outside influences will triumph over the system of morality their children learn at home.

The resolution of this problem will start when society ceases to rely on slogans and parents actually accept responsibility for teaching their children morality rather than blaming the school system when their children fail. Despite all efforts to the contrary, our children will be tested by influences outside our control and catchphrases wouldn't substitute for a well trained, self disciplined conscience.

In the meantime, while Americans are free to adopt the system of morality they choose, Society must retain the right to protect itself and its children from this pandemic of sexually transmitted diseases when parents and religion fail.