

October is National Family Sexuality Education Month

Virtually everyone agrees that parents and caregivers should be the primary sexuality educators of their children. Facts show, however, that most parents have abdicated their responsibility. Instead, youth learn misinformation from their peers and receive mixed messages from the media leaving them less informed and more likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection or become pregnant.

As parents, we rightfully want to be involved in our teen's lives. We want our daughters to come to us if they become pregnant.... And most do. But, think about it, not all teens live in homes where communication is possible. Some teens can't or won't go their parents.

Planned Parenthood Shasta Diablo (PPSD) offers a series of workshops for Parents and Children to help get them started talking comfortably about sex, sexuality and values. PPSD's "Real Life." Real Talk." program equips parents with the skills to teach their children about sex and how to become an askable parent. You can get help to become an askable parent by contacting PPSD's Parent/Child Education Manager Beth Zacovic Nevins at 925-887-5327– and scheduling a presentation.

Planned Parenthood along with other youth serving organizations has been providing age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education throughout California. In the past decade, California's policies supporting comprehensive sexuality education in schools and access to contraceptives have resulted in a 40% decline in the rate of teen pregnancy. This is the greatest reduction of any state. For the first time in over ten years, teen birth rates have dropped in California below the national average. The latest report from the Department of Health Services shows birth rates among teens 15 to 19 years old dropping to their lowest level since 1991. Unfortunately, last week, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger audaciously eliminated funding for more than half of the state's teen pregnancy prevention programs.

This year as we recognize **National Family Sexuality Education Month**, parents have some difficult choices to make. Contact your local elected officials and demand that funding for age-appropriate, sexuality education must be restored for our youth. As parents and as community members, we owe our youth the opportunity to make responsible decisions. Governments cannot legislate effective parent/child communication. Parents must also vote no on Proposition 4.

Proposition 4 is a dangerous initiative that is before the California electorate for the third time. It would require parents to be notified before a teen can get an abortion. It may sound good, but in the real world it would have terrible consequences. It would put vulnerable teens in jeopardy. And, desperate teens will do desperate and dangerous things. If your daughter couldn't come to you—no matter what the reason—wouldn't you want her to be safe? Isn't her safety more important than the state forcing her to tell you? Real family communication starts with caring families not new laws that put teenagers at risk. Real family communication must start long before a teen faces an unplanned pregnancy. The best way to protect our daughters is to begin talking with them about responsible, appropriate sexual behavior—including abstinence— from the time they are young and fostering an atmosphere assuring them they can come to us.

For more information on Proposition 4 go to www.NoonPropositon4.org.

Heather Saunders Estes is the President/CEO of Planned Parenthood: Shasta-Diablo (PPSD) which has 15 Health Centers serving 13 counties in Northern California. Last year PPSD provided health, educational and case management services to over 36,000 individuals..