

## Comprehensive Sex Education: Empowering Black Women and Girls

All young people deserve the right to medically accurate information about sex that allows them to make healthy decisions about their sexuality. Comprehensive sex education is effective at assisting young people to make healthy decisions about sex, and to adopt healthy sexual behaviors. Sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values. It encompasses sexual development, sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, and body image.

***In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda*** supports the use of comprehensive sex education programs in schools that are age-appropriate and medically accurate. Of the research available, the most effective sex education programs contain all of the following:<sup>i</sup>

- Tools to make informed decisions and build healthy relationships;
- Stress the value of abstinence to avoid STDs, HIV and unintended pregnancies;
- Medically accurate information about all contraceptives, including condoms;
- Encourage family communication about sexuality;
- Teach skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality, including how to avoid unwanted verbal, physical and sexual advances; and
- Teach how alcohol and drug use can impact decision-making.

***In Our Own Voice believes:***

Reproductive Justice is the human right to control our bodies, our sexuality, our gender, our work and our reproduction. That right can only be achieved when all women and girls have the complete economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives.

Most sex education happens in the home with parents, trusted adults and siblings. Teachable moments present opportunities for parents to discuss sexuality issues with their children. From the moment of birth, children learn about touch, love and relationships when parents hold them, talk to them, dress them and show them affection.

Young people also learn about sex from books, television, music, the Internet, their friends and structured sessions in their churches and schools.

Two-thirds of the 48 comprehensive sex education programs researched by the National Campaign to End Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy showed positive effects for teens.<sup>ii</sup>

- 40 percent delayed sexual initiation, reduced the number of sexual partners, or increased condom or contraceptive use.
- 60 percent reduced unprotected sex.

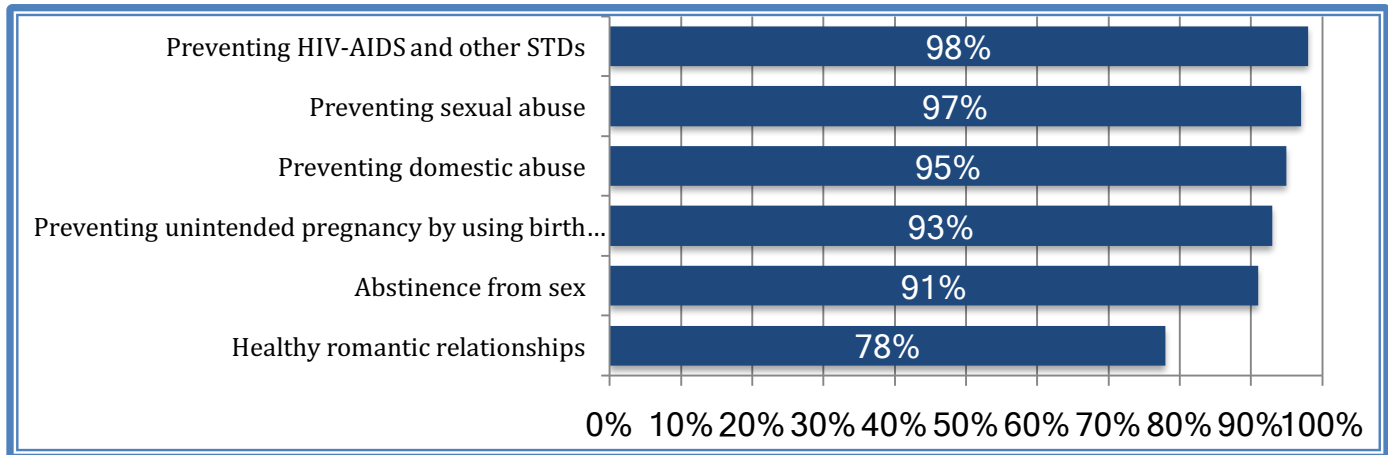
Seventeen is the average age young people experience sex for the first time.<sup>iii</sup> Given that only 24 states and the District of Columbia mandate that sex education be taught in schools<sup>iv</sup>, it is no surprise that nearly half of all new cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occur among adolescents ages 15-24.<sup>v</sup> Young Black women bear the greatest burden as they are five times more likely to contract chlamydia and over 10 times more likely to contract gonorrhea<sup>vi</sup>, as compared to white women in the same age range. To add to that, Black women accounted for 61 percent of all women diagnosed with HIV in 2015.<sup>vii</sup>

The numbers do not lie. Young Black women, like their peers, are having sex. It is imperative that they receive the education and information that will keep them safe and healthy, so that they can have the families of their choosing, when they are ready.

### Black Women and Men Support Comprehensive Sex Education<sup>viii</sup>

In 2012, 1,006 Black women and men, ages 18 and older, were asked about their thoughts regarding sex education. A majority believe that young people should be provided with education and information about sex and contraception to help make healthy decisions, and they reject the idea that censoring information is best. They (73 percent) also believe that young people’s sexual development is a normal part of growing up.

Black women and men say high school sex education should, among other things, cover:



### Implementing Comprehensive Sex Education

In 2016, after 25+ years and nearly \$2 billion federal and state monies spent on ineffective abstinence only sex education programs, President Obama submitted a 2017 budget proposal cutting all funds for abstinence programs and increasing funding for comprehensive sex education in schools. Also, Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (REHYA). The bill supports the “health and well-being of young people by providing the comprehensive sexuality education they need to make informed, responsible, and healthy decisions throughout their lives.”<sup>ix</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). *Fact Sheet: What Research Says...Comprehensive Sex Education*. October 2009. <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1193>.

<sup>ii</sup> Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001.

<sup>iii</sup> Guttmacher Institute. *American Teens’ Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Fact sheet, June 2016. Accessed 8/2/16, <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/american-teens-sexual-and-reproductive-health>.

<sup>iv</sup> Guttmacher Institute. *Sex and HIV Education. State Policies in Brief*, May 1, 2017. Accessed 5/11/17.

<sup>v</sup> United States Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. September 12, 2016. <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/reproductive-health/stds.html>.

<sup>v</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Atlanta GA, 2012. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/stats14/minorities.htm>. Accessed 5/11/17.

<sup>vi</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Atlanta GA, 2012. <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pmss.html>. Accessed 7/1/15.

<sup>vii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV Surveillance Report, 2015*; vol 27. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/library/reports/surveillance/cdc-hiv-surveillance-report-2015-vol-27.pdf>. Published November 2016. Accessed 5/11/2017.

<sup>viii</sup> *African-American Attitudes on Abortion, Contraception, and Teen Sexual Health* (2013). Belden-Russonello Strategists LLC., Washington DC. February 2013. <http://www.blackrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/media-memo.pdf> Accessed 7/1/15

<sup>ix</sup> Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. *Fact Sheet: The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act*. April 2016. <http://siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1551>.