

- ▶ Search/Archive
- ▶ Site Map
- ▶ About Us
- ▶ Contact Us
- ▶ Home Delivery
- ▶ Advertise



- NEWS
- BUSINESS
- SPORTS
- ARTS/LIFE**
- OPINION
- MARKETPLACE

**MARKETPLACE**  
classifieds and more  
Jobs • Cars • Homes • Apartments • Classified

- ♥ Talk about it  
Discuss this story
- ✉ E-mail it  
Send this story to a friend
- 🖨 Print it  
Printer-friendly version

- ▶ News
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Sports
- ▼ Arts/Life
  - Today
  - Live
  - Arts/Society
  - Home/Family
  - Travel
  - Movies/Video
  - Music/Nightlife
  - Restaurants/Food
  - Art/Museums
  - Theater/Dance
  - Books
  - Visitors' Guide
  - TV/Media
  - Crossword
  - Horoscope
  - ▶ Opinion
  - ▶ Marketplace

**Become a mySunSpot member**

- [Sign up here](#)
- Already registered? [Login here](#)

**IN DEPTH**

- ▶ Bay & Beach  
Explore galleries, discover upcoming events and learn about area beaches.

## Abstinence works, but too many teens never get the message

Susan Reimer

Originally published Jul 14, 2002



[Susan Reimer](#)

One long afternoon in a high school gym somewhere, my friend Becky and I were talking about several surprise pregnancies among young unmarrieds we know and about how these calamities would be viewed by our much younger boys, when Becky said something profoundly sensible:

"If you have sex often enough, somebody is bound to get pregnant."

In other words, no matter what form of protection a couple chooses - his, hers, both or none - the odds favor pregnancy.

As gloomy mathematician Jeff Goldblum predicts in the movie Jurassic Park, "Life will find a way."

It behooves parents, therefore, to so instruct their teen-age children: "Abstinence is the only guaranteed method of avoiding pregnancy. And sexually transmitted diseases, while we are on the subject."

So I have no fundamental objection to the fact that the federal government has, under the welfare reform legislation of 1996, provided \$50 million a year in funding for sex education in schools that teaches that abstinence is the only sure-fire safe behavior for teens and the unmarried.

But that legislation is up for renewal now in Congress, and we now know more about teen-age sexual behavior, and public opinion on the topic, than we did in 1996.

Today, 70 percent of 18-year-olds say they have had sex, and 82 percent of their parents say they want sex ed classes to explain contraception.

And it looks as if Congress might act on this information.

- Also
- [Ing to kn](#)  
Jul 9
- [She differ child](#)  
Jul 2
- [Sus](#)  
Jun 3
- [Gir Now](#)  
Jun 2
- [Kev](#)
- [Joh](#)
- [Jay](#)
- [Mik](#)
- [Gre](#)
- [Rob](#)
- [Jac](#)
- [Micl](#)
- [Mike](#)
- [Sus](#)
- [Dan](#)
- [Jule](#)
- [Lau](#)  
BIG B come comp the Fu Baltim
- [Mus in ct](#)  
Venza Beeth clarity
- [Cyr effort worl](#)  
Shake for an

**OTHER SERVICES**

- ▶ Registration
- ▶ Print Edition
- ▶ Wireless Edition
- ▶ Corrections
- ▶ SunSource Store
- ▶ Search/Archive
- ▶ Site Map
- ▶ About Us
- ▶ Contact Us
- ▶ Home Delivery
- ▶ Advertise
- ▶ Map/directions
- ▶ SunDial
- ▶ FAQs

Put SunSpot on your site  
We make it easy.

**Quick search**

Type search term(s) for  
articles, places or events,  
then hit enter

Politicians, like parents, wish teen-agers would abstain from sex, but they don't believe that teens will, and those teens are proving us right. The United States continues to have the highest teen pregnancy rate of any developed country.

So, it is profoundly important to the health of our kids that we give them information about contraception, too. After all, teens informed about contraception might use it, and it might work.

And the version of the welfare reform renewal act that has emerged from the powerful Senate Finance Committee would provide the money to do just that.

Rather than try to change the abstinence-only language in the welfare reform bill - and require politicians to vote for that change and be seen as not endorsing abstinence - Sen. Max Baucus' Finance Committee has approved a second revenue stream that would provide money for "abstinence-first" education. That is, "We want you to abstain, but if you are not going to listen to us, here are ways to protect yourself from pregnancy and disease."

Abstinence-only education was good as far as it went. It did not discuss contraception except to mention its rates of failure. That approach is cautionary, but not complete, especially now that we know that 70 percent of your 18-year-old's peers have already had intercourse.

This is certainly not the most important part of this landmark social legislation. Congressmen are rightly more concerned with the welfare-to-work, education, medical insurance and child-care provisions of the bill.

But that also means this abstinence-first funding might be lost in the conference committee wrangling over the House and Senate versions. (The House bill unfortunately does not provide for abstinence-first money.)

So, if you are one of the 82 percent of parents who want their kids armed with information about contraception, you had better get word to your congressman. And fast. Congress has to come up with a bill the president will sign before Oct. 1.

Sarah Brown, executive director of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, says the country, and it appears the Congress, is beginning to see teen pregnancy for what it really is: not a sex issue, but a far-reaching child-welfare issue.

"Teen pregnancy is not a fringe battle in the culture wars over sex," says Brown. "It should not be seen through the lens of the sex ed wars or the abortion wars or the condoms-in-the-health-room wars.

[Fate](#)  
[dete](#)  
Archd  
staine  
Howa

['Let](#)  
[actic](#)  
[satir](#)

"That is not the way to view this issue.


"The fact is, if you reduce teen pregnancy, you will reduce poverty," she says. "And if you reduce poverty, you will reduce dependence on welfare."


And isn't that what welfare reform is supposed to do?


Copyright © 2002, [The Baltimore Sun](#)

[From the archive](#)

**sunspot.net**

 **Talk about it**  
Discuss this story

 **E-mail it**  
Send this story to a friend

 **Print it**  
Printer-friendly



[Today](#) | [Arts/Society](#) | [Home/Family](#) | [Travel](#) | [Movies/Video](#) | [Music/Nightlife](#) | [Restaurants/Food](#) | [Art/Museums](#) |  
[Theater/Dance](#) | [Books](#) | [Visitors' Guide](#) | [TV/Media](#)  
[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Arts/Life](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Marketplace](#)

**Contact us:** Submit feedback, send a letter to the editor, submit a news tip, get subscription info, or place a classified ad.

[SunSpot.net](#) is Copyright © 2002 by The [Baltimore Sun](#).  
[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[Powered by Genuity.](#)