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Critics of abstinence-until-marriage program off base

By
COMMUNITY VOICES

I will be bold and proclaim that sex outside of a monogamous relationship with a lifetime partner (aka marriage) is hazardous to the health of seventh-graders and everyone else. This conviction is reinforced by facts I've learned about sexually transmitted diseases from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other authorities, who outline the physical, as well as emotional risks accompanying casual sex. The more partners one has, the greater exposure to viruses and disease, not to mention possible emotional pain.

After reading the "Community Voices" opinion by Lynn Koller in the May 22 issue of The News-Journal, I need to respond in favor of abstinence-until-marriage education. I am qualified to address her diatribe because I am one of the founders of Pure Energy, the successful abstinence education program that has served tens of thousands of Volusia teens since 2000. I assert that the program is in compliance with Sunshine State statutes and has no religious overtones, nor does it espouse any religious doctrine. So I am offended that Koller's article attempts to vilify Pure Energy, alluding that it "sermonizes" to and brainwashes its attendees, when nothing could be further from the truth.

If the basis for Koller's criticism is with the program's emphasis on waiting for sex until a commitment of marriage, she should take that up with the Florida Legislature, which recognizes marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Additionally, Koller labels the curriculum as "fear-based." Though the facts about how easily STDs are spread with an absence of symptoms are truly frightening, the program continually takes an upbeat tone, encouraging teens to make good choices to protect their futures. The underlying theme of Pure Energy is that sexual activity outside of marriage poses real risks that may affect a teen's future goals and dreams. The curriculum gives students an opportunity to reflect on their future and to strategize how to avoid situations that could put them at risk.

Thanks to the parent component of the Pure Energy program, parents and educators can learn facts about the real dangers facing our teens and how to communicate with teens more effectively. Koller cites several studies that have persuasive counterparts. In today's culture, studies and polls are certainly manipulated to support any bias. In defense of abstinence-until-marriage education, I encourage News-Journal readers to pick up a book written by a dedicated pediatrician, Dr. Meg Meeker. Titled "Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids," this book shares facts and actual accounts about teens involved in risky behavior.

Also, it is noteworthy that in 2007, the Orlando Sentinel published a report on the prevalence of STDs in Florida by counties. Volusia County is one of only two counties that had seen a decrease in disease among our youth. I think we should applaud the team at Pure Energy for its tireless efforts to protect teens instead of slamming them.

On a personal note, I regret that I didn't have the benefit of this "character-based" education during my adolescence. I would have been spared much heartache, as well as risk of disease, during my college years. Yet, learning from my mistakes, I raised my two teens with the principle of abstinence-until-marriage. A good thing because sex outside of marriage is a lot more dangerous today. These fine young adults have graduated from college and have thanked me for helping them realize their goals.

You see, abstinence education equips teens to value their lives and dreams more than a casual hookup or the shaky promises of a sexual relationship when they are not even old enough to provide for themselves. Given the harsh consequences of disease and unplanned pregnancy, who would ever encourage casual sex among our teens while placing their trust in a thin piece of latex?

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