

Parents aren't fools, either

Sex-ed conference makes for crucial family connection

Quotes from Nobody's Fool student evaluations:

"... why not to have sex at a young age" — eighth-grade boy

"... respect for others." — eighth-grade boy

"... how to avoid getting HIV and what to do when being abused" — seventh-grade boy

"... that the teachers listen to everything we had to say." — ninth-grade girl

Nobody's Fool is 15 years old. A Waco-original, the national award-winning event has educated over 7,000 children about the wonders and worries of puberty and adolescence.

Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, along with about a dozen other youth-caring organizations, hosts this half-day educational conference, which will be July 15 at the Waco Convention Center.

Children entering fifth through ninth grade are divided into 10 classrooms, by age and gender. Our focus is to reach children before they enter into dating relationships.

Since 1989, 400 to 700 children have attending annually. Activities focus on puberty, dating, relationships, avoiding peer pressure, postponing sexual activity, preventing sex abuse, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Trained health educators teach the classes.

Positive parent-child communication is *the* best teen pregnancy prevention tool. Nothing



**PAM
SMALLWOOD**

Guest
column

else compares. That means listening, encouraging questions and promoting discussions, not lectures.

One of the predominant themes at Nobody's Fool is "parents can be your best source of information — ask them." Young people need a responsible source to whom they can turn with confidence, not incorrect information from other teens, and certainly not silence from adults.

The day before Nobody's Fool, a preview lets parents review teaching materials, meet the faculty and see a classroom. At the preview, parents are encouraged to take the lead in being their child's primary sex educator, and we provide materials to help with that.

Nobody's Fool has earned the support of many of Waco's youth-caring organizations whose missions resonate with the common theme that education empowers. It is funded entirely by contributions from local businesses and individuals who understand that parents appreciate support in the challenge of preparing their children to become responsible decision makers. Co-sponsoring organizations lend volunteers. Our 100-plus volunteers provide classroom assistance and help make this event so successful.

Many communities around the country request assistance in replicating our program. So many requests have been made that in 1998 Planned Parenthood of Central Texas wrote a "how-to" manual for this event.

We want young people to learn how to make the most of their strengths and approach relationships of all kinds responsibly. Education empowers. Our youth deserve access to comprehensive sexuality information to counteract the mixed messages they receive, if they are to make responsible decisions.

Pam Smallwood is executive director of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas.