

Editorials

Tribune-Herald Editorial Board

WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

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C is for condom

Head-in-sand approach to sex ed is just dangerous

Unbelievably, three of four health books up for adoption for Texas schools can't bear to utter the word: condom.

That, in sanitary wrap, seems to characterize this foolhardy attitude: When it comes to sex, knowledge is like dynamite. Snuff out that fuse.

Well, guess what. Texas has the nation's highest rate of teen pregnancy and a correspondingly alarming rate of sexually transmitted diseases. A lot of teens are doing "research" on their own.

Arming youngsters to make the safest choice of all, abstinence, must be Job 1. But despite our best intentions, some will give in to their urges anyway. Texas must take as encouragement the fact that nationwide, the rate of teen promiscuity is moderating. Today's teens are more cautious and thoughtful on the dangers. Knowledge is power. But many high-profile individuals think of it simply as explosive.

This week the Catholic Diocese of Austin took the unusual tack of advising that Catholics avoid the annual Nobody's Fool conference on education. Bishop Gregory Aymond calls the conference material "devoid of Christian morals." He is more than welcome to his opinion. Waco is fortunate, however, that a program like Nobody's Fool welcomes the questions and curiosity of youngsters, with parental consent, toward making safe decisions about

sex and peer pressure.

The overriding theme is abstinence. But real-world dynamics demand that all questions be invited and answered.

The same should apply to sex education in general. The political shift toward abstinence-only discussions, funded by many millions of dollars from a Republican Congress, is a disservice when students, in an age-appropriate matter, ought to know the whole gamut of comprehensive sex education, including means of contraception.

As for the condom, of course it should be discussed. Guidelines under the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills require that health books "analyze the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of barrier protection and other contraceptive methods." We should hope so. For goodness sakes, children see condom advertisements on TV.

From what are we sheltering them when we don't address such subjects?

They ought to know condoms' efficacy, or lack thereof, in preventing differing sexually transmitted diseases. They ought to know of proper usage and condoms' potential for failure in preventing pregnancy. They also need to know about all the varied means contraception available, including emergency contraception.

Adults who would deny children basic sex education are playing with fire in a room full of fuses.