



Getting ready for Nobody's Fool '05 are Kerry Burkley (from left), Joshua Davis, David Davis, Rebecca Mosley and Yolonda Davis-Tinsley.

Opening the lines of communication

Nobody's Fool aims to get parents, kids talking about sensitive issues

By SANDRA SANCHEZ

Organizers of Nobody's Fool expect to draw about 500 youngsters to the Waco Convention Center this month for the 16th annual conference on dating, relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, puberty and birth control. Sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, the July 13 event is for boys and girls entering fifth through ninth grades.

"Kids who have attended Nobody's Fool say, 'You took me seriously, you

answered my questions, you acted like you cared,'" said Pat Stone, Planned Parenthood's education director. "Nobody is there to say, 'Why do you want to know that?' Through this, they learn that asking questions and getting answers is an appropriate thing to expect, and that adults are supposed to be here to help them."

The conference is designed to be engaging and interactive, featuring games, videos and role-playing. Classes are divided by age and gender to make children feel safe talking about sensitive issues.

Each of the 10 classrooms has four stations with volunteer teachers to help explain the information presented. The curriculum emphasizes sexual abuse prevention for younger children

and disease and pregnancy prevention for older youth, Stone said.

Parents can review the materials and meet the staff July 12 at Parents' Preview night at the Convention Center.

Nobody's Fool participants receive a free T-shirt, breakfast, lunch and a packet of materials that includes places to call for answers to sex-related questions.

More than 100 local residents and dozens of corporations and organizations, including the *Tribune-Herald*, are sponsoring this year's event. More than a dozen churches and nonprofit organizations also help by supplying volunteers.

First Presbyterian Church associate minister David Hyers said his church supports the curriculum taught at Nobody's Fool and has been a sponsor of the event for several years.

"Nobody's Fool is an excellent opportunity for children to be educated on their sexuality," Hyers said. "The curriculum seems to be responsible. It does teach abstinence first, but it also teaches healthy sexuality and at least in the Presbyterian Church, the curriculum that I've seen seems to fall in line with our beliefs."

Mary Catherine Driese, 13, a member of First Presbyterian's youth group, said teens need accurate information about sex.

"They need to know everything they can so if they make a mistake, which a lot of kids do at my age, then they'll be prepared," she said. Adults "should give them all the information . . . then give them guidance on it, but don't make the decisions for them. That'll make it worse, because kids want to be independent."

Last year, Nobody's Fool was involved in controversy as Pro-Life Waco co-director John Pisciotta led a campaign to boycott local Girl Scout

NOBODY'S FOOL '05

WHEN: 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. July 13

WHERE: Waco Convention Center

ADMISSION: Registration costs \$5 and includes breakfast, lunch and a T-shirt. Scholarships are available.

PARENTS' PREVIEW: 6 to 7:30 p.m. July 12 at the Waco Convention Center. Meet the faculty, visit classrooms and review materials. Cost is \$5 per family.

CONTACT: Pat Stone at 759-5777, ext. 230. Register online at plannedparenthoodwaco.org

cookie sales because of the Scouting organization's nine-year association with the conference. The Girl Scouts - Bluebonnet Council withdrew its affiliation in the wake of complaints from parents, troop leaders and others in the community.

The controversy "didn't hurt in terms of how the program ran or attendance," said Pam Smallwood, Planned Parenthood's executive director. "It hurt in the sense that we're big supporters and believers in collaboration, especially on youth issues. We feel there is no better way than for organizations to collaborate our gifts and talents. . . . To take one piece of the pie away — and from such an important organization — (it) was felt."

Smallwood began Nobody's Fool as a girls-only conference after local churches and youth organizations expressed a need for thorough, straightforward sex education. Since then, more than 7,500 boys and girls have attended.

"If nothing else happens because of Nobody's Fool, my hope is kids and parents talk more," she said. "When you come to Nobody's Fool and you learn to talk to your child about sexual issues, it increases your ability to talk about all issues." ★