

Sex ed show-and-tell

'Nobody's Fool' gives facts to support healthy decisions

Ducking into a room in the Waco Convention Center, what did I see but a flying diaphragm.

Sex educator Jerri Love was demonstrating birth-control devices.

One of the ninth-grade girls seated on the floor asked for a closer look at a diaphragm, which fits into the vagina and closes off the cervix. Barker flipped it her way like a fish-market mackerel. Instantly, a basic women's health-care tool was demystified.

Here. Hold a condom. Some of the girls did, flexing the Latex. Others curled their noses.

A condom is not as sturdy as that diaphragm, pointed out Barker. Condoms can break and dislodge. Condoms can be used incorrectly. "User error" she emphasized, eyebrows raised, can mean major, major problems. There's also a female condom, which she showed.

Continuing the demonstration, she held up a Norplant implant, and a syringe by which a physician can give monthly or quarterly injections to "tell the ovaries not to make eggs." The birth control pill does the same.

Having been introduced to all of these, the girls settled down for Contraceptive Bingo.

"Spermicide," the instructor called out. "Depo Provera — that's the shot." The girls searched their cards.

These were from sights and sounds as 415 young people gathered for the annual Nobody's Fool conference.

Segregated by grade and sex with subject matter tailored to both, youngsters from grades 5 through 9 saw myths punctured and had questions answered. Many participants were shy, but after four hours hardly any were too shy.

Subjects not to avoid

Regardless of whether or not the girls I observed point steadfastly to a walk in white down the aisle, they'll need the information they were getting. And earlier is always better than too late.

Young people must know that sexual abstinence is the smartest and safest choice, the only "safe sex." But let's not dwell in a fantasy world.



JOHN YOUNG

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One of the ninth-graders was already taking Depo Provera. She wanted to know about side effects. A sexually active 15-year-old offends my senses, but a 15-year-old mother is more offensive.

Another offensive notion is that it is the girls who would bear the responsibility of avoiding the pitfalls of unwanted pregnancies. That is why it was encouraging to see the give and take among the boys.

"True or false," educator Christopher Aparicio, an Austin middle-school teacher, asked a room of eighth-grade boys. "Before 16 a [sexually active] girl is more likely to get pregnant than when she's over 21." Most of the boys knew the answer from an earlier discussion. True.

"True or false. A guy can tell a girl is menstruating just by looking at her." False. Not even the Amazing Kreskin can.

True or false. "Boys have monthly periods just like girls." Not last time I checked.

It takes two

Though its principal mission is women's reproductive health, Planned Parenthood, which sponsors this annual event with a coalition of other community groups, has devoted more and more attention to the male side of the equation. And do we alphas need guidance.

The eighth-grade boys in the room were hashing out matters of responsibility and personal safety, as well as basic biology.

"True or false," after all is said and done on prevention, "abstinence is the only guarantee that a girl won't get pregnant." True.

The dialogue was encouraging. Also encouraging was the fact that this year for the first time the conference featured a parent's preview, and 50 parents came. That's the kind of reinforcement that any kind of education needs.

John Young's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. E-mail: jyoung@wacotrib.com.