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TEENSEX: STUDIES SHOW MORE KIDS ARE WAITING

Allure of abstinence

■ **BY SARA LENZ**
DESERET NEWS

KANSAS CITY — It's a Friday evening in Kansas City, and inside a crowded auditorium full of about 22,000 teenagers, a man named Jason Evert is walking back and forth across a blue-lit stage.

Evert is in his mid-30s, but he has the youthful, energetic manner of a college student. Tonight, he looks like a college student, too: black necklace, spiked blonde hair, sleeves rolled up.

Sometimes, at moments like this, Evert feels like he's in the middle of a Justin Bieber concert. And by the time he's done, the entire auditorium will be on their feet, clapping and cheering.

Evert's topic: sex. But what makes his message unique in today's media landscape is what he's saying: kids should remain pure and chaste until marriage.

"The kids are hungry for this," Evert said. He and his wife, Crystalina, go to dozens of schools a year in both the U.S. and abroad teaching chastity and said they get about the same response wherever they go.

Despite shows like "Glee" and "Skins," which make it seem like every high-schooler either wants to have sex or is already doing it, a just released study found that the amount of teens having sexual intercourse is dropping. In fact, according to the study by the Center for Disease and Control, sex among teens is down from just six years ago.

In Utah, it is unclear whether teens are following this same trend; Utah is one of a handful of states that withholds the questions about sexual behaviors on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey given out each year by the CDC.

Teens, educators and researchers have different ideas about why fewer teens are having sex. Evert, who

speaks to about 100,000 teens a year, said it might be because this rising generation are children of divorce and see what can happen in a relationship when two people aren't committed. And a University of Utah student, Brian Buxton, said he believes that students are getting the message about STDs and teen pregnancy loud and clear and have decided to wait until after high school to start that kind of relationship.

Students want to be told that chastity is good, Evert said, but far too many educators and parents either just try to scare students into not having sex or just assume they will and tell them preventative measures.

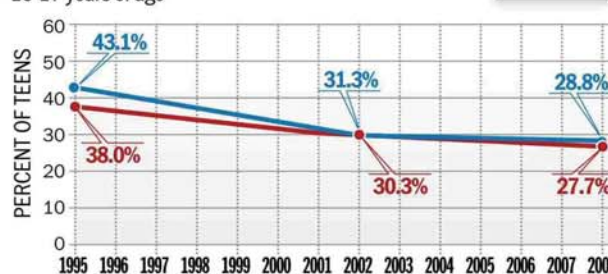
Part of the reason he believes the amount of abstinent teenagers has risen is because the Clinton and Bush administration decided to pour more money into abstinence education instead of just the comprehensive sex programs. Yet the Obama administration took much of that money away. Currently comprehensive sex programs receive 16 times that of abstinence programs, said Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association based in Washington, D.C. And the government was even threatening shut-down April 8 in part because of \$363 million being allocated by the federal government to Planned Parenthood programs.

John Jemmott, a professor of communication in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, conducted a study called Efficacy of a Theory-Based Abstinence-Only Intervention Over 24 Months and the results came out last year showing abstinence-only education does work if done in a certain way.

In his study of 662 African American sixth- and seventh-graders who were broken up evenly into four groups, 32.6

Teen sex on the decline

Percent of teens who have ever had intercourse, 15-17 years of age

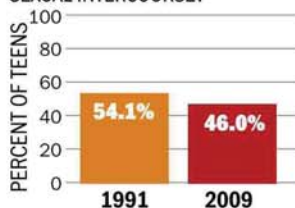


SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics

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Teen sex on the decline

QUESTION: EVER HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE?



SOURCE: The national Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 9th- to 12th-graders

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percent of those who were in the abstinence-only program initiated sex in the following two years as opposed to 51.8 percent that received a safer sex intervention, 41.8 that received a comprehensive sex education and 46.6 percent that were in the control group.

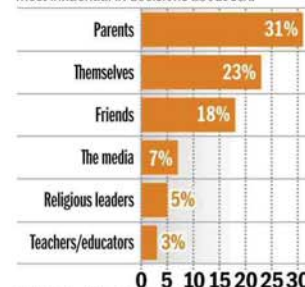
He said many people discount abstinence-only education based on their own opinions and not on fact.

"If you use behavior change principles, than it is likely you will affect change," he said of abstinence-only education.

When teaching abstinence-only, he said educators need to understand what motivates the students to engage in certain behaviors. In the study, educators asked students what the positive aspects of practicing abstinence were and what would make it easy or hard not to practice abstinence.

Parents influence teens' decisions on sex

Survey findings, over a 10 year period, show that teens consistently say their parents are most influential in decisions about sex.



SOURCE: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

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"You are not lecturing or preaching, you discuss the points that they are trying to make," Jemmott said, adding that educators need to present the correct facts when asked.

In 1995, just 8 percent of schools taught abstinence education. In 2002, that number was 22 percent. Just recently North Dakota lawmakers were discussing making abstinence a part of sex ed curriculum in their state and a Texas school board changed their sex ed curriculum from abstinence-only to abstinence-plus. So the debate goes on.

Many people misunderstand abstinence education as meaning that contraception is not taught, Huber said, adding that contraception can be

taught as a way to reduce the risk of STDs, but that the curriculum stresses abstinence as the only full-proof way of prevention. She cited more than 20 studies conducted in Georgia, California, Ohio, Arkansas, Virginia, Utah, New York and more where abstinence education reduced the students' likelihood of engaging in sex in the following year or years. Most of these studies were conducted over the last several years.

But Jemmott said sex ed teachers who stress abstinence need to be sure not to tell their students that a condom never works as this would make them more likely to not use a condom if they do decide to become sexually active.

Jemmott believes that both contraception and abstinence education should be taught in schools.

"For young teens, delaying sexual activity should be options one through five," said Bill Albert, chief program officer of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. "But for those young teens having sex, it is absolutely necessary that they use contraception."

People seem to treat sex education as either teaching abstinence or teaching contraception, Albert said. But he believes both should be a part of the educational experience.

Sexual education is more tricky than teaching about drinking and driving or smoking, Albert said. Because most people in their lifetime will engage in sexual activities whether that is in or out of marriage. That's why he believes the emotional as well as the physical consequences of sex should be discussed in high schools.

"Effective sex education is not just a body parts conversation," Albert said. "It takes into account the emotional as well as the physical. It talks about relationships as well as sex."

In Utah, sex education takes different forms depending on the district you are in, but the state policy is "abstinence plus," which means contraception can be taught but not

advocated. Utah also has an "opt-in" policy, which means a parent permission slip must be signed for students to listen to the sexuality portion of the health class.

At Highland High School, health teacher Paul Tate takes about four weeks of his class to talk about sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, abstinence before marriage and contraception options in early marriage. On the permission slip signed in Nebo schools, it says "all curriculum will be abstinence only and contraceptive use will NOT be taught."

Canyons, Jordan and Provo districts also do not teach contraception, nor does Murray High School. Callie Short, a University of Utah student who attended Bingham High School, said her teacher taught about protection but didn't go into detail. She and many of her friends who were at the table with her during lunch last week believed more should have been taught in high school.

During the last legislative session, two congressmen tried to clarify that the sex ed law which states that "the advocacy or encouragement of the use of contraceptive methods or devices" is prohibited does not mean that contraception cannot be taught. Sen. Steve Urquhart, R-St. George, who tried to introduce the bill in committee, said many teachers and even schools think it is against the law to teach contraception, and it's not. His bill was shot down.

Cheyenne Olsen, a senior at Cottonwood High School, said she doesn't remember her teacher even saying the word "abstinence" during her health class but does remember learning about STDs and contraception. She thinks her teacher was afraid to say the word "abstinence" — that students would then do the opposite. About half of her friends are sexually active, but she believes that wouldn't be the case if teachers were more open about the emotional and relationship aspect of having sex.

In fact, 66 percent of teen girls who have sex wish



K.C. Christensen and his son, Tyson, listen to a lecture about puberty during a maturation program at Robert Frost Elementary.

they had waited, said Nancy Anderson, a presenter of the Parents Speak Up Campaign, a federal campaign set to encourage parents to talk to their children about sex.

"Teen sex can deflate self-esteem, erode optimism and spoil the quality of intimate relationships," Anderson said to a group of parents at Harry S. Truman Elementary School earlier this month.

But in most states, Albert said, sex education is not a priority, especially now with tight budgets and programs being cut from schools. Sex ed, he said, is at the bottom of the priority list.

"This topic is too big and too complex for a four-hour discussion during class," he said. "And unfortunately for some young people that is the only place they learn about it."

But Albert believes schools shouldn't be the only ones with the responsibility to teach sex education and to solve teen pregnancy. "That is too much to ask of already burdened schools," he said.

Parents have a responsibility as well and have more influence than they think on their teen's sex life.

While 31 percent of teens (the highest percentage of respondents) say their parents most influence their decisions about sex, just 24 percent of parents believe this to be the case, according to a study conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Forty-three percent of adults surveyed believed that friends most influence their teens decisions about sex while just 18 percent of teens said that

was the case.

Anderson laid out why parents are most afraid of talking to their children about sex and why they shouldn't be scared"

- Parents are afraid their child will grow up too fast, but talking to them little bits at a time actually will help you hold onto them longer.

- Parents say they already know what their child is doing and can control their child's activities, but when parents talk to their children, they remain the greatest influence as opposed to media, friends or peer groups.

- Parents fear intimate discussion, but this does not mean the conversations need to be explicit. Share bite-size information about values and expectations.

- Parents don't know how their child will respond, but most children will look at their parents as experienced, and parents have more influence than they think.

- Parents feel unprepared, but they do not have to be the experts. They can look up information when needed.

"All of us are enormously encouraged at the progress the nation has made in reducing teen pregnancy and teen sex, but the moment you get complacent is the point at which the rates turn around," Albert said. "I think we need to both celebrate the progress on an issue many once considered intractable and understand if we want these numbers to continue to go down, we have to keep working at it and encourage parents to talk to their kids."

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