Parents’ views of Relationship and Sex Education and Teenage Conception

Background

The provision of high quality sex and relationships education is one of two key factors known to have a significant impact on reducing teenage conceptions. As part of the needs assessment to inform the Teenage Pregnancy Commissioning Plan, the Speakeasy Coordinator was commissioned to undertake a short survey was to establish parents’ views of the teaching of sex and relationships education and to establish current attitudes to teenage pregnancy.

Method

For a three month period from the November 2010 to February 2011 parents were invited to complete a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire was available on line and in hard copy. The opportunity to complete the survey was promoted through the parenting fora across Kent and parents were asked to extend this opportunity to other parents they thought would be interested. A total of 119 respondents took part in the survey.

Findings

The majority of parents taking part in this survey were supportive of young people receiving sex and relationship education. Parents acknowledge that sex and relationship education includes the wider influences of risky sexual behavior such as drugs and alcohol. Parents also identified that it was important to ensure young people understand the realities of parenting.

Conclusion

This snapshot survey demonstrates that the majority of parents agree that schools and others should teach young people about sex and relationships by providing education within a broader based programme that incorporates other risk factors.
Question 1

Do you think young people should be informed about the following?

- Sexual health services
- Teenage pregnancy and consequences
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Alcohol and unsafe sex
- Homophobic bullying

The vast majority of respondents were supportive of their children receiving information about various aspects of relationship and sex education, with over 90% agreeing that young people should be informed about sexual health services, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, alcohol and drugs and unsafe sex. Slightly fewer respondents (87%) identified that young people should be informed about homophobic bullying.

Question 2

Some people think that if young people are given information about sex it encourages them to engage in it. What are your views on this?

76% of respondents disagreed with this statement, 8% were not sure, 7% agreed and the remainder did not answer.
Parents’ comments

‘if young people are given information about sex it encourages them to engage in it’

Of parents who disagreed that

- If properly taught it demystifies the subject and can lead to informed decisions being made
- There is a responsibility to make children safe
- Children already appear to be sexually active and they therefore need accurate information

Of parents who were unsure:

- Information should be presented and discussed in the correct way
- Young people needs to be taught in the correct environment
- There is a need to engage families in decisions regarding delivery of the subject

Of parents who agreed with the statement:

- There could be possible conflict around information that parents want their children to have
- There was a comment that information is given out before children need to know
- It is important that information is age appropriate
- Some felt that parents should be involved in making this decision

Question 3

Some teenagers who become pregnant become excellent parents, however many young parents and their children spend years living in poverty and have poorer life experiences than their peers e.g. health, education, work, leisure time etc.
Do you think schools have a responsibility to teach young people about the risks of unprotected sex?

83% of respondents stated that schools do have a responsibility to teach young people about the risks of unprotected sex. A very small percent stated this was not their responsibility. A small percentage of parents seemed unsure and answered both positively and negatively.

Question 4

Should schools teach young people about parenting?

The majority of respondents (80%) agreed that schools should teach young people about parenting. No additional comments were provided.

Question 5

Have a look at the PHSE Charter for young people (appendix 1). Are there any comments you would like to make about it? Is there anything you would like to see added to it?
The majority of parents had no further comment on the PHSE Charter. Where comment was made it was positive.

A few parents suggested additions the Charter as follows:

- First Aid
- Debt advice
- Domestic violence
- Bereavement
- Marriage
- Healthy lifestyles
- Where to access support
- Parental participation

These will be considered if the Charter is reviewed.
Appendix 1

The Young People’s Charter for PSHE Education

Your Safety
- Learning to take responsibility of our own and each other’s safety in light of the risks involved and their consequences.
- Gaining a clearer understanding of drug and alcohol misuse, the influences of bullying and also having a basic understanding of First Aid so as to be able to respond in an emergency.
- Skills to maintain safe and healthy relationships in all walks of life and in all forms of society.

Your Health
- Having a clearer understanding of healthy eating its influence on our bodies and minds, and how sport and exercise maintains our health.
- Recognising our emotions to deal with stress, anxiety and pressure effectively in order to maintain a positive lifestyle.
- Understanding what constitutes being sexually healthy.

Your Community & You
- Learning to be confident and outgoing so as to be more involved in our community.
- Working within our school community to influence decision making and be more involved in our learning.

Your Life, Work & Money
- How to manage a home, save money and avoid debt. Learning to take care of a family while accepting a multitude of family circumstances.
- Understanding and aiming to be employable in order to secure a ‘good job’. The ability to balance life and work both now and in later life. Appreciating that wealth does not equate to happiness.

Your Achievement
- Developing motivation to try new things to focus on our school work and achieve. Understanding the purpose of all our learning in school, valuing things besides exam results and being open to different types of learning.
- Learning how to manage our time well and communicating effectively with our parents about the balance of work and play.

The Kent Youth County Council and Kent County Council would like to thank the KYCC Education Group for their work on this charter.