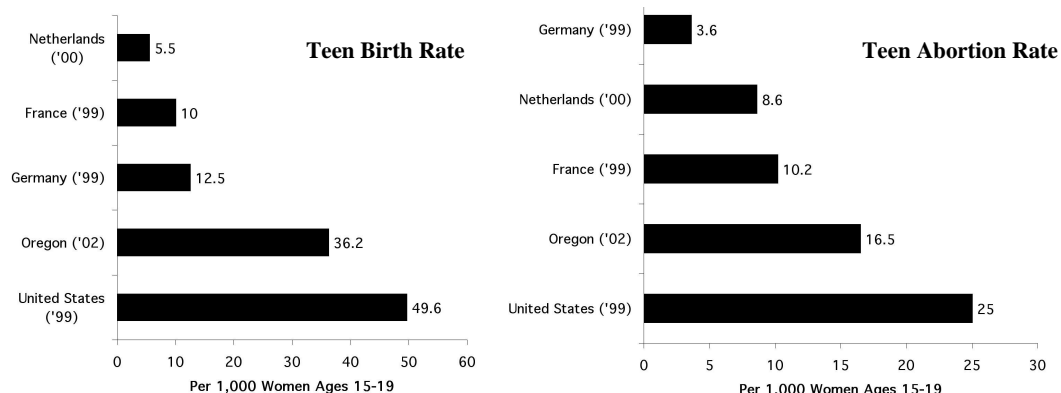


Teen Pregnancy: Can We Do Better?



Despite a substantial decline during the last decade, teen pregnancy rates among 15–19 years olds in Oregon and the United States remain among the highest in the industrialized world. Teen birth and abortion rates as well as the incidence of sexually transmitted infections among Oregon and U.S. youth are dramatically higher than in western Europe.

We can do better.

Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon (PPHSSO), in coalition with state and local organizations, clergy, parents and youth has launched **Rights, Respect, Responsibility®**, a campaign to infuse teen pregnancy prevention efforts with strategies that have proven so successful in western Europe: family communication about sexual issues, comprehensive sex education, confidential and accessible reproductive health services, effective mass media campaigns, and policies based on sound public health approaches. Enthusiastic response from diverse communities tells us that clearly, this ambitious and bold initiative resonates with Oregonians.

What is Rights, Respect, Responsibility®?

Mission Statement

To help Oregon youth develop healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors supported by proven public health strategies that reduce teen pregnancies, births, abortions and sexually transmitted infections

Rights, Respect, Responsibility® (RRR®) is a way of thinking about adolescent sexual health. It is a philosophy that drives an open-ended set of activities toward the ultimate goal of fostering healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors among Oregon youth. RRR® is *not* a specific program, project, or curriculum. Instead, it

is an organizing principle *supported* by a host of programs, projects, curricula and policies that reflect the following core values:

Rights: Young people have the right to accurate information and confidential health services.

Respect: Young people deserve to be respected as valued members of the community with much to offer.

Responsibility: Young people are expected to act responsibly to safeguard their health. Society must provide young people with the tools they need to act responsibly: accurate information, confidential health services, and a secure stake in the future.

Oregon's RRR® initiative is about creating a climate in which these values are honored and promoted.

What makes Oregon ready for RRR®?

More than 17,000 Oregonians have participated in Rights, Respect, Responsibility® events and have expressed great interest in and support for adapting western Europe's successful strategies to fit the needs in our state. Surveys conducted in four diverse Oregon communities - Eugene, Springfield, Grants Pass and Medford - show significant support for these strategies. Of the adults surveyed:

- 93% believe that young people deserve comprehensive, medically accurate sex education in schools;
- The majority believes that sex education should begin by the late elementary school years;
- 88% (of parents) are talking with their children about sex;
- 90% believe that sexually active teens should have access to birth control and reproductive health services;
- Over half support condom advertising.

Oregon has already laid some important groundwork:

- The Family Planning Expansion Project is helping reduce barriers to contraceptive health services;
- The Action Agenda to Reduce Teen Pregnancy calls for multiple strategies similar or complementary to Europe's successful approach;
- Oregon law requires that sex education in public schools be comprehensive (ORS 336.355).

Oregon has an important opportunity to develop a cooperative discussion that embraces the "3Rs" of adolescent sexual health – where youth are supported in developing attitudes, making decisions and choosing behaviors that safeguard their sexual health; where parents, clergy, teachers, government and media work

together to create a climate that supports sexual health; and where a fourth R – research – is the basis for selecting programs, strategies and policies.

What has been accomplished?

The various partners who embrace Rights, Respect, Responsibility® have chosen to make it their own through efforts that fit well and naturally within their personal and/or organizational vision. For example, since 2001:

- ✓A team of 30 Oregonians has participated in the annual Advocates for Youth European Study Tour to research effective adolescent health strategies in Germany, France and the Netherlands. This team is using the experience to advance positive sexual health policies and practices in Oregon.
- ✓Clergy and religious leaders from 74 diverse faith communities have participated in leadership forums designed to support them in bringing the principles of Rights, Respect, Responsibility® into their congregations in a way that is in keeping with their beliefs. Clergy have endorsed comprehensive sexuality education, written pastoral letters in support of healthy sexuality, sponsored regional trainings in the K-adult positive sexuality curriculum, “Our Whole Lives”, delivered sermons on the tenets of RRR®, and participated in the European Study Tour.
- ✓Through town hall forums, adults have heard from young people about the reality of today’s teens: sexual pressures, decisions, and their need for accurate information, services and honest conversation about sex.
- ✓The Oregon Team Report, **We Can Do Better**, has been disseminated throughout the state. This document reflects the experience, observations and research of the 2001 European Study Tour participants and provides recommendations to the state of Oregon based upon western Europe’s successful approach to adolescent sexuality.
- ✓Three successful forums were held with mass media professionals, public health professionals and policy makers to examine the power of media partnership in supporting sexual health. Professionals from Germany, France and the U. S. showcased effective campaigns that are thoughtful, well-researched, entertaining and responsive to public need. These forums are helping shape similar media efforts in Oregon.

Where are we headed?

It may take many years, even decades, to achieve the cultural shift that is at the heart of Rights, Respect, Responsibility®. The process of creating that shift is well under way, and the movement is gaining momentum. In 2004 – 2005, RRR® will:

- continue to build on its work with faith communities, engaging larger

circles of clergy, religious leaders and congregations;

- expand its activities and programs supporting family communication about sex;
- build a cadre of parent advocates for comprehensive sex education;
- collaborate with the positive youth development community and with policy makers to provide opportunities that support young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment;
- develop a statewide Rights, Respect, Responsibility® coalition with public and private organizations, agencies and individuals;
- partner with mass media professionals to develop a media campaign that promotes the vision and values of RRR®.

How will we know when we're successful?

When Rights, Respect, Responsibility® has achieved its ideal:

- Parents, families, teachers, community leaders, policy makers and opinion leaders will be able to talk about sex in a natural way, and will be *committed* to open, honest communication with young people regarding sexuality.
- Comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education will be provided — standardized, expected, and welcomed — available through multiple, easily accessible channels of communication.
- Contraception, sexual protection, and sexual health services will be universally accessible and affordable.
- Policy related to sexuality will be driven by proven public health approaches. Personal values and morals regarding decisions about sex will be respected and addressed within families and faith communities.
- Young people will have a voice in matters pertaining to their sexuality.
- Young people will be equipped to make informed, thoughtful and healthy decisions about sex; they will automatically think about protecting themselves and their partners if and when they choose to have sex.
- The media will convey sexually responsible messages — in terms of both *what* it chooses to cover (sex as a healthy, natural part of being human) and *how* it chooses to cover it (frank, open, honest discussion, free of innuendo and fear-baiting).
- Prevention efforts will be successful. Unintended pregnancies will be reduced to the point that the abortion debate will be a thing of the past.

**For additional information about Rights, Respect, Responsibility®, contact:
Joanne Alba, RRR® Coordinator: 541-344-1611 x 14 or joanne.alba@pphssso.org**