

Windsor Tribune - Windsor, Colorado

The Family Room: My not-so-hidden agenda

By REBECCA VALENTINE

Posted on Friday, November 04 @ 12:29:49 PST

There was a time when I thought most parents wanted the best for their kids. But after all the back-and-forth over the issue of WAIT Training vs. comprehensive sex education in our schools, I'm not so sure. What has become clear to me is this: Many parents are content to take things at face value and base their opinions on what they hear rather than do some investigating and critical thinking of their own.

When I first heard about WAIT Training, I visited the program online. I wasn't impressed with what I saw there, but decided I needed more information before I could form an opinion. So I borrowed a copy of the workshop manual and read it. What I read there brought up one red flag after another. So I did more research. Finally, I decided WAIT as a whole was not a curriculum I felt was ideal for our students. Definitely not for mine.

What I didn't do is listen to my neighbor tell me that the current sex ed curriculum promotes homosexual exploration. I didn't just attend a meeting in which a dynamic saleswoman pitched me a product, and I didn't take her word as gospel. I didn't rely on anyone else to give me statistics or "facts" or claims of success.

Truth is, people can be convinced of nearly anything. Whether you listened to Shelly Donahue and thought, "This WAIT is awesome," or read my last column and thought "WAIT is not all it's cracked up to be," your efforts to understand what's going on shouldn't stop there. Do some research of your own; the information is easy to find. Call the middle school and ask to read the manual for yourself so you can see what WAIT preaches. Think those medical inaccuracies and half-truths I mentioned are insignificant? When talking about your child's health and safety, how does the word "insignificant" even fit into that dialog?

One parent stated that any textbook you pick up will contain inaccuracies, but that you don't throw out the textbook. Well, no, you don't have to. But you should change the text to reflect fact. And though Shelly Donahue says the "errors" have been fixed, they haven't. The program still contains them. And you don't know what the teacher will do with inaccurate information.

Will you be so cavalier when your child contracts HIV because you didn't trust him enough to educate him on safe sexual practices? Abstinence-until-marriage in no way guarantees safety. Teens are engaging in oral sex more than ever because they think it's not really sex. HIV and the AIDS virus live in the lining of the mouth. (Saliva alone contains proteins that reduce the power of the virus. There is no scientific evidence that saliva, tears, or sweat can transmit HIV or AIDS.) So all that sex that isn't really sex puts our kids in danger. They believe they're abstaining, but because abstinence-only doesn't address contraception and safe sex practices, these kids will pay a hefty price. And many of you don't seem concerned about that risk. We're not talking wrong dates or misspellings here; we're talking about your child's life.

This sex ed issue has brought to light something very troubling here in our town. You're getting a letter from the school that calls a curriculum engaging, and that's good enough for you. You go to a meeting and listen to a professional speaker give you a persuasive sales pitch, and in your mind, you've already bought the product. You hear the words "abstinence only" and jump on the bandwagon because hey, waiting is good. Waiting is good. But ignorance isn't. The solution doesn't have to be either/or. Bottom line, I hope, is the safety and protection of your child. How will withholding information from him achieve this goal?

As a writer of history and medical/health reference books, I've been trained to approach a subject unbiased, to research all sides of any topic, to find the subtle as well as the obvious. It's my job to recognize reliable sources, whether they support my belief system or not. And yet, because I've

taken a stance based on my research, I'm accused of having an agenda to push. What a convenient response that is to what you don't like to hear.

The purpose of formal education, to me, is to impart knowledge. There is an implicit assumption that knowledge is fact-based. I want the truth for my kids. I want their education to be rooted in truthfully presented facts, not fear. And I will do whatever it takes to help make that happen. If that's an agenda, then yeah, I'm pushing it. As for teaching values, that's a parent's job, not the schools'.

Find the facts and think about them for yourself. Doing so requires more than talking to a friend or attending a meeting. But whatever you decide, base your opinion on your own knowledge, not hearsay. To do less is dangerous. As author Mary Poole said, "To repeat what others have said requires education. To challenge it requires brains."

Rebecca Valentine survives in Windsor. She is the property of four kids and an angel.