

Nadine Dorries' 'abstinence for girls' Bill – what you can do

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A parliamentary [Private Members Bill](#) that would "require schools to provide certain additional sex education to girls aged between 13 and 16; to provide that such education must include information and advice on the benefits of abstinence from sexual activity; and for connected purposes" is scheduled for a second reading on 20 January 2012.

The Bill, called "Sex Education (Required Content) Bill 2010-11", is the work of Nadine Dorries, the MP who last year attempted to diminish abortion rights.

At the first reading of this Bill, many people did not take it seriously, thinking it would be quickly disposed of. Chris Bryant MP adeptly took her argument apart during the debate, but she narrowly won (by six votes; 67 to 61). Please [write to your MP](#) asking them to vote against her Bill on January 20, using the information below. You can find out who your MP is here.

The Background

In May 2011 Conservative (and Christian) MP Nadine Dorries introduced a Bill proposing that girls (and only girls) between 13 and 16 get extra sex education teaching them to practice abstinence. Ms Dorries has close ties with Christian Concern For Our Nation, a highly conservative group that campaigns (among other things) for 'Christian family values'. Her Bill is also supported by the Christian Legal Centre and the Christian Medical Fellowship. She misrepresents facts to claim that current sex education is not working. She also claims that teaching abstinence to girls will reduce child abuse – which has outraged abuse survivors' groups.

The Facts

The NSS strongly believes that all teaching around sex and relationships should be evidence-based. There is strong [evidence](#) that teaching abstinence does not work and that it can exacerbate problems with teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Abstinence teaching may delay first intercourse by a few months but when it does happen, it is much less likely to involve a condom. The UK has one of the highest [teenage pregnancy rates](#) in Europe and very high rates of STIs, with the highest STI rates in the under-25 age group. Of even more concern is that of all 16–19 year olds diagnosed with an STI, at least 11 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men will become re-infected within a year. UK teenage pregnancy rates are [beginning to fall](#); fact-based sex education is essential to ensure this continues.

It should be made clear that delaying first intercourse until a young person is ready is not the same as abstinence. Education for Choice [points out](#) that those involved in the delivery of SRE do already discuss reasons not to have sex as an integral part of high-quality education on the issue. However this is placed in the context of young people's choices and well-being and does not seek to make value judgements about those choices.

Why we object to this Bill

Ms Dorries' proposal is based on ignorance of the evidence, distortion of the facts and a religious agenda that fails to put the needs of young people first.

This religiously-inspired proposal is misogynistic; it forces girls to be the gatekeepers of sexual morality. It also implies that boys cannot control themselves and should not even be expected to try. It puts young people at risk of STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy.

Educating girls in abstinence to reduce abuse ignores the fact that saying 'no' will not prevent rapists and child abusers but may well make the victim feel responsible for not preventing the attack. Moreover, it is not only girls who are abused.

For more information, please contact Tessa Kendall at admin@secularism.org.uk.

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