

January 20, 2013

Dear Sir or Madam

As a parent of three teenaged students I feel compelled to express my views on HI Tops TeenPEP.

I have read this curriculum (all 900+ pages) cover to cover and can summarize the program's philosophy as "you can only prevent pregnancy and STD's 100% by abstinence, but since we know that you are not capable of abstinence, you can be "safer" by getting to a "clinic" and getting contraceptives."

Creating the illusion of safety within risky behavior puts these teens at unconscionably greater risk. This program suggests that the adolescents, whose lack of ability to connect cause and effect are well documented in many studies, have the tools to navigate risky sexual behavior. Even parents who incredibly praise TeenPEP have acknowledged that responsible adults should be alerting teens to the dangers of early sexual activity not "empowering" them to navigate these treacherous waters.

The workshops within TeenPEP are graphic and edgy by design to "capture" their audience. Many teens are embarrassed, not engaged, by the display but are subject to peer pressure to act sit there and act "cool". Students are required to publicly take a stand on sensitive issues before their peers. These public polls **only serve as intimidation for the student to conform to the majority and reinforce the TeenPEP philosophy.**

It is ironic that this program suggests that sexually involved young people be "monogamous". Monogamous? All of the scenarios that are continually being presented in this program are of teens having one sexual encounter after another. What they are really promoting is serial monogamy, only have one partner at a time, then make sure you get tested, and they get tested, before each of you go on to your next sexual encounter. I take no solace in this program that is encouraging our children to be "selective" about their partners, to ask about their sexual history and STD/STI testing, and to keep the "lights on" so you can possibly see if they have any obvious STDs/STIs!! Can you imagine? This is the pathetic advice our kids get from this program!

TeenPEP touts its peer education component as an effective teaching tool. I suggest that the peer education component is yet another intimidation tactic. An upperclassman, typically a junior or senior, instructs a freshman student on the importance of "privacy" and dictate their values and morals. Underclassmen are encouraged to confide in, and when necessary, rely on the "Teen Peppers" (peer educators). When it comes to students having difficulty with transportation to a clinic or the cost of a clinic visit Peer Educators are asked time and again "How can the Peer Educator help?" Isn't the answer being sought that the Peer Educator is to say: "I will help you!" All these manipulative antics in order to not have students inform his/her parent that they could be in big emotional or life-altering trouble.

The intimidation of TeenPEP does not stop with the student but extends to parents. When a friend of mine did not return the permission slip allowing her son to attend the workshops, she was called at her home, in the evening, by the teacher, to be "assured" of his good judgment in omitting the topics of which she was concerned. She felt compelled to give her permission because of the teacher's persistence in dismissing her reservations. I do not have evidence of further coercion but cannot believe that she was the only parent targeted for compliance.

I personally spoke to the parents of no less than 5 teen pepper peer educators. ALL of these parents were told by their students that they ONLY taught the abstinence message of TeenPEP and assured their parents that they were not instructing on contraception. Given that the abstinence message is a

fractionally small portion of the program, I am skeptical that a nearly one-quarter of the peer educators concentrated on this tiny part of the curriculum. Within 9 Teen PEP lessons, condoms are mentioned 239 nine times, anal sex a shocking 126 times and abstinence merely, 79 times. I as one parent looking for the healthiest message for my children during the teen years would like to see these numbers reversed.

I do not pretend that all parents adhere to my convictions, and would want my values and morals taught to their children. Conversely, I do not want to live with any consequences to my students due to the “lessons” taught by HITops through their TeenPEP. Parents have to stop being depicted as the enemy in discussions of minor student’s sexual behavior. No one cares for that young person more than their own parent does. Because it is the parent that will be there holding their distraught child when the common and expected outcomes of early sexual activity are reaped.

In conclusion, I realize that there are students without a strong family support system that must navigate life on their own. Parental guidance and advice may not be a reality for them and they are seeking guidance elsewhere. These students are MOST susceptible to finding the acceptance, approval and affection they need in all the wrong places – so wouldn’t it be wonderful if there was a program being taught to them in school that DID teach self-respect, restraint and to value themselves. An expectation of respectful, responsible and truly safe behavior should be taught as the norm for ALL students, regardless of background. Surely there is an alternative program to TeenPEP that leads teenagers to healthy futures, instead of one that makes the contraceptive makers and the clinics the big winners.

Respectfully yours,

A Very Annoyed and Angry Parent