



## Family Policy Brief

### ***You, Your Life, Your Dreams: A Problematic Sex-ed Manual for Caribbean Adolescents***

Sexual rights activists are becoming increasingly vocal regarding what they claim to be the “sexual rights” of all individuals. One of the most troubling developments is the focus of these activists on the sexual rights of children. Activists assert that children are sexual from birth, and as such, are entitled to experience sexual pleasure. In order for children to understand their sexual rights and experience sexual pleasure, these activists believe that children are entitled to all sexual information and services (no matter how graphic or sensitive), often without the knowledge or consent of parents.

A sex-ed manual written for adolescents (defined by the World Health Organization as youth from the ages of 10-19<sup>1</sup>) in the Caribbean region was written and published with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and reflects the ideology of sexual rights activists. Much of the information would be deemed highly inappropriate for 10-year-old children by most parents.

One stated purpose of the manual, *You, Your Life, Your Dreams*,<sup>2</sup> is to ensure the sexual and reproductive health of youth as they transition to adulthood by, among other things, preventing (1) unwanted pregnancy, (2) coercive or abusive sexual activity, and (3) sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, while these goals are laudable, the manual is riddled with inaccurate and even dangerous information that ultimately will produce the very consequences it intends to eradicate.

A message in the foreword of the manual from Edwin W. Carrington, Secretary General of CARICOM, recognizes that the sensitive nature of the issues requires the “careful use of the materials by stakeholders within the context of legal frameworks of our societies and also their own cultural and religious environments.” Yet the manual, intended to be read by youth, addresses issues such as homosexuality, masturbation, and abortion in a less than “careful” manner and contains graphic drawings of nude adolescents and male and female genitals, including drawings that instruct youth how to put on a condom. The manual also instructs children on how to engage in a number of extremely high risk sexual activities in order to obtain sexual pleasure.

Below are some controversial excerpts from *You, Your Life, Your Dreams*: (Emphasis added)

#### **Excerpts on Undermining Parental Authority**

“Our feelings about our family and our relationships with our parents may also change. Our parents may give us more responsibilities, which is a sign that they trust and rely on us. But they might also become stricter—keeping us from our friends and **trying to make decisions for us about our schooling or our future.**” (Page 2)

“**Often we may feel like questioning our parents’ beliefs and reasons for doing things, and this is very healthy!** We may want to try new things for ourselves, and, at times, to take risks.” (Page 13)

“Even the people we know and love can also mislead us about sex and sexuality. Many parents don’t want to talk about sex with their children, sometimes because they are afraid to see us as sexual beings, and because they lack the information, **and it can be hard to learn much from them.**” (Page 80)

### Excerpts on Taking Risks

“**Taking risks is not necessarily bad**, but it is important that we take calculated risks that we can handle. To do this, we must have enough information to evaluate the risk, try to anticipate the consequences of our decisions, and **trust in our own capacities to respond responsibly.**” (Page 3)

It is widely known by neuroscientists and confirmed by published scientific research that the “wiring” of the developing adolescent brain is incomplete and that functions such as self-control, judgment and emotions are undeveloped. This is why it is not uncommon for teens to sometimes make rash decisions or act on impulses. Therefore it can be difficult for teens to “anticipate the consequences” of their decisions especially when they are in an emotional situation or they are sexually aroused. So to encourage adolescents to “take calculated risks” and “trust in [their] own capacities”<sup>3</sup> with regard to their sexual feelings or behavior is irresponsible.

### Excerpts on Condom Use

“**If used correctly and consistently, latex condoms provide very good protection against pregnancy and STIs, including HIV and AIDS.** Latex condoms keep bacteria and viruses in the vagina, anus, or mouth from coming in contact with the penis, and they prevent sperm, bacteria, and viruses in semen from entering the other person’s body.” (Page 104)

“**Many people who use latex condoms say they make sex more enjoyable for both partners because both can relax more when they are not worried about the possibility of pregnancy or getting an STI.** Some men also say that using a latex condom helps them to avoid ejaculating or “coming” too soon and thus giving more pleasure to their partners.” (Page 107)

“**If you are sexually active, make sure to use latex condoms to protect yourself against pregnancy and STIs.** You should also seek help from a family planning clinic or a health worker. There are contraceptive methods that adolescents can use to avoid becoming pregnant. All adolescents have the right to information and counselling on contraception and to family planning methods.” (Page 121)

**[A]nal sex increases risk for anal cancer as a result of infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). Therefore the use of a latex condom during anal intercourse is very important.**” (Page 84)

Statements such as these imply that condoms are infallible, and they give youth a false sense of security by failing to disclose the fact that condoms have high failure rates especially when used by adolescents.<sup>4</sup> Condoms can be effective when they are used correctly and consistently, and if they don’t break or leak, but teens, due to their immaturity, are much less likely than adults to use condoms correctly and consistently. In addition, there is absolutely no mention of the fact that condoms do not protect against HPV, which is transmitted by skin-to-skin contact. A very high percentage of cervical cancer, up to 99 percent with some strains, is caused by HPV. HPV may also play a role in cancers of the anus, vulva, vagina, penis, as well as oropharyngeal cancer.<sup>5</sup>

### Excerpts on Abstinence

“Since only abstinence is 100% effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies and HIV and STI infections, **the ABC approach proposes that young people practice sexual abstinence until they are fully informed and prepared to engage in sexual activity. This means delaying having**

**sex until you are emotionally ready and that you and your partner know the risks and responsibilities involved and how to protect yourselves.** This behaviour is of course recommended for very young adolescents who are in the process of discovering their sexuality and their sexual feelings and who are not yet prepared to negotiate safer sex. Many older adolescents and young people also practise abstinence for different reasons, including religious beliefs. Also, anyone who has been sexually active can opt for abstinence at a certain stage later in life. (Page 91)

While the manual does mention abstinence as an option, the dangerous language is classic Planned Parenthood sexual ideology that appears in many manuals they have influenced. Anybody who has worked with teenagers knows that they often believe they are invincible and think they are emotionally ready for sex when nothing could be further from the truth.

### Excerpts on Masturbation

**“Masturbation is the act of touching oneself in a sexually stimulating way, and it is another way that people sometimes express their sexual feelings.** Apart from the external genitals, our bodies have “erogenous zones” which are particularly sensitive to touch and respond by sexual arousal. Both men and women can satisfy their sexual feelings and experience sexual pleasure through masturbation.

**Most people masturbate sometime or other during their lives. Some people start masturbating when they are children and continue to do so all their lives.** Some start during puberty; others start when they are adults. Other people never masturbate, and others feel that having sexual fantasies and masturbating conflicts with their religious or moral beliefs.” (Page 85)

“Breasts are very sensitive to touch for many women. **Touching and caressing your breasts is very pleasurable and can be sexually exciting. It is important that you learn how and when to obtain pleasure fondling your breasts.** Since this is part of the sexual foreplay and exciting for your partner as well, it is also important to establish your boundaries and discuss them with your partner beforehand. Nobody should ever touch your breasts without your consent.” (Page 26)

[From a section containing myths about the vagina] “It is obscene to touch the vagina. Not true! **Your vagina is a part of your body, and as such, you are free to touch it in private.** Unless you feel comfortable and have given consent, no one except you should touch your vagina.” (Page 27)

**Masturbation is only considered a problem when it is excessive, when a person cannot function or get through daily tasks without masturbating.** (Page 86)

Experts in human sexuality consider masturbation one normal way for people to get to know their bodies and feelings, and to express their sexuality without risking pregnancy or STIs, including HIV and AIDS. **Nothing bad will happen to your body, even if you masturbate a lot.** Your genitals might get sore from rubbing them too much. On rare occasions, a boy may contract non-specific urethritis (NSU), which is an inflammation of the urethra from excessive rubbing. (Page 86)

“These ways of expressing sexual feelings [talking to each other and holding hands, to hugging, cuddling, kissing, and touching each other] can be very arousing and satisfying, and they carry little risk of HIV infection (read Chapter 10 for more on HIV and other STIs). Your whole body may feel very sensitive and stimulated, possibly staying at this level of sexual excitement for a long time without having to go further. **Or, you may want to go further and involve your genitals by caressing and rubbing them.**” (Page 82)

“Safer sex means sexual practices that greatly reduce your chances of getting STIs, including HIV, or getting pregnant. **If you want totally safe sex—100% sure safe sex—then the best choices for you are masturbation, abstaining from rubbing genitals or sexual intercourse, and using sex toys.** If you read Chapter 9, then you know masturbation is totally safe. The only body fluids and private parts you are in contact with are your own. You cannot get infected with anything, and you cannot get yourself or anyone else pregnant. **Sex toys or sex aids (the most popular ones being vibrators) are devices**

**which are made to enhance sexual pleasure. They are used mainly on the genitals or around the genitals. You can use a sex toy by yourself or as a couple. If you are sharing a sex toy with your partner make sure to wipe it clean before giving it to your partner so that you don't exchange body fluids. Also remember to clean the sex toy after use."** (Page 104)

Masturbation is a highly controversial subject. Some experts who treat adolescents with serious sexual addictions believe that encouraging children to masturbate can be considered child abuse. Although many people believe masturbation can cause no harm unless it becomes compulsive, a growing number of experts believe that because of its addictive nature, masturbation is a highly risky behavior and is certainly not a behavior that should be encouraged in youth. Since regular masturbation can and often does lead to other more serious sexual addictions, encouraging children to masturbate is highly irresponsible.

## **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

[From a section entitled "Are you a Sexually Healthy Individual?"] "YOU ARE if you:  
. . . **Affirm your own sexual orientation and respect the sexual orientation of others.**" (Page 81)

"Adolescence is a time when many people become more aware of their sexual identity and sexual orientation. **Sexual identity is the way in which a person identifies himself or herself as male, female or some combination of the two.**" (Page 82)

**"Some people feel romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. This is called homosexuality.** Some men feel attracted to men and are called "gays", and some women feel attracted to women and are called "lesbians". Furthermore some people are attracted to both men and women, and are called bisexuals." (Page 82)

**"At some point in their lives, most people have sexual feelings, thoughts, dreams, and attractions to someone of the same sex.** Two close friends (either two boys or two girls) might have a crush on each other. They like being together and at times feel physically attracted to each other. Some people find these feelings confusing or upsetting, but they are normal and it is also part of discovering and developing our sexual identity." (Page 82)

Encouraging children to adopt a sexual orientation at a young age and thereby define themselves by their sexual feelings might cause them to permanently label themselves as homosexuals when in reality they might be struggling from unwanted same-sex attraction that can be treated. While some youth may experience sexual attraction to someone of the same sex, this does not mean they are permanently homosexual.

The manual encourages youth to explore their sexuality to determine if they are homosexual, but there is no mention of the many well-documented negative physical and emotional consequences of homosexual behavior. If youth are encouraged to explore and adopt a homosexual identity they should also be provided the research showing the many negative outcomes that are associated with the homosexual lifestyle.

## **Abortion and Emergency Contraception**

"Many girls faced with an unwanted pregnancy seek illegal abortions, which are dangerous. Each year across the Caribbean, **many girls die or damage their reproductive organs having unsafe, illegal abortions.**" (Page 116)

"Abortion can also be induced (deliberately caused) through a medical procedure. **When performed by trained medical personnel under hygienic conditions, abortion is a very safe medical procedure,**

**one that is even safer than childbirth.** However, in most Caribbean countries, abortion is not legal except under rare circumstances such as rape or incest, when the woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy, or when the foetus is very abnormal and will not survive after delivery." (Page 120)

**"A woman that undergoes an abortion, whether natural or induced, should receive counselling since it is a strong emotional strain."** (Page 120)

"There's one more method of contraception that you should know about: emergency contraception. This is a method that you can use immediately after having unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy; for example, if you forgot to use a condom or if the condom breaks or slips off accidentally (which is very rare if they are used properly). It is not a permanent method and should not be used frequently. **As the name states, it is a useful solution in emergencies.** If you are sexually active, you should adopt a regular contraceptive method." (Page 122)

**"If you engage in unprotected sex, go immediately to a clinic and ask for emergency contraception.** It can prevent pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. (Page 126)

The implication of these excerpts is that only illegal abortions are unsafe. The manual enumerates many, many complications of pregnancy, yet states only that abortions performed by trained medical personnel are "very safe," without mentioning any of the many potential, even lethal complications of abortion, with the single exception of "strong emotional strain." [Click here](#) to read Family Watch International's Policy Brief on the multiple physical, emotional, mental, and reproductive complications arising from abortion.

## **Inappropriate Information**

**"We are sexual beings from the time we are born. . . Every person is a sexual being from birth until death."** (Page 79)

"An erection can happen when a penis is touched or caressed, when you are excited by a sexual thought, or by the sight of someone you find attractive." (Page 19)

"The vagina is also extremely sensitive to touch and is the centre of orgasms in women, no matter how the orgasm is primarily brought about. Stimulation of any sexually sensitive zone can provoke a vaginal orgasm in women." (Page 28)

**"Anal sex is the stimulation of the anus during sexual activity. It can be done in several ways: manually, orally (anilingus), or by anal intercourse that is the insertion of a man's penis into his partner's rectum.** Anal sex is often thought of as an activity in which men who have sex with men engage, but it is also practised by heterosexual couples. It can be pleasurable but it can also be a source of discomfort. Some people have strong negative attitudes toward anal sex, whether it takes place between homosexual or heterosexual couples." (Page 84)

**"Oral sex or oral-genital sex means both mouth contact with the vagina, which is called cunnilingus, and mouth contact with the penis, which is called fellatio.** Either form of oral sex can be done with one partner stimulating the other individually or both partners doing it simultaneously. The latter is called "69" because the position of the couple in simultaneous stimulation resembles this number." (Page 84)

**Being sexually healthy means that we can express our sexuality in a way that is pleasurable and fulfilling both for ourselves and our partner, without putting either of us at risk.** (Page 95)

There is always a risk when adolescents engage in any kind of sexual activity. To imply otherwise is misleading and inaccurate.

## Conclusion

Comprehensive sex education manuals such as *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* that are promoted under the guise of reproductive health education are not medically accurate nor are they based on science. They are explicit and inappropriate and should be pulled from circulation. These manuals are based on the goal of sexual freedom and promote masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, homosexuality and bisexuality with no mention of the risks to adolescents. Rather than discourage youth from engaging in premature sexual activity these manuals attempt to sexualize young children from an early age. The graphic information in this manual reflects the sexual ideologies being pushed by Western nations rather than the values of the people of the Caribbean Islands. Youth need to be given the biological truth and accurate information so they can make fully informed decisions with regard to their reproductive health.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO defines “adolescents” as individuals in the 10-19 years age group and “youth” as the 15-24 year age group. These two overlapping age groups are combined in the group “young people” covering the age range 10-24 years. See [http://www.searo.who.int/EN/Section13/Section1245\\_4980.htm](http://www.searo.who.int/EN/Section13/Section1245_4980.htm)

<sup>2</sup> The manual is available here: <http://www.familycareintl.org/en/resources/publications/14>

<sup>3</sup> See Adolescent Brain Development <http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/may02factsheetadolbraindev.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See Ranjit N, Bankole A, Darroch JE, Singh S. *Contraceptive failure in the first two years of use: differences across socioeconomic subgroups*. *Fam Plann Persp* 33(1):19--27. 2001. The two-year condom failure rate resulting in pregnancy for youth under 18 was 25.8 percent.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Prevention/HPV-vaccine>