

BHA BRIEFING: Nadine Dorries MP's Abstinence Education for Girls Bill

Scheduled 20 January 2012



Briefing from the British Humanist Association (BHA): Second Reading of Sex Education (Required Content) Bill

Nadine Dorries MP's Sex Education (Required Content) Bill, which advocates that schools should provide abstinence education, only for girls aged 13 to 16, is scheduled to have its Second Reading on Friday 20 January. It has a chance of being debated, so we urge MPs to speak and vote against this Bill at its Second Reading on Friday 20 January.

The Bill passed its First Reading 67 votes to 61, helped by many members of the Conservative Christian Fellowship turning up to vote in support of it. All 6 of Nadine Dorries MP's co-presenters of the Bill are active in the socially conservative, Christian-dominated, anti-choice, All Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group, and outside of parliament the Bill is supported by the unrepresentative pressure group Christian Concern, and by the fundamentalist organisation Christian Voice.

Although this Bill has little chance of succeeding, we believe it is yet another attempt by a lobby on the religious right to promote and impose on others, a narrow, unshared and potentially damaging perspective regarding sex, sexual health and abortion rights.

We urge MPs to oppose this Bill.

The Bill

If this Bill were to be enacted, it would introduce abstinence education for some girls in addition to the statutory provision of sex education. Unfortunately, and despite the obvious public health and child rights imperative for Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), the current situation is that schools do not have to teach any SRE beyond basic information on anatomy, puberty and human reproduction in the science curriculum. All state maintained schools must also teach about sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS; however there is no guidance about what information should be taught. Parents are entitled to withdraw their children from these lessons. In effect, this Bill would introduce abstinence-only education for girls.

All the [best evidence](#), tells us that abstinence-only education, which exclusively teaches sexual abstinence until marriage, does not work. It is an ideological (and often religious) view, which is not supported by most sexual health experts, educationalists, teachers, parents, or children's rights organisations, who want to see high quality, comprehensive and objective Sex and Relationships Education taught in schools. Abstinence education does not stop people having sex but it [can foster](#) 'dangerous levels of ignorance' in relation to condom use and transmission of sexually transmitted infection, it [does not cut](#) unwanted pregnancy rates, and does not equip young people with the information they need to make safe and informed decisions about their relationships.

By focusing only on girls, the Bill fails to acknowledge that safe, healthy sex is a shared decision that must be consented to by all parties. It negates and overlooks the important role of boys and young men in forming safe, fulfilling and consensual sexual relationships.

Good, high quality Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) should include education about waiting before sex, the importance of safe sex and of sexual consent, and must be broad, fact-based and for all young people, regardless of gender or type of school.

About the BHA

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. It is the largest organisation in the UK campaigning for an end to religious privilege and to discrimination based on religion or belief, and for a secular state.

Contact: Naomi Phillips, Head of Public Affairs, 07540 257101, naomi@humanism.org.uk, www.humanism.org.uk