

MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE REALISTIC, ACCURATE IMAGES CONCERNING SEXUALITY

The National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education recommends that the media use their influence to convey more realistic, medically accurate, and health-promoting ideas and images concerning sexuality.

It has long been recognized that the media help shape the attitude of the public—particularly young people—on a myriad of topics. The media play a major role in educating Americans about sexuality, gender roles, and sexual behaviors.

Sexual images and references may be commonplace in the media, but sexuality is much broader than the media typically portray. Human sexuality encompasses the sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals. It deals with one's roles, identity, personality; with individual thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships—as well as one's body. Sexual health encompasses sexual development and reproductive health, as well as such characteristics as the ability to develop and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships, to appreciate one's own body, to interact with both genders in respectful and appropriate ways, and to express affection, love, and intimacy in ways consistent with one's own values.

Becoming a sexually healthy adult is a key developmental task of adolescence. The media can enhance adolescent sexual health by communicating accurate information and portraying realistic situations. The media provide opportunities for adolescents to gain clearer insights into their own sexuality and to make more responsible decisions about their behavior.

We, the undersigned members of the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education, strongly encourage writers, producers, film makers, programming executives, performers and program hosts, reporters, advertising professionals, Internet access providers, and others to incorporate the following into their work whenever possible:

SEXUALLY HEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- When possible and appropriate, include the portrayal of effective communication about sexuality and relationships between children and their parents or other trusted adults.
- Present the choice of abstinence from sexual intercourse from the point of view of characters knowledgeable and comfortable with their sexuality, but clear about their

decision to postpone this sexual behavior for reasons of health, emotional maturity, or personal ethics. Portray young people refusing unwanted sexual advances in order to maintain their decision about abstinence.

- Show typical sexual interactions between people as verbally and physically respectful, non-exploitive and promoting gender equity.
- Suggest intimate behaviors other than intercourse to inform the public about the possibility of alternative, pleasurable, consensual, and responsible sexual activity.
- Recognize and show that the healthier sexual encounters are anticipated events, not spur-of-the moment responses to the heat of passion. Model communication about upcoming sexual encounters, including expressions of partners' wishes and boundaries.
- When describing, alluding to, or portraying sexual intercourse, include steps that should be taken for prevention, such as using contraceptives and condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancy and information about the full spectrum of sexually transmitted diseases.
- When an unprotected sexual encounter results in negative consequences, realistically portray or refer to the possible, specific, short- and long-term repercussions of the individual's decision-making process.

SENSITIVITY TO DIVERSITY

- Eliminate stereotypes and prejudices about sexuality and sexual behaviors; for example, eliminate the notion that only "beautiful people" have sexual relationships, that sexual interaction always leads to intercourse, or that all adolescents have intercourse.
- Provide diverse and positive representations of the scope of people who express their sexuality in caring, consensual, and responsible ways; for example, when possible and appropriate, include disabled adults, older adults, adolescents, gay men, and lesbians.
- Provide more and positive views of a diverse range of body types and sizes.

ACCURATE INFORMATION

- Lift barriers to contraceptive and condom product advertising.
- Promote responsible sexual adolescent behavior by using articulate characters that teens can identify with in order to highlight success stories where teens take appropriate actions, make healthy decisions, and follow through with them—such as exercising self-control, and making plans and setting goals for their lives.
- Provide ways for young people to obtain additional information about sexuality and related issues, such as by listing addresses and telephone numbers of public health organizations and support groups in such places as public service announcements; trailers at the end of sitcoms, daytime television programs, music videos, and news programs; mailing inserts in magazines and age-appropriate comic books; computer e-mail or subject-related bulletin boards; and toll-free phone numbers before, during, or after subject-related programming.

Signed by:

AIDS Action Council
Advocates for Youth
American Association of Sex Educators,
Counselors, and Therapists
American Counseling Association
American Jewish Congress—
Commission for Women's Equality
American Medical Association—
Department of Adolescent Health
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American School Health Association
American Social Health Association
Association for the Advancement of Health Education

Association for Sex Education and Training
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
AVSC, International
Catholics for a Free Choice
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological,
and Cognitive Sciences
Gay and Lesbian Medical Association
Girls, Incorporated
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Human Rights Campaign
National Abortion Federation
National Abortion and Reproductive Rights
Action League
National Asian Women's Health Organization
National Association of School Psychologists
National Council of the Churches of Christ
National Education Association—
Health Information Network
National Lesbian and Gay Health Association
National Minority AIDS Council
National Native American AIDS Prevention Center
National Resource Center for Youth Services
National Women's Law Center
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Sexuality Information and Education Council
of the United States
Society for the Scientific Study of Sex
The Alan Guttmacher Institute
Unitarian Universalist Association
University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education
Zero Population Growth, Incorporated

February 1996

