



The way to prevent abortion is **not** to make it illegal. That won't work. It never has. Whenever governments have made abortions illegal, they have not stopped them. Throughout the centuries, when women have felt abortion to be their only option, they have had them. Whether they were legal or not. In the two decades before abortion was legal in the United States, nearly one million women went "underground" each year for illegal operations. Thousands died for lack of medical care. Tens of thousands were maimed. All were forced to behave as if they were criminals in order to do what they felt was right for themselves. We hope those days are gone forever, even though anti-choice extremists are determined to turn back the clock.

But regardless of where we stand on the abortion issue, most of us would like to see the need for abortion reduced. This will only come as the natural result of **reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies**. Planned Parenthood has worked for decades toward that goal. We advocate the following ways to prevent abortion.

### 1. Make contraception more easily available.

The quickest way to reduce the number of abortions in America is to increase the availability of contraception. The shocking fact is that millions of Americans do not have access to contraceptives or know how to use them. For many others they are prohibitively expensive.

There are more than three million unintended pregnancies each year.

Easier access would prevent hundreds of thousands of unintended pregnancies and abortions. New methods of birth control are also needed.

Since the early 1970's, Title X, the national family planning program, had been strongly supported by all Democratic and Republican administrations, until recently. It has also received broad bi-partisan support in Congress. It has established thousands of community family planning centers, serving millions of low-income women and teenagers. Each year, publicly funded programs help avert 1.3 million pregnancies and 632,000 abortions. A tremendous financial savings also results: every public dollar

which goes to family planning saves more than three dollars, in the next year alone, that would otherwise be spent for health and welfare services associated with unintended births.

One would expect anti-abortion leaders to embrace this program. But the same people who speak loudly against abortion have fought to eliminate all government support for family planning services.

So far, Congress has resisted the pressure. But if the anti-family planning forces should ever succeed, the results are predictable: less contraceptive use, more unintended pregnancy, and an increase in abortions.

### 2. Give young people a better teacher than experience.

The people who oppose abortion and contraception also oppose sex education programs for teenagers. They apparently think that by saying nothing at all, teen sexuality will go away.

From work done with hundreds of thousands of sexually active teenagers, we can tell you that a shocking number of them know nothing at all about how reproduction works, how their own bodies work, and how to prevent pregnancy. Their teacher is trial and error. Plus television, movies and misinformation from peers.

Anti-abortion leaders argue that information about sex should come from parents. Agreed. But are parents doing it? Do they know what to say? Or when to say it? Research shows that many parents feel uncomfortable discussing sex with children. When they do, important information is often omitted.

Almost all parents though, regardless of how comfortable they are discussing sensitive matters with their children, support the idea that sexuality education programs should be offered in schools and other community settings.

These programs provide young people with a comprehensive understanding of the facts. And a basic element of sexuality education programs is to help teens understand that waiting until they're ready to have sex — and not succumbing to peer pressure — is a legitimate option.

Sexuality education does not increase sexual activity; it increases knowledge and responsibility. The net result: fewer unwanted pregnancies and fewer abortions.



### 3. Increase the involvement of men.

No woman ever made herself pregnant. Yet for centuries, men have ignored their responsibility in preventing unwanted pregnancies. "I've got no kids—that I know of" is an all-too familiar male expression.

Fortunately, change is in the air. That change must be encouraged. Many family planning agencies now run programs which help men recognize their equal responsibility in all aspects of sexuality: decision-making, obtaining and using contraception, and handling any crisis which occurs.

### 4. Create new birth control methods.

By far the most common method of birth control for married couples is sterilization, because it offers the best protection against unintended pregnancy. But sterilizations are permanent.

Among the "temporary" methods, none is perfect. Unless there's a dramatic increase in government support, new methods will not be available to American women any time soon.

### 5. Make America friendlier to children.

A study by The Alan Guttmacher Institute found that the U.S. has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in most of the industrialized world.

The countries with the lowest rates were found to be those with a more realistic and accepting attitude toward sexuality, and open access to family planning services. Other factors cited were economic opportunity for young people and the encouragement of self-esteem.

Americans need to face the fact that the environment in which our children are raised — the quality of housing, child care, education, understanding and acceptance — are all factors which affect how they feel about themselves and their ability to cope with the pressures of life.

For many young people today, sexual expression is often the only way to feel loved. Becoming pregnant, or causing pregnancy, is a tragic outcome of that quest for intimacy.

Studies support the premise that young people with high levels of self-esteem are the least likely to compromise their futures by taking the risk of unintended pregnancy.

To help young people avoid this we must provide them meaningful alternatives: a better understanding of human sexual development, a better education, real career opportunities, job development, training, placement and hope for a better life.

### The Way That Won't Work

Public opinion polls show that a strong majority of Americans favor preserving safe, legal abortions, but there is still a vocal minority that does not. They want to make abortion a crime, robbing women of the right to decide for themselves when or whether to have children. Some of these people have been accosting women who enter reproductive health centers. Others have planted bombs. None of this will succeed in preventing abortions. Whenever women feel abortion is absolutely necessary, for whatever personal reasons, they have them, even if they are illegal, even in circumstances that are dangerous, expensive and humiliating. We must never return to those dark days when government could force women to choose between compulsory pregnancy or dangerous, back-alley abortions. But while we protect women's right to choose safe and legal abortion, we must work to reduce the need for abortion. We will continue to work toward that goal. You can too.

These are five ways to guarantee far fewer unwanted pregnancies and far fewer abortions. Shouldn't the anti-abortion movement support these efforts? Shouldn't the government? Shouldn't we all?

The anti-abortion movement is increasingly hostile to the actual concerns of real people. They fail to acknowledge that lives are being ruined every day. Not by legal abortion, but by lack of education and access to contraception, by the lack of more effective, safer contraceptives, by men who refuse to share responsibility, and by society's inattention to the fundamental needs of our young people. Reversing this situation would prevent unintended pregnancies by the hundreds of thousands.

You can also help. Circulate this statement among your friends. And, if you can, support our work by contacting us. Thank you.