



TP3: Teen Pregnancy Prevention Pilot Project Brooklyn Center Youth Interim Focus Group Report

In the spring and summer of 2007, the Hennepin County Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement Department (SiCE) conducted focus groups with teens in Brooklyn Center to find out what young people in those communities do during their out of school time, to better understand where they are receiving their information about sex and sexual relationships, and to gauge their knowledge of family planning services available in the community. The teens shared a number of insights with focus group interviewers, a summary of which has been prepared to help guide planning efforts and future teen pregnancy prevention and youth development work in the area.

Focus Group Recruitment and Limitations

The findings contained in this report were derived from focus group discussions conducted with six groups of teens in Brooklyn Center and do not represent the opinions of all teens. Four focus groups were conducted with girls and two with boys. The two groups of boys and two of the groups of girls were recruited through Brooklyn Center High School. Two groups of girls were recruited through the Liberian Women's Initiative of Minnesota's girls summer kickball program. Focus group participants were freshmen through seniors in high school. Overall, SiCE did not attempt to assemble focus groups that were representative in terms of age, gender, race or ethnicity of teens in Brooklyn Center as a whole. All focus group participants either received parental consent to participate or, in the case of participants 18 or older, consented themselves to participate.

There were a total of 33 focus group participants; 13 boys and 20 girls. Of the total female participants, 11 participated in the focus groups recruited through the Liberian Women's Initiative's kickball program.

The information collected is divided into two sections below. Section 1 contains information from the general focus groups recruited through Brooklyn Center High School. Section 2 contains information from the focus groups recruited through the Liberian Women's Initiative's girls kickball program.

Section 1: Brooklyn Center High School Focus Groups

Sex Education: Are Parents Sexuality Educators for the Children?

In 2004, NBC News and People magazine asked teens all over the country where they got most of their information about sex and sexual relationships. Seventy (70) percent of respondents said parents were the main source of their information. Participants in these focus groups were asked to react to that poll. They were skeptical of the poll results. They felt that parents can provide



some of the highest quality information but that teens do not get a lot of information about sex from their parents. This is largely because talking about the subject is awkward for both sides, and they also noted that by the time most parents bring the subject up, their teens have already learned about it somewhere else. Typical responses included:

- “I just think like the whole — it’s weird for the parents to talk to them, it’s awkward, and it’s awkward for the kids to learn about it from their parents, I think. And like you should have a talk with your parents about sex, but it’s just weird and awkward.”
- “I don’t think that they learn it from their parents and if their parents tell them, they already know stuff about it.”
- “Probably because like who wants to talk to their parents about sex? I think that’s kind of an awkward situation.”
- “We don’t get the most information from our parents. We get the most, like, trustworthy or, like, good advice from them, but then it’s like by the time they give us, like, the talk, we kind of already know about it, so it’s like really hard to actually focus on what they’re saying.”
- “Parents, yeah, I think they feel uncomfortable talking to you, so like they’re probably going to tell you when it’s already too late.”
- “The parents are more like shy or something and don’t want to tell you about it.”
- “It’s kind of weird and embarrassing to go and talk to, like, your parents about sex.”
- “I think that just like everything else is more accessible. And then so like TV shows and Internet and friends, like you’d rather talk to them or learn from them than go to your parents. I think it’s easier just if you want to try to learn it like that, but it’s probably not the right way to learn it.”
- “And then the thing about parents is some parents feel uncomfortable talking to you about it, so maybe they come in too late or they never talked to you about it at all, and you have to learn about everything by yourself. And then you never know their expectations, or you never know what their point of view about sex is.”
- “I’m not going to ask my parents for nothing like that.”
- “I wish my mom was like my grandma. She was like, ‘Girl, if you hold hands, you will get pregnant. Don’t hold hands,’ and my mom will be like, ‘Look, this is what you do.’ I’ll be like, ‘I can’t hear you. I really can’t, no.’”

Sex Education: So Where is it Happening? And is it High Quality?

Focus group participants were also asked where young people in Brooklyn Center received most of their sex education and where they received the highest quality information. Note that focus group facilitators did not attempt to determine whether or not the information that participants discussed is actually “high quality” information. Rather, the questions were asked to understand what sources participants *perceive* to be providing the highest quality information. Summary findings and typical responses included:

Focus group participants say teens in Brooklyn Center get most of their information about sex from their friends, television and movies. However, they also note that these sources provide some of the lowest *quality* information.

- “... Your friends will tell you anything and everything. They won’t leave out the details, even if you ask them to. They still will tell you everything.”



- “Your friends talk about it, because that’s where they feel comfortable, with those people.”
- “Your friends will tell you what they did and how they did it and your friends are your friends, so you want to listen to your friends more than you will listen to your parents.”
- “I picked friends, and a lot of times your friends will peer pressure you into hyping stuff up. You know what I’m saying? Like they’ll be like, oh, yeah, I just did this to this female, and this, this and this.”
- “I chose friends because they tell you...but they don’t know what’s behind it.”
- “For the TV shows and movies, that’s not accurate because — unless it’s a TV show about sex education from professionals, but other than that, it’s not accurate because it’s just what you see on TV.”
- “And then in TV shows you see it like all the time. Like Sex and the City and like all these shows that involve sex.”
- “The movies and TV shows, they depict it as the best thing and like...nothing can happen to you.”
- “They only say the good things that come out in the TV shows. And they never tell you what kinds of diseases you can catch.”
- “I think the worst information is probably from TV and friends. Well, it depends on who your friend is that gives you the information, but TV because...most of the time they don’t show positive things.”
- “Because their friends just hear stuff, and they assume that it’s true or right.”
- “I say friends, because your friends will lead you on to the wrong way. They’ll tell you that, oh, yeah, you should go do this girl because she has a bomb body and this, this and this, but they’re not telling you what she might be carrying.”
- “I think music and TV shows give the worst information, because there’s a lot of music about sex and drugs. And some teens go out and drink a lot and then end up having sex or — because like they emphasize sex in a really bad way. And then some teens will listen to this music, and they would want to act it out and such. And TV shows and movies make sex seem simpler than it actually is. And teens don’t realize all the responsibility that comes with having sex, and maybe after having sex they might have an STD or get pregnant or something like that.”
- “I agree. It’s just that TV and music show all the positive aspects of sex and don’t like show any of the negative, so it’s like you really don’t get informed well.”

While the largest *quantity* of information comes from friends, television and movies, focus group participants say that the highest *quality* information comes from their parents, teachers and doctors.

- “Well, the best information probably would come from your parents.”
- “I think its parents and teachers, because they’re your parents so they’re not going to teach you any bad things. And teachers are just respectful, and they’re supposed to be there to help people.”
- “Parents don’t give you negative information about sex. They try to make you have moral decisions and make good decisions. And teachers teach you positive information, and they discourage teenage sex, so that’s why it’s good.”
- “Teachers have, like, the educated part and parents the life experiences, and they will tell you, like, a lot of things about it.”



- “The teachers, the parents, the doctors are the best places to get information from.”
- “Well, doctors, because they have an education in that. Teachers, because, I mean, they teach it. They teach what happens, what doesn’t happen, what could happen. Nurses, because they have an education in it. And parents, because they’re your parents. Who’s not going to trust their parents?”

Even though health class provides teens in Brooklyn Center High School with quality information about sex, focus group participants say health class discussions were more about avoiding disease than explaining sex.

- “I don’t think they really teach you about sex in school. Do you know what I mean? They just say, “This is good and bad.” That’s the way it goes. At our school they don’t really teach you about sex, what you should be doing, why it’s good and why it’s bad. They don’t really talk about that.”
- “Health class in our school is more like — you’ve got sections about drugs and then about body parts and then a little bit about sex and stuff, but it’s mostly like drugs.”
- “Keeping yourself healthy. Like in our health class we did STDs, but that doesn’t really talk about sex, it talks about what happens if you have sex and what could happen.”

Sex Education: What Should Be Happening?

Focus group participants were asked “How do you think teens want to learn about sex and relationships?” Suggestions included day-long sessions in high school and facilitated group discussions. Typical responses included:

- “I think that a group would be like really good, especially with a group of people your own age, so that you’d feel comfortable talking about it. But there should be someone to supervise you who knows what’s going on.”
- “We should have a day in high school, like a day throughout the year, like one day every year that that’s what we learn about.”
 - “Yeah, like everybody’s in the…”
 - “Go to the auditorium and watch a movie or something.”
 - “And we all talk about it and have a big discussion.”

In addition, some focus group participants say they should begin learning about sex earlier on in school, while others suggest waiting until students are older and can relate better to the subject before discussing sex in class.

- “They should offer it sooner than later, like when you get into like ninth grade or something so that kids don’t go have sex and don’t know what they’re doing.”
- “They should teach it in seventh grade.”
- “Yeah, probably even in junior high that would be better.”
- “Like at this school, like seventh grade. You have to start early, like seventh grade you have to talk to them little girls and the little boys.”
- “When you’re in sixth grade, you don’t know. You don’t know about the stuff; it’s not going to stay with you. They need to have classes when you’re in high school.”
- “They tell you when you’re young and you’re not going to pay attention. All you’re going to say is, ‘Eww’ and all that kind of stuff.”



- “Well, it will help us, but we’re saying they shouldn’t have it in, like, sixth, seventh grade, eighth. They should have it in high school.”
- “It should be in high school, because people in middle school, they ain’t going to take it serious.”

Access to Family Planning Services: What Do Teens Know? What is Important to Them?

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions to gauge their knowledge about where teens in their community go to access family planning services. They were also asked questions to ascertain what factors are most important to teens when they do attempt to access family services. Summary findings and typical responses include:

Participants focused on condoms, which they noted are widely available, and mentioned the doctor for other forms of contraception, such as contraceptive pills or the patch.

- “You can go and get condoms anywhere. Go to the gas station, you can get condoms. Go to Target, you can get condoms.”
- “The doctor, the grocery store, SA, Target.”
- “I’d tell him to go to the store. Go to SA and go into the bathroom. Use 75¢ and get a condom out of the little machine.”
- “I would tell them to go to Target, because they have, like, a lot of it.”
- “For condoms, go to the store. The pill, patch, go talk to your doctor.”
- “In the Minneapolis schools, for condoms, you can just get them there right at the school.”
- “What everybody else said, the store for guys like to buy some, and like your doctor for [other things].”

Focus group participants highlighted privacy as of key importance when it comes to obtaining birth control. They are reluctant to ask their parents to help them get it, and are uncomfortable with their parents and others finding out they’ve been seeking it.

- “I think the fact that it’s in places that they’re readily accessible, so you don’t have to...Ask your parents or something.”
- “Right, you don’t have to be like, ‘Dang, I’ve got to go have somebody buy me this, and I don’t necessarily want them to know I’m doing it.’ They can just go in and get what they need and be done. It’s there.”
- “And it’s confidential there too, so your parents don’t have to know.”
- “I think because they’re helpful and private. You don’t have to worry about, like, something happening and you go to the doctor and your mom and dad don’t know. You don’t have to worry about them calling, like, “Yeah, your daughter’s at the hospital for such and such today.”
- “I’ve found that it’s a whole lot easier and a whole lot, like, less stressful or embarrassing if I go buy condoms from like the oldest lady that’s working the cash register, the oldest lady there, like the old grandma that is just the nicest old lady in the world. If you go to her, it’s a whole lot easier to deal with, because she doesn’t care. She’s not going to say anything. She’s not going to say anything to anybody else. But if you go to, like, someone your own age that you might happen to know...then they’re going to give you that look, or they’re



going to tell somebody and be like...Does your mother know you're buying these?" and lines like that.

- "I don't know, but going into the store and asking for it — I don't know, it might be an embarrassment to somebody, but that's safe, to protect yourself."

Focus group participants are less aware of the morning-after pill, and less sure of where to get it, than condoms, contraceptive pills or the patch.

- "I have no clue what that is."
- "It's like if you have sex and don't use protection, you go get the morning after pill, and then isn't it like you won't get pregnant or something?"
 - "So you can go like to a gas station or something."
 - "Well, not the gas station."
 - "Like a convenience store."
 - "Yeah."
 - "Or like Walgreens, Snyders."
 - "I've never heard of that."
- "I think just the store pharmacies. I was going to say I think some stores sell it like with medicines, but that would be the store pharmacy."
- "I've heard of the school nurse carrying like some sort of pill where like after having sex, you go there and she'll give you a pill that will like — I don't know, like get rid of the fertilized egg or something. I'm not sure how it works."
- "Probably [go to] the doctor."

Focus group participants believe that it is easier for Brooklyn Center teens to obtain birth control in Minneapolis than it is in Brooklyn Center. Few participants knew of any locations within Brooklyn Center where they could obtain contraception other than condoms.

- "I was thinking before like where could — I don't even know where any of these places are and like where you could go to get birth control or something. I wouldn't even know where to start."
- "It seems like Minneapolis had a lot of those clinics, so it's like they must have places where you can buy birth control if they have clinics for that."
- "I think Minneapolis would be easier, because there might be more places where you could go to and like more selection of clinics instead of like going to — in Brooklyn Center there are not a lot of choices you can make."
- "I would think Minneapolis, because like Brooklyn Center is kind of a small place. So I think a big city like Minneapolis would have like more places for you."
- "Probably in Minneapolis, because Minneapolis has so many people. But then again, Brooklyn Center is small, so it should be able to serve its people, so you probably would get it faster in your own neighborhood rather than another city."

Access to Family Planning Services: What Would Reduce Barriers and Improve Access?

Focus group participants were asked what would make it easier for teens in their community to obtain family planning services if they needed them. Suggestions ranged from local access to better transportation and more information. Typical responses included:



- “If there was like someone they could call like... a hotline or something.”
- “Or like a ride if they don’t want their parents to find out.”
- “If they have more places around Brooklyn Center.”
- “Transportation is hard when you’re not driving or when you’re not mobile or know anybody that’s mobile, so somewhere around here local would be easier to get to.”
- “That’s what I was going to say, knowing where they [the clinics] would be would be more helpful.”

Youth Development Activities: What Appeals to Teens?

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions about what they currently do outside of school time and what they would like to do that is either not available or available but not accessible. They would like to have a wide range of activities available to them at no cost and they would like to have designated “teen spaces” or designated “teen times” at places that are open to all ages. Typical responses included:

- “There is, I think, enough.”
- “I think, like, maybe a city activity. I’m not sure, but like a little activity where everybody can go and just have fun, where something like that doesn’t happen every day.”
- “I would like a lacrosse team.”
- “What about tennis lessons?”
- “I would just like there to be like more sports for guys and girls so it’s liked mixed, not just like specific sports for gender.”
- “I would also like more language classes, because they just offer like French and Spanish. And then also American Sign Language, but they’re thinking of getting rid of American Sign Language. Also, when I first came, I wanted to do Japanese or some other Oriental language.”
- “Maybe like a sports club. Like if I had a membership to a sports club or access to a sports club, I would be more active instead of, like, playing more video games rather than running and such.”
- “I think you need, like, another — like a bigger Brooklyn Center, like, community center type, where kids can just go play, ride skateboards and play soccer, basketball.”
- “And stop charging people. It’s a community center.”
- “Have, like, teen days, like days where, like, teenagers can come and just — somebody playing music, and so it’s just like everybody has somewhere to go.”
- “I was about to say a job.”
- “Actually, more after-school programs...I don’t know, something for the, like, seventh through ninth grade.”
- “We like to dance. They should have more dance clubs here.”
- “I think they should have swimming and stuff like that.”
- “Go to a skate park. We need to make one in Brooklyn Center, in my opinion, because I know lots of skateboarders, and it’s kind of hard getting out to, like, Brooklyn Park and to Minneapolis and stuff, downtown Minneapolis and skateboard, and there’s nothing around in Brooklyn Center.”



Section 2: Focus Groups with African Teen Girls

Sex Education: Are Parents Sexuality Educators for the Children?

As with the Brooklyn Center High participants, participants in these focus groups were also skeptical of the NBC/People magazine poll indicating that nationwide 70 percent of teens say they receive most of their information about sex from their parents. These participants, too, felt that parents can provide some of the highest quality information but that teens do not get a lot of information about sex from their parents. There was debate among the participants as to whether African-born parents are “different” than native-born American parents when it comes to talking with their children about sex. Typical responses included:

- “I think we get quality information about sex from our parents.”
- “They’re going to tell you even if you make sure you want to have sex, have sex with a condom, because you don’t want to get illness from a person. You don’t want to get pregnant while you’re still in high school or drop out of high school, so I’ll say that.”
- “Because parents, I mean, not a lot of people are going to go to their parents like, ‘Mom,’ like—you wouldn’t go there if you respect your parents like you say you would, because like African parents, you cannot stand up to them and even talk about a boy. They’ll think, oh, you can’t even work with a boy. They’ll think that’s your boyfriend and you’re not—yeah.”
- “I have parents, a brother and sisters. I think brothers and sisters, because I have a brother and sometimes we sit together, and we don’t talk about boyfriends and girlfriends. He doesn’t tell me about his—basically we just talk about our family and life and all that [inaudible] each other. And parents, how she said, you don’t—African parents are totally different. You don’t just call a boy, or a boy doesn’t call your house and, you know, it’s very different. You don’t talk to your parents about boyfriends and all that.”
- “I think for African parents, it depends on your age.”
- “Like, for instance, probably like for them, I don’t think their mom would sit them down, and say ‘Oh, you don’t have to have a boyfriend. If you have a boyfriend, you’re not supposed to do this, you’re not supposed to do that.’ But for my age, my mom, she usually calls me and like talks to me and asks me about HIV or teen pregnancy and all that.”
- “I think they should be like able to be kids, because preventing is better than curing. What if you don’t know nothing, and some people are very immature, and like they said—curiosity kills the cat [inaudible].”
- “So I think that’s the—they said about African parents, they don’t like to talk to their kids about sex, because they feel that the more you kind of talk to kids about it, the more they kind of want to know what is sex, what is it all about.”
- “Even in my health class, I had like a parent who called the teacher and said she don’t want her kid, her child to be [inaudible], because she said she’s not comfortable with that.”
- “Some people’s parents are open like that.”
- “I don’t know, but African parents, you don’t see your mommy and dad—white people it’s kind of very common to sit in front of your kids and kiss and do all kinds of things in public. But African parents, you never see your mom and your dad when they say goodbye, they don’t that in front of kids.”

Sex Education: So Where is it Happening? And is it High Quality?



These participants were also asked where young people in Brooklyn Center received most of their sex education and where they received the highest quality information. Note again that focus group facilitators did not attempt to determine whether or not the information that participants discussed is actually “high quality” information. Rather, the questions were asked to understand what sources participants *perceive* to be providing the highest quality information. Summary findings and typical responses included:

Similar to the groups recruited through Brooklyn Center High School, the African girls participating in these focus groups felt that most teens learn about sex from television, movies and friends and that these sources provide some of the lowest *quality* information.

- “If you’re listening to music nowadays, people talk about anything. Nowadays, all you hear is sex and stuff in music.”
- “...A lot of kids in America right now, we have access to the Internet and MySpace and all of that so if you don’t even like have an idea bout sex and stuff like that...but if you email your friends, talk on the Internet with your friends, your friends are going to...you know, they put pictures, they get pictures of a boyfriend or whatever.”
- “Everything on TV right now is about sex.”
- “Everything is all about sex. So if your kids put TV on to watch, the next thing you see is some girl naked or a boy and girl kissing. And action speaks...louder than words.”
- “People see like sex stuff on the Internet and they just believe it, so I think it’s not right.”
- “Because let’s say your friends are more experienced than you are, they tell you what to do, or like they’ll probably tell you how it went and all that stuff, and you’ll want to experience it too.”
- “Like there could be a girl or a little kid sitting there and she doesn’t know nothing about, you know, a guy being cute. And if you like a guy and he’s cute, what’s going to happen next? And she’s going to learn about it, so that’s very bad information. Like when I sit by my little sister and say “Oh, my God, he’s so cute, he’s so fine.” And then after I tell him he’s cute, he’s like “Oh, I like you too, can I get a number?” And after that she’s going to ask me—what’s the end result of that, you know. She would want to know what I’m going to do with him, all of that. I think that’s bad information.”
- “Your friends make up a lot of stuff.”
- “Some people don’t tell you the truth.”

Sex Education: What Should Be Happening?

Focus group participants were asked “How do you think teens want to learn about sex and relationships?” Participants discussed the possibility of an after school program or club, and noted the importance of involving parents as well as teens. Typical responses included:

- “And when you have clubs, that’s where you can play and then talk about it, because if you can get your play on, like you can basketball and get involved and then after having a little meeting, and kids would want to be in it.”
- “...Before you do that, like you give out more information, like meet with the parents and tell the parents, “Look, this is what we are about to do. It’s about educating your child about, you know, pregnancy and how to be a better person.” And maybe parents, when they see like good information would allow their child to participate. But if you just invite the



kids alone, you know, some kids are afraid of their parents, so they might not want to be a part of that.”

Access to Family Planning Services: What Do Teens Know? What is Important to Them?

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions to gauge their knowledge about where to access family planning services, such as “If a friend asked you where he/she should go to get condoms, the pill or the patch or something like that, what would you tell them?” They were also asked questions to ascertain what factors are most important to teens when they do attempt to access family services. Summary findings and typical responses included:

African girls in these focus groups said that they would tell a friend to go to a family member, such as a parent or sibling, to find out about accessing family planning services. They were clear that they would not recommend a clinic.

- “Go to your mom and ask her if she knows the best way for you. If you’re not comfortable with your mom, tell someone that is close to you to tell your mom about it.”
- “Or somebody like a family member who you are really close to, like an aunt or uncle.”
- “If you send them to the drug store to go get it or to Walgreens and anything happens, it’s going to be all your fault.”
- “So go to your parents, they will make the decision for you.”

Some participants reported knowing other girls who could not access birth control because they did not have insurance. There was also confusion among focus group participants as to whether you have to be a certain age to obtain birth control.

- “I knew my friend, she wanted to get on birth control, but she never had like insurance and she couldn’t go buy it in the stores...”
- “Because first of all they were underage, but they still wanted it.”

Youth Development Activities: What Appeals to Teens?

As with the focus groups recruited from Brooklyn Center High School, participants in these groups indicated that they would like to have a wide range of activities available to them, including double dutch, arts related activities like drawing and dance, and a tutoring program. The main barrier to participating in existing programs that they identified was cost. Typical responses included:

- “Everything costs money.”
- “You’ve got to have free lunch, and not a lot of people have free lunch.”
- “I would like to play basketball in my school, because I like basketball. But it costs money to play, and I don’t have money.”