

This article represents one educator's thoughts about the work that needs to be done among young people to increase their knowledge about sexual safety and teen pregnancy prevention.

Young people are having sex. The high rate of teen pregnancy in our community proves this. I also see proof that many youth are not receiving information they need to help them make the wisest choices possible.

That is why I keep thinking about the annual Teen Maze. The Maze is an educational event designed to teach young people about the consequences of teen sex. Nearly every topic is covered at the maze from abstinence, choosing whether or not to be sexually active, preventing sexual assault, preventing teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and what it means to be a teen parent.

Months of planning take place, multiple agencies are involved, and great efforts are made to invite schools far and near. However, this year, not one school from Casa Grande attended. No one attended from our hometown, where the latest statistics from Arizona Department of Health Services show that 45 girls age 15-17 had babies in 2003.

As a specific example of what Casa Grande's youth missed, consider the topic of sexual assault prevention. Would the young person in your life know what consent is? Would they know how to get or give consent?

Based on the results of pre surveys from those who did attend the maze, most youth do not realize that if a person is drunk or under the influence, they cannot give consent. That means that a boy could commit sexual assault without even knowing he was breaking the law; a girl could blame herself when, in fact, she was raped!

The Maze teaches responsible decision-making and teaches consequences. By attending the maze, the youth learn that a person that is drunk or under the influence cannot give consent. They learn that consent has to be given willing, verbally, and by a person that is conscious. They learn that someone under age 14 cannot give legal consent. If the person is 15, they can give consent, but cannot have sex with a partner more than two years older than them. Or their partner will not have legal consent.

They also learn the risk factors for sexual assault are being promiscuous, not communicating clearly, and using substances. They learn that they are more at risk with an acquaintance than a stranger.

Some even learn the hard way, that a drug can be dropped into their drink and make them vulnerable. As was the case of those students that attended a mock party and left their drink unattended while dancing. Later they found a sticker on the bottom of their cup.

The Maze does not promote sexual activity, but it does provide vital information so students can make both positive and protective decisions. If you are a parent or community member who is concerned about the Maze's content or a young person in your life, I invite you to join us in planning the 2006 event. **Please call me, Julie Cheetham, Children's Services Coordinator, at Horizon Human Services (520) 723-9800.**