

# NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD

*An Agency of the Ministry Of Health*

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **CONTRIBUTED ARTICLE: LISTEN AND LEARN.**

When I reflect on my high school guidance and counselling class I can't help but wonder, is it any different for today's health and family life education student. The fading memory is of me begrudgingly walking to the nurse's office for a lecture lasting for some 40 minutes. Once in the room, classmates jostled to occupy the rusted and chipped metal chairs as far away from the teacher in the hope of being inconspicuous. The disinterest in the topics and the samples of contraceptive methods she held aloft was in stark contrast to the girls' interest displayed in the copies of the Mills and Boone romance novels concealed in the pages of larger books.

For me, it wasn't one of those courses that 'mattered' like Math or English. Back then I didn't see the relevance of this class to the rest of my life.

Fast forward a few more years and truth be told the information the guidance counsellors and school nurse imparted is extremely important. It provides a road map to steer us on a roadway with fewer speed bumps and roadblocks. Hear me out. Most boys and girls attain puberty while still in secondary school. In order to fully understand and deal with the inevitable bodily changes they need to have the knowledge.

The hormonal roller coaster ride can also send adolescents into an emotional spiral. The discernment or judgement needed in decision-making is not developed, with some following their hearts and engaging in early sexual activity. Guidance and counselling provides the facts on how pregnancy happens, and an introduction to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. Getting the facts from an authority figure, the nurse or HFL teacher, and referring to them versus a classmate or someone else in their own age group who is finding their own way, just makes common sense. Choosing wisely can make a marked difference in the outcome of engagement in early sexual activity once relationships are formed.

Contraceptives come in handy much later, but there are legitimate instances when teenaged girls are prescribed these hormonal pills to regulate their irregular periods or to treat acne. But for the most part the contraceptives take a woman through her reproductive years. Knowing what methods are most

appropriate at a particular stage in life is important in order to gain maximum benefit. Contraceptives are a great aid in helping couples plan their pregnancies, the number of years between children, when they are contemplating stopping having children and when the final decision is made but they still want to have an enjoyable sex life without the worry of an unplanned pregnancy.

The HFLE syllabus is more exhaustive today and is implemented earlier than it was during my time. Theory mixed in with real life stories and a bit of humour can make an otherwise uninteresting subject quite riveting. So the next time the teacher whips out the samples of the condom, pill packet, intrauterine device, implant, injectable or any other pregnancy or STI prevention method consider it a great teaching moment. It has merit. And if you are still a high school student promise me that you will make an effort to give the guidance counsellor an 'ear' in the next class. It just might be that life lesson you needed to hear.

***Contributed by: Dianne Thomas, Director, Communication and Public Relations, National Family Planning Board***