



around the region

Sex Bracelets: Urban Legend or Epidemic

MAY IS TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION MONTH.

It's time to change the conversation.

DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

If you don't think teen pregnancy is a good idea, why is DC's rate so high?

202-789-4666 www.teenpregnancydc.org

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▲ DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Executive Director Brenda Rhodes Miller poses along side program information. Photos by Victor Holt

By Rahiel Tesfamariam
WI Staff Writer

Several school districts within Florida, Illinois and Ohio have already banned the wearing of jelly bracelets (now known as sex bracelets). These inexpensive rings of rubbery plastic are supposedly worn by children and teenagers to indicate their willingness to perform a particular sexual act. When

another individual snaps the bracelet, this becomes a "sex coupon," promising the sexual act indicated by the bracelet's color.

In the past few months, the D.C.P.S. Office of the Superintendent and several other school officials have been contacted by concerned parents and principals who believe that this problem has reached the city's public schools.

Davis Elementary School's principal, Yvonne Morse, said that that the issue was first brought to her attention by a mentoring group that works at the school. After alerting social workers and administration, she located children with them on in order to speak with them about their reasons for wearing them. Morse said that only one child knew what the bracelets represented, which is alarming considering approximately 70 bracelets were confiscated from her 2nd through 5th graders. The matter was discussed with parents of children at the school at a Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) meeting shortly thereafter.

Morse also stated that she had heard rumors that a child at another D.C. elementary school wore a sex bracelet without knowing its connotations and was assaulted after the bracelet was snapped.

This rumor is perhaps evidence of a greater scale of speculation that surrounds the issue as parents, school officials and media have yet to definitively conclude whether the wearing of jelly bracelets within schools is in fact cause for concern or merely a fashion trend. Some have said that the media and the Internet are responsible for the perpetuation of this possible rumor. Morse believes that media

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coverage is serving a negative purpose as it is encouraging children who did not previously know about the bracelets to go out and buy them. While adults seem to be uncertain about the validity of this matter, young children and teenagers seem to profess that it is true.

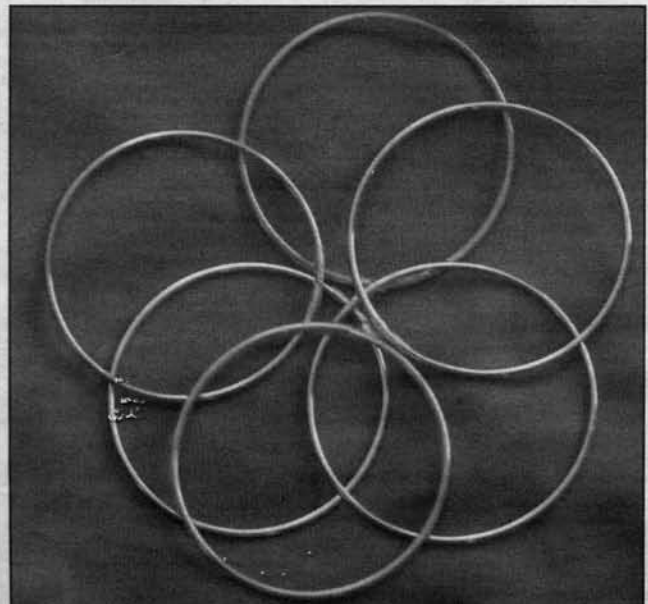
During a Sunday service at Spirit of Faith Christian Center in Temple Hills, MD late last year, Pastor Mike Freeman called on youth within the congregation to come to the front of the sanctuary and speak about the role of sex in their schools and in their lives. One teenager discussed the presence of jelly bracelets at his own high school and other youth standing at the altar nodded in agreement. The pastor then asked the young people throughout the sanctuary if they knew about these alleged sex bracelets and if their classmates were wearing them for reasons other than fashion; the youth answered yes in overwhelming numbers. Afterwards, several teenagers discussed the prominence of homosexuality among their peers and how the bracelets are often used as a marker to identify the youth who are gay or bisexual.

The DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a nongovernmental/non-profit organization founded in 1999 with the mission of cutting the city's teen pregnancy rate in half by 2005, has been working very hard to bring attention to this matter. Executive Director Brenda

Rhodes Miller stated that while the District of Columbia has mandated sex education for grades K-12, parents should not assume that someone else is going to talk to their children about the things that they need to know.

"Parents are key in helping their kids understand life. So, it's very important that parents take every opportunity to have conversations with their children about their own values and about their expectations for their behavior...It just underscores how important it is that whenever parents hear or see something that concerns them, to not just ignore it but to use that as an opportunity to find out what their children are thinking about, who they're talking to, what programs they're watching and what kind of music they're listening to- just to get a real good sense of what they should talk about with their children relative to their own values around love, sex and relationships," she said.

Irregardless of the legitimacy of the sex bracelet rumors, parents should find the city's statistics on teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases alarming enough to compel them to engage in serious dialogue about sex and sexuality with their children. If these bracelets are in fact being used for the purposes that have been rumored, then adults must delve into the deeper issues that this latest trend brings to surface and try to ensure that youth are educated about the possible consequences of their actions.



▲ Color bracelets similar to these have been adorned by young children at schools.

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