

Campaign asks parents to talk to kids about sex

By T. Kevin Walker
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (NNPA) - As an adolescent health consultant for Forsyth County, Patrice Toney doesn't need government research or television news sound bites to tell her that parents seldom talk to their children about the birds and the bees.

She recently held a discussion on sex and other issues at a local middle school. The discussion was designed for girls. Toney expected only about a dozen girls to show up; 50 girls came instead.

"That is a sign to me that parents aren't talking about these issues with their children," said Toney. "It is an uncomfortable subject for many parents."

Toney and others will be working this month to try to ease some of that discomfort. October has been designated "Let's Talk Month" across the state. County health departments and their partner agencies will hold seminars, roundtables and other special events aimed at encouraging parents to open up to their kids about sex and other so-

cial issues such as alcohol and drug abuse.

Although today's young people live in a world where video games, music and MTV are king, research shows that their parents still have the biggest influence over them.

Kids are more likely to model and listen to their parents rather than teachers or even their peers.

The Forsyth Adolescent Health Coalition Prevention Team will host a series of programs this month that will focus on training parents to communicate better with their children.

The monthlong slate of events kicked off last Thursday at the Public Health Department with an information session that began with a proclamation from Mayor Allen Joines.

An audience of mostly Department of Health employees and representatives of local social service agencies listened to speakers give often disturbing details about the state of young people.

Dr. Robert Durant of Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center said while the numbers of under-

age people drinking and carrying concealed weapons to schools are down, they are still not good enough.

"The numbers are still higher than they ought to be," said Durant, who also cited a recent study that showed that at least half of all teens have engaged in sex at least one

time.

Toney said that 49 young people become pregnant each day in North Carolina. Last year in Forsyth County, 163 high school students were pregnant.

Addie Hymes said that parents who expect teachers and principals to provide

their children with a moral core should think again. Hymes, the parental involvement coordinator for the city-county school system, said it is schools' job to educate children, not raise them.

Hymes said when parents are silent, their kids suffer. She pointed to the system's

dropout rate as another example of parents not having an open line of communication with their children.

"If we can keep them in school, we won't have all of the problems we are having," she said.

T. Kevin Walker writes for *The Chronicle*.

Cosby

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Cosby implored listeners to show children a better way of thinking. He offered an example of a solution to that faulty reasoning: show their children someone like local business owner Luther Mack, who owns several McDonald's franchise restaurants, and discuss that possibility with their kids.

He likened the problem parents have with children to a car with a mechanical defect that causes a noise and needs attention to be repaired: "Don't be embarrassed." He said it is crucial for African-American families to talk about and fix the problems. "Demand it," of politicians and the police and others in authority in the community, insisting, "You're not begging, you're telling people."

Cosby spoke exclusively with the *Sentinel-Voice* beforehand and shared the underlying motivation for his impassioned comments about the problems he targets. It's because of, he said thoughtfully, "Old people... 80-year-olds, 70-year-olds... looking as stunned as an evacuee... wondering, 'What happened.'" He explained, "A woman—a grandmother—wondering why she's now in charge of [a child or children]." He spoke about the number of mothers and fathers on drugs, in jail or in other positions that leave children in need.

Controversy, of late, is not foreign to Cosby who drew fire from many who opposed his statement made earlier in the year about the priorities some low-income parents ap-

parently place on trendy clothing over their children's education. Cosby said to those who are upset about his unapologetic position, "You can get mad at me all day long. But you know you're wrong." He said — to those who would say to him, "You put my dirty laundry in the streets," — his advanced reply is, "Your laundry is already in the streets."

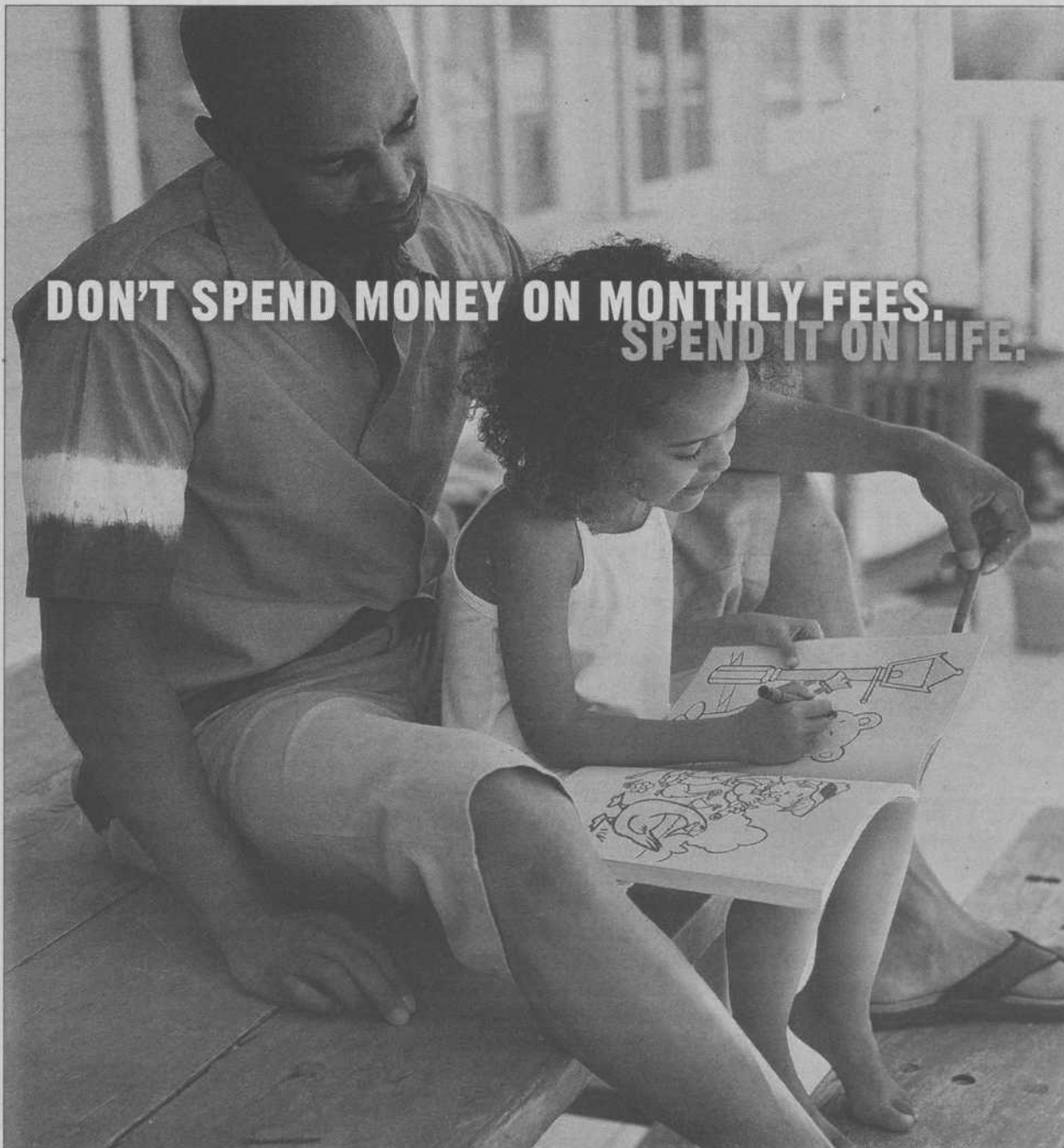
Cosby concluded his comments with the repeat warning: "Our children are geniuses, but if we don't protect them..."

"The general concept of what Bill Cosby was talking about is so important," said Judge "Angel" W. Cooley after the event. She said she was aware that some people complained aloud about the use of profanity by Cosby in his message, but said she looked to the meaning and intent beyond it and thought the discussion on the topics was timely.

"I believe that all parents are interested in the education of their children. But I believe that... they are so overwhelmed providing for the essentials and the basics, they don't have time to go protest injustices. It behooves the rest of us to [help them]. We are talking about helping our children... All children are our children. I want to see all children safe, educated and spiritually inspired... It takes all of us."

Cosby said it is a responsibility of a community: "It's up to you, 24/7."

On his commitment to youth, families and his message, he said, "Do I love my people? Damned right."



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