



SEX, LIES & STEREOTYPES: PROFILES OF FEDERALLY FUNDED ABSTINENCE- ONLY GRANT RECIPIENTS

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CHOOSING THE BEST

“Guys think so much more about sex because of testosterone.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*¹

Choosing the Best is one of the most well established and widely used abstinence-only curricula. Founded in 1983, Choosing the Best has received millions of dollars in state and federal grants and its curriculum is used in the programs of countless other federal grantees. Since 1995, 1.5 million students have used Choosing the Best.² It is also one of the most controversial curricula, namely for its gender-bias and shaming tactics.

What You Should Know – Overview

Founded: 1983

Budget: \$311,029³

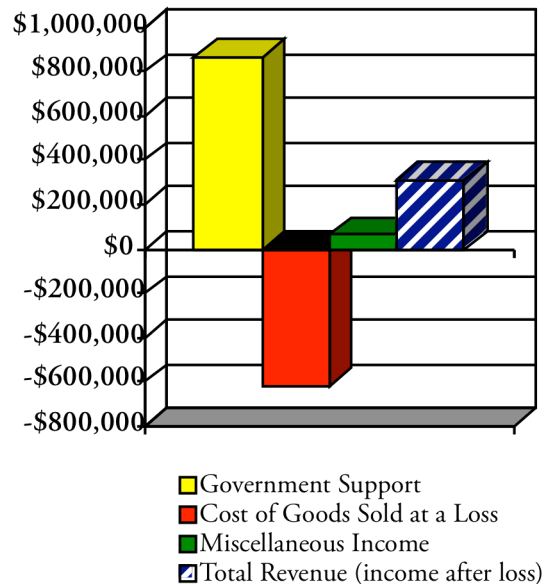
Government Contributions or Grants:
\$861,917⁴

Website: <http://www.choosingthebest.org>

Religious Affiliation: None avowed.

Key Publications: Choosing the Best WAY (Sixth Grade Curriculum and Accompanying Learning Materials); Choosing the Best PATH (Seventh and Eighth Grade Curriculum and Accompanying Learning Materials); Choosing the Best LIFE (Eighth and Ninth Grade Curriculum and Accompanying Learning Materials); Choosing the Best SOUL MATE (Eleventh and Twelfth Grade Curriculum and Accompanying Learning Materials); Choosing the Best Parent Training Program; Parents, Teens and SEX: The BIG TALK Book

**Choosing the Best
2004 Budget**



History

Choosing the Best was founded by husband and wife team Bruce and Donna Cook after Bruce developed a middle school sexual education curriculum for their son's school. Choosing the Best is comprised of two separate entities: Choosing the Best, Inc., a non-profit organization which focuses on abstinence education and training, and Choosing the Best Publishing LLC, a for-profit corporation which publishes, sells and distributes abstinence-only curricula and materials.

Influential abstinence education group Project Reality began using the curriculum in 1994. In 1998, Choosing the Best, Inc. received a five-year contract from the Georgia State Department of Education to write an abstinence only curriculum for grades six through nine and to provide teacher training.⁵ Choosing the Best has also received contracts from state agencies in Alabama and Oklahoma as well as several federal grants.⁶

Despite consistent federal and state funding, Choosing the Best has long been controversial. An early edition of the abstinence-only curriculum advised its readers to use Lysol on their genital after using a condom.⁷ Some parents groups have organized opposition to Choosing the Best. In 2004, parents in DeKalb County, Georgia successfully lobbied the school board to remove the Choosing the Best from the district's curriculum, citing its scientific errors, gender stereotypes and scare tactics. These parents have now formed Georgia Parents for Responsible Health Education, which aims to support other parents in ensuring that their children receive accurate comprehensive sexual health education.⁸

Regardless of the widespread criticism of Choosing the Best, including by the Waxman report⁹ and the non-profit Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS),¹⁰ it remains one of the most widely used abstinence-only curricula in the US.

Key Staff

Bruce Cook, President & Co-Founder

Cook received an undergraduate degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology and later earned an MBA from Harvard Business School. Cook previously served as the head of Rapha Services, a Christian-based counseling program.¹¹ From 2003 until 2005, Cook served as Chairman of the Board of the Georgia State Department of Health and Human Services, during which time he worked ardently to cut state family planning funding.¹² In 2005, Cook resigned from this position during intensifying speculation that he used his position to further the use of the Choosing the Best curriculum in Georgia schools. Cook denies these allegations.¹³ He is currently an advisor to the Georgia state government on the delivery of mental health and addiction services.¹⁴

Linda Hamrick, Director¹⁵

Hamrick is a long-time activist against comprehensive sexual education who once served as vice-president of the Georgia Christian Coalition and Executive Director of the Georgia State Republican Party. She is presently a lobbyist with Harris Payne & Associates.

In Their Own Words

Gender Roles

“Ask: How do guys view sex differently from girls? ([in the video], Guys say sex is more of a physical thing, that they are driven by hormones – testosterone – and peer pressure. Girls say sex is an emotional act, involving strong emotional feelings.)”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*¹⁶

“Guys can more easily focus on the physical side of sex without necessarily being in a relationship. Girls tend to have a broader view of sex that emphasizes the total relationship rather than the physical aspect alone.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*¹⁷

“A guy can more easily see something sexual and become aroused. Girls are generally stimulated by the whole event – several things happening together – such as words, personality, touch and physical setting. These actions engage her emotions.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*¹⁸

“In general guys have difficulty verbalizing their feelings because they don't connect feelings with actions. Girls, however, access both sides of the brain, so they more easily integrate feelings and emotions into the everyday situations in life.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*¹⁹ *

“A female sex drive tends to be more cyclical relating to the menstrual cycle.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*²⁰ *

“Although there are exceptions, teenage guys may view sex as separate from a personal relationship. Girls, however, tend to see sex as part of a larger emotional relationship with another person.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*²¹ *

“Since girls access both left and right sides of the brain at the same time; they have a greater capacity for emotional expression, feelings, and perceptions. In fact, women responding to a collegiate survey stated their number one dream date criterion was receiving emotional intimacy. In the same survey, men responded that their number one dream date criterion was receiving physical intimacy.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*^{22*}

“Guys are sexually stimulated through sight. ...Girls, however, generally are stimulated by the whole event – several things happening together.”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*²³ *

“Ask: What things might stimulate a girl sexually? (Romantic words, light touches, holding hands, a guy’s personality, a romantic setting, or a kind of action are just a few ideas. For girls, these need to happen together).”

- *Choosing the Best LIFE*²⁴ *

*** Denotes quotes taken from the 1st edition (2000), which do not appear in the 2nd (2003) edition.**

“Ask the class if they notice a difference in the way most guys carry books and the way most girls carry books. (Boys usually carry their books down by their sides. Girls usually cradle their books in their arms.) Next, ask everyone to look at his or her fingernails. Ask the class if they notice a difference in the way most guys look at their fingernails and the way most girls look at their fingernails. (Boys usually look at their fingernails with their fingers curled toward the palm. Girls look at their nails by holding their hands out-stretched in front of them.)”

- *Choosing the Best WAY*²⁵

“Why do guys hang out with other guys and ignore girls? Why do guys brag so much? Why do guys act silly and clam up around a girl? Why do guys pay so much attention to the way a girl looks?... Why do girls go to the bathroom together? Why do girls talk on the phone so much? Why do girls talk about guys all the time? Why do girls get their feelings hurt so easily?”

- *Choosing the Best WAY*²⁶

Scientifically Inaccurate or Misleading Statements

“Research shows that condoms fail an average of 14 percent of the time in preventing pregnancy. This means if a teen uses condoms for birth control during four years of high school, they will experience a cumulative failure rate of more than 50 percent.”

- *Choosing the Best Parent Training Program*²⁷

“Consistent condom use does not reduce the risk of HPV.”

- *Choosing the Best Parent Training Program*²⁸

Sources

- ¹ Bruce Cook, *Choosing the Best Life: Leader Guide*, 7 (2003).
- ² *About Us*, *Choosing the Best Website*, available at http://www.choosingthebest.org/about_us/index.html.
- ³ Note that *Choosing the Best* ran a deficit in 2004, see *IRS 990 Form, FY 2004: Choosing the Best*, available at <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/311/496/2004-311496092-01fc9d3c-9.pdf>.
- ⁴ *Id.*
- ⁵ *Supra* note 2.
- ⁶ *Supra* note 3.
- ⁷ Janice M. Irvine, *Talk About Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States*, 120 (2002).
- ⁸ For more about Georgia Parents for Responsible Health Education, see <http://www.gprhe.org>.
- ⁹ *The Content of Federally-Funded Abstinence Education Programs, Prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman*, Comm. on Government Reform (Minority Staff), U.S. House of Rep., Dec. 2004.
- ¹⁰ *SIECUS Curriculum Review: FACTS*, available at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/reviews/FACTS.html>.
- ¹¹ *Bruce E. Cook Bio*, *Choosing the Best Website*, available at http://www.choosingthebest.org/docs/CTB_Bruce_Cook_Bio.pdf.
- ¹² *State Profiles 2005: Georgia*, SIECUS Website, available at <http://www.siecus.org/policy/states/2005/mandates/GA.html>.
- ¹³ Craig Schneider, *DHR Leader to Step Down for New Post; Cook to Help Service Boards*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Mar. 26, 2005.
- ¹⁴ *Bruce E. Cook Bio*, *Choosing the Best Website*, available at http://www.choosingthebest.org/docs/CTB_Bruce_Cook_Bio.pdf.
- ¹⁵ J. Salzer, *Athenian Running State GOP Operation*, *Athens Daily News*, July 7, 1999.
- ¹⁶ *Supra* note 1 at 6.
- ¹⁷ *Id.* at 7.
- ¹⁸ *Id.*
- ¹⁹ *Id.*
- ²⁰ *Id.*
- ²¹ *Id.*
- ²² *Id.*
- ²³ *Id.*
- ²⁴ *Id.*
- ²⁵ *Id.* at 14.
- ²⁶ *Id.*
- ²⁷ Bruce Cook, *Choosing the Best Parent Training Program: Leader Guide*, 11 (2002).
- ²⁸ *Id.* at 12.