

Family Education Trust

(Family and Youth Concern)

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High Court judgment does young people no favours, says family group

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Family Education Trust regrets today's High Court ruling against Mrs Sue Axon. The Trust's Director, Norman Wells, commented:

'We very much regret today's judgment. It is only right and proper that parents of girls aged under 16 should be informed if their daughter is contemplating an abortion or any other major surgery or medical intervention. Parents are the primary protectors of their children, yet they are increasingly being sidelined in the name of "the right of the child to confidentiality".'

In a three day hearing during November, Sue Axon challenged Department of Health guidelines that permitted underage girls to have an abortion without the knowledge of their parents. She argued that the new guidance, issued in July 2004, effectively turned the House of Lords ruling in the 1985 Gillick case on its head. While the law lords ruled 20 years ago that it should be most unusual for parents *not* to be told when their children were accessing contraceptives, the government's revised guidance effectively says that it should now be unusual for parents *to be* told when their children are accessing contraceptives or seeking an abortion.

Norman Wells observed:

'Children and young people generally only want to conceal things from their parents when they are doing things that are not good for them. Health professionals are not doing young people any favours by helping them keep their parents in the dark. They are hardly encouraging them to value and respect their parents' role, and they are condoning underage sex with all its physical and emotional risks. Research from the United States shows that in places where mandatory parental involvement laws are in place, there has been a more rapid decrease in teenage sexual activity than in areas where confidentiality policies hold sway.'

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Trustees: Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P (Chairman); Betty, Lady Grantchester; Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)
Dr John Guly MB BS DMJ; Simon J Ling MA FCA (Hon Treasurer); Denis Riches BSc (Secretary);
Mrs Valerie Riches (Founder President); Dr Trevor Stammers BSc MRCGP; Robert Whelan MA

Sponsors: John Bonnar MA MD FRCOG; Peter Dawson OBE BSc FRSA; The Baroness Elles; The Duke of Montrose;
The Baroness O'Cathain OBE; Professor Dennis O'Keefe; Sir John Peel KCVO FRCS FRCP; J S Scott MD FRCS FRCOG

Mr Justice Silber's judgment serves only to reinforce the mixed messages being given out by government ministers. Last summer, Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, spoke of the need to get parents on board if teenage conception rates were to be reduced, yet the government's confidentiality policies are positively throwing parents overboard by excluding them from vital areas of their children's lives.

Norman Wells noted:

'The more the state undermines the authority of parents, the less responsibility parents will be inclined to take for their children. The government can't have it both ways: it can't disempower parents and at the same time blame them for society's ills. If the government wants parents to take proper responsibility for their children, it must first of all respect their authority.'

'The family unit is the basic building-block that lies at the foundation of a stable society. At a time when we are facing escalating social problems as a direct result of family breakdown, it is extraordinary that we should be persisting with an approach that is driving a firm wedge between parents and their children.'

'The way to address the growth in antisocial behaviour among young people, drug abuse, underage sexual activity and the spiralling rates of sexually transmitted infections is to show parents proper respect and encourage them to take their responsibilities seriously, not to remove them from the equation.'

For further information:

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Family Education Trust is an educational charity committed to promoting stable family life and the welfare of children and young people.

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