



CALLING IT OFF

SEX DOESN'T ALWAYS END AT SEX

By: [Charlotte Jusinski](#) 02/10/2010

Most would agree that love and sex are two of the most fun things on the face of the earth. But these fun things are also heavy things, and there are always possible consequences and bigger issues at stake. Local author Kate Buckley recognizes this and, with her 2009 young-adult novel **Choices**, brings one of the most heated and emotional debates in America and the world to the forefront: abortion.

Buckley has worked, both in California and New Mexico, as a support group facilitator and a teacher at Head Start programs for at-risk youth, many of whom are young girls dealing with sex, drugs, alcohol and abuse at a very young age.

Buckley was inspired to write *Choices* when she heard a news story in California about a 15-year-old girl who became pregnant and whose mother brought her into the clinic for an abortion.

"Didn't we see you in the picket line outside before?" the doctor asked the mother in the real-life scenario.

"This is different," the conservative mother replied. "This is my daughter."

Buckley loosely interpreted the story into a screenplay and submitted it to many networks in 1994; it was turned down as "too controversial."

As time passed, the abortion debate in America grew only more polarized. Once her own children reached high school age, Buckley became intimately acquainted with many issues teens face. So when she moved to New Mexico in 1998, she decided to adapt *Choices* into a young-adult novel.

In the story, 15-year-old Kara MacNeill, the daughter of right-wing, "anti-choice," deeply religious parents, gets drunk, is date-raped at a party and becomes pregnant. She wrestles with whether she should seek an abortion—and if so, how to go about doing so at a young age in a parental-consent state (the novel takes place in Colorado).

Interestingly enough, the book is not about politics or even about religion: "It's a book about beliefs," Buckley says. "You can be on a treadmill of belief until it becomes personal." She neither demonizes the Catholic Church, nor lionizes liberal feminists. Rather, she approaches the issue from all sides and focuses more on how to avoid such a situation all together, rather than how to deal with it after it's happened.

Buckley believes the key to teen safety is communication between kids and their parents. In the book, Kara believes she couldn't possibly talk to her parents about the boyfriend she sneaks out to see and the wild parties she goes to with him.

When she is violated, she doesn't immediately go to the two people whom, ideally, she should have gone to first.

"Once you lose that," Buckley says of communication, "you've lost everything."

Some recommendations Buckley makes are to always have your home open to your kids' friends. "So many kids don't want to bring their friends home to meet their parents," she says. "I always had a house where people could hang out. Getting to know the kids, then getting to know the parents of your child's friends is very important."

Additionally, teaching kids refusal skills is vital. Strangely enough, Kara, the character in the book, had never been taught to say no; sex and partying are such taboo topics in her house that they are never even mentioned. But the truth is that, no matter how sheltered children are, they will always be presented with an opportunity to make bad choices.

Buckley suggests parents urge their kid to use them as an excuse ("My mother will kill me! I'm going to be grounded for three months!") or to pretend to be high or drunk already ("My daughter was really good at that," Buckley says with a laugh) or to lie—to just say, "I'll be right back," leave the party and call your parents from your cell phone down the street. There are many options available to kids who don't want to look lame to their friends, but also don't want to drink.

The subjects surrounding the story of Choices are outlined in discussion questions at the end of the book, which is taught in schools and is kept in stock at school libraries in Santa Fe. The book treats its audience as intellectuals deserving respect. The book also can serve as a tool for parents who aren't sure how to approach these heavy subjects with their own kids.

"I was trying to get everyone to open up and look at it," Buckley says. "A lot of parents, in particular, thank me for writing it, because it allows them to talk to their kids without it being a hot button—because they're talking about Kara, a character."

Who Gets Abortions

40 million women since Jan. 22, 1973

56 percent are in their 20s

61 percent have had one child or more

67 percent have never been married

57 percent are economically disadvantaged

78 percent report a religious affiliation