

RELIGIOUS VALUES, BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS IN AGE-APPROPRIATE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

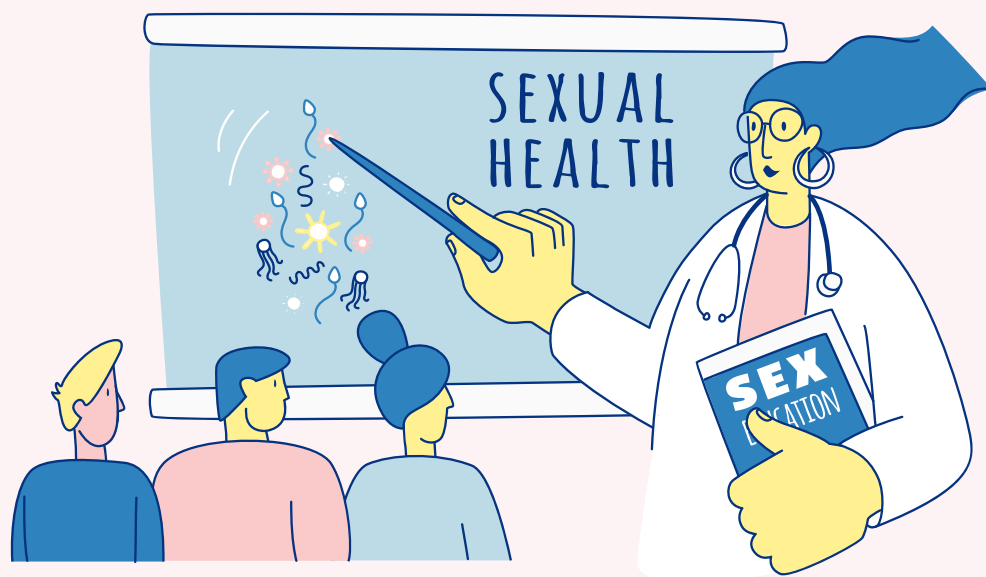
BRIEFING PAPER FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES



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PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF THE BRIEFING PAPER



WHAT ARE OUR CONCERNS FOR ADOLESCENTS' SEXUALITY HEALTH?

As faith communities, our values, beliefs and teachings are useful in shaping our day-to-day engagements. We remain connected to the challenges and complexities that face our members and the community at large. This proactive approach enables us to work towards a holistic approach to life, engaging with our members' concerns. We seek to spread messages and activities of love, compassion, care and unity that speak to every member of our community, whether old or young. We note that, it is only uncritical faith that would be rigid, intolerant and disregarding of communities' needs. The needs in question vary from one faith community to the other, but are also age sensitive. Health concerns constitute one aspect that may affect people of different ages, in different ways. One important example, and which is the concern for this briefing document, is Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR).

WHAT SEXUALITY HEALTH CHALLENGES DO OUR ADOLESCENTS FACE?

Adolescents remain a crucial group in our communities. They are the bearers of future generations and as such, their sexual health requires attention. As of 2020, there were an estimated 250 million adolescents (aged 10–19 years) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which is 20% of all adolescents worldwide. This figure is expected to rise to 24% by 2030.¹ We are aware of the vulnerability of this age. Adolescents face obstacles related to right knowledge and understanding on their health, especially Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Subsequently, this sub-set of the population faces risks of high rates of pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. They are also susceptible to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. A quick glimpse of statistics² that concern adolescent and young adult's sexuality give a clear image that justifies the need for sexuality education. A few highlights include:

1. Population Reference Bureau (PRB). (2021). World population data sheet. <https://interactives.prb.org/2021-wpds/> Accessed 7 May 2024.
2. This statistical data is sourced from: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2016., Universal Access to Reproductive Health: Progress and Challenge; and, UNHR. 2020. Information Series on sexual and reproductive health and rights. UNAIDS 2017. Sexual And Reproductive Health In Early And Later Adolescence: DHS Data On Youth Age 10–19. DHS Comparative Report 45. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/CR45/CR45.pdf>, Accessed 6 May 2024; PPF. Facts on the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Adolescent Women in the Developing World. <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/FB-Adolescents-SRH.pdf>. Accessed 6 May 2024. Unvited Nations Children's Fund, 2023. The State of the World's Children 2023. For every child, vaccination, UNICEF Innocenti-Global Office of Research and Foresight, Florence, Italy. <https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file/SOWC-2023-full-report-English.pdf>. Accessed 4 June 2024. UNFPA. (No Date). Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services. <https://wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-UNFPA-WCARO-MUSKOKA-AYSRRH-Brochure-WEB-1.pdf>. Accessed 6.05.2024.



Figure 1: Statistical Data on Adolescents in Africa.

Besides these statistics, we are aware of the fact that in many instances, policies that safeguard the SRHR of the young population, especially in developing nations, are either not in existence, or just exist on paper without proper implementation. In some cases, the policies do not allow for access of the services to young people.³ We note with concern these challenges that adolescents and youth face with their sexuality, and we have been to a great extent part of the solution, especially with regards to sexuality education.

WHAT THEN CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS BRIEFING DOCUMENT?

The briefing document aims to bring to the fore ways in which our faith communities are involved in ASRH. It exemplifies the training methods we use to empower adolescents to live healthy lives and live in respectful relationships. Through these examples, the document explains how our beliefs, values and teachings are key in adolescents' sexuality education. It reminds us that our faith, teachings and beliefs are meant to provide a framework for adolescents to navigate through life's concerns. Further, this guidance does not stop with religious teachings of adolescents but moves towards

3. UNFPA. (No Date). Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services. <https://wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-UNFPA-WCARO-MUSKOKA-AYSRHR-Brochure-WEB-1.pdf>. Accessed 6.05.2024.



advancing the need for our communities to reflect more and more on the concept of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and especially the emphasis that we should make regarding age and content appropriate information for our young people.

In advancing the need for us to learn from better practices, the briefing explains the co-existence of faith-led initiatives on ASRHR with other initiatives such as the UNESCO technical guidance on sexuality education.⁴ This way, it will remind our communities understand that CSE has existed in

African communities and cultures as far as the history of these communities go, and that variance in terminologies does not imply distinct differences in the content of this education.

The briefing also reminds us that as faith communities, we have a privileged position not just to offer, but also provide support for comprehensive sexuality education. Our faith leaders particularly, have advantaged positions and social status within communities that gives them better chances to provide support for comprehensive ASRHR education. This is because they can use their platforms to provide information that is guided by their values and beliefs to mainstream the right teachings in various sexual health topics for adolescents and youth. These platforms enable our communities to support relevant initiatives that empower adolescents to live healthy lives and have respectful relationships. The briefing evidences that we already have on-going faith-based work that is structured and well thought out. With proper support and partnerships to effectively offer the right sexuality education within the faith platforms and beyond, we aim to improve and strengthen ownership, and acceptability of CSE within communities. The briefing further helps us to learn from the challenges that we have faced so far, and use these as platforms for future opportunities in influencing acceptance and uptake of our activities and related education programmes in- and out of schools.

4. UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach. Revised edition. Paris: UNESCO, 2018. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



WHAT GUIDES OUR ENGAGEMENTS IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Our religious doctrines in the context of sexuality education

Religion and religious teachings remain important aspects in defining, particularly, the lives of communities across the world. Further, religious beliefs and doctrines are very particular in defining the moral standards of the followers. Since our faith sources from religious doctrines, we use the values, beliefs and teachings embedded in our doctrines to help shape the behaviour of our adolescents. Our approach as faith communities is therefore guided by our values and beliefs in moral upbringing of our children as we endeavour to bring up a generation of good morals. Our communities emphasize the

need for chastity, delay of sexual debut, but also care of adolescents by parents and other community members. This approach is aimed at safeguarding adolescents against sexual abuse and gender-based violence among other sexual ills. However, we are also abreast with the challenges that our young people face that are complicated by diverse socialization processes, peer pressure, technological access, social and economic hardships, among others.

OUR CULTURAL CONTEXTS

We are aware that our faith communities are situated within specific cultural contexts. Our cultural beliefs and practices therefore, contribute towards shaping the behaviour of our communities and, by extension, our adolescents. Culture and religion have co-existed for long, and there is always an effort to find harmony in this co-existence. We are therefore guided by cultures in shaping our adolescents' behaviours. We reiterate that sexuality education existed within traditional communities. It existed even before the advent of Christianity,



Islam and other religions. It is still in use in a number of communities to date. This traditional sexuality education to some extent continues to shape the present forms of sexuality education, emphasizing the important place of cultural beliefs and practices within communities. This is to say that people's worldviews and belief systems sometimes blend to shape the belief systems and practices. We note that although this remains important in the development of communities; while paying attention to sexuality education, these processes should not lose focus of the aim of comprehensive sexuality education, which is to ensure that the target groups are well empowered to live healthy and respectful lives.

THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Our education systems, both formal and informal, have co-existed with religious teachings. In fact, in most primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa, where our young people are taught, education and faith teachings seem to go hand in hand. These are therefore readily available tools that educators, whether from faith or formal school systems, are using to engage adolescents and youth in sexuality education. Faith communities are aware that formal sexuality education, which bears different terminologies in different countries/

contexts, is tailored through a scientific approach to ensure comprehensive coverage of issues that address adolescents' health. This form of education facilitates healthy and respectful relationships. With this understanding, we need to educate our communities to know that there should be no conflict and competition between faith-led initiatives and those led by governments and other agencies with an aim of attaining similar goals.

WHY IS SEXUALITY EDUCATION IMPORTANT TO US?

Some reasons render religious leaders important in advocating for and providing sexuality education within their communities. A few of these include the fact that:

- a. Faith leaders are community leaders. They command the attention of members;
- b. Their opinions, in most cases, are taken seriously;
- c. They are among the first moral leaders of children and adolescents;
- d. Their leadership moves beyond the confines of their congregations. Besides teachers and parents, many adolescents and young adults listen closely to their faith leaders;
- e. They are close and in touch with their communities, and if bridges are needed to facilitate talks with communities on adolescents' sexual health, they are well positioned;
- f. They also have wider connections – social and political – and as such can act as the link with their communities.
- g. Their moral authority enables them demystify taboos and other beliefs around sexual topics and encourage communities to open up about the challenges that face them;
- h. They are consulted far beyond religious and spiritual issues.
- i. They are perceived as educators and their advice on religious beliefs, attitudes and practices remain important in sexual health of adolescents and young adults.

WHY THEN SHOULD WE COMMIT OUR RESOURCES FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION?



It is our calling to remain relevant as "the salt of the world" in our communities. Subsequently, we cannot remain insensitive to sexuality challenges that by our young people face. We are aware that this young generation requires not just moral education relating to their sexuality but also awareness of their rights, and services available to help them navigate through these challenges. We, therefore, have the potential to educate them that ASRHR is about knowledge of information and skills that enable them make positive and healthy decisions, for themselves and others. If this approach is enshrined within our faith beliefs, values and teachings, our adolescents will grow as healthy beings who respect themselves and others. A number of factors are responsible for the need to use faith-based platforms, tools and approaches to educate adolescents and youth on SRHR. A few are highlighted below:

a. The need to help adolescents gain knowledge and understanding on ASRH

As we have already seen, the statistics available on adolescent sexuality are already a warning to us that there are things we must do to help them. Besides the statistics, the challenges are evident within our families and communities. If we observe our homes, our neighbours', our streets, our villages, towns and cities, our faith spaces, every evidence is presented to us that there is a challenge with ASRH. There is clearly a need for us to engage our young people for them be all-round in knowledge and understanding on how to live healthy lives.

Our doctrines are useful in providing a foundational basis for morality that is a contributing factor to healthy lives. As such, the Bible, the Quran and other religious books, have provisions that guide faith communities in helping the youth in their morals, importance of life and relationships, confidence and self-esteem, wisdom in making life choices. A few examples of such texts and their contributions are cited below:⁵

Table 1: Biblical texts and their contribution to youth's morality and their rights⁶

Verse	Contribution
Proverbs 3:1, Proverbs 5:7-14, and Proverbs 22:6	Emphasize the importance of wisdom, discipline, and training up a child.
Exodus 20:13-14; 1Corinthians 6:18	Address the sanctity of life and the avoidance of immoral behaviour
1 Timothy 4:11-16	Encourages youth not to be despised
Luke 2:41-52,	Underscores the significance of parental responsibility.
1 Thessalonians, the Song of Solomon, Psalms, 2 Timothy 2:22	Contribute to the Christian perspective on youth, morality, and familial relationships.
Luke 15:11-32	The parable of the prodigal son: highlights the themes of repentance, forgiveness, and the challenges faced by the younger generation

Table 2: Quran texts and their contribution to youth's need for wisdom and knowledge

Verse	Contribution
Surah Taha (20: 114)	My Lord! Enrich me with wisdom - emphasis on searching for knowledge. Indeed, seeking knowledge is one of the requirements that comes with being a Muslim. [1]
Qur'an, 58:11	God will raise up, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge: He is fully aware of what you do.
Qur'an, 45:13	He has subjected all that is in the heavens and the earth for your benefit, as a gift from Him. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect.
Prophet Muhammad, PBUH	Whoever takes a path in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to walk in one of the paths to Paradise. In deed the angels will lower their wings in great pleasure with the one who seeks knowledge. ⁸
(Quran 39: 9).	Are they equal to those who know, and those who do not know?

5. Faith to Action Network (2024). Religious Values, Beliefs and Teachings on Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

6. Faith to Action Network (2023): 8. See also, inter alia, Proverbs 1:5; Jeremiah 3:15; Proverbs 22:17; Proverbs 23:12; Philippians 1:9; Exodus 31:3; 2 Peter 1: 5; Yasin, Z. et al. 2023. The Importance of Seeking Knowledge in Islam: A Literature Review. International Journal of Social Science And Human Research 6(5): 3061–3066.

7. Yasin, Z. et al. 2023. The Importance of Seeking Knowledge in Islam: A Literature Review. International Journal of Social Science And Human Research 6(5): 3061–3066.

8. Ramlan, L. S. 2021. Importance of seeking knowledge in Islam. 03 November. Available at <https://simplyislam.academy/blog/seeking-knowledge-in-islam>.

b. Awareness of faith communities about youth's sexual rights

As faith communities, we are aware of rights of human beings, and specifically adolescents. Even though most of the adolescents remain under the care of their parents and guardians, they, just like all other human beings, have rights. These are provided for, within our religious doctrines and by the State. Of importance for us is the need to educate adolescents on harmful sexual practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, the sexualization of girls, taboos around menstruation and menstrual



health, among others. While doing this, we should encourage our faith communities and especially male leaders to show the way and to advocate for the equal rights of girls and boys. The following are examples of rights that we can learn from, that speak to the challenges that face adolescents and which if granted, may help resolve some of the sexuality challenges facing them. These rights are consistent with our values and teachings.

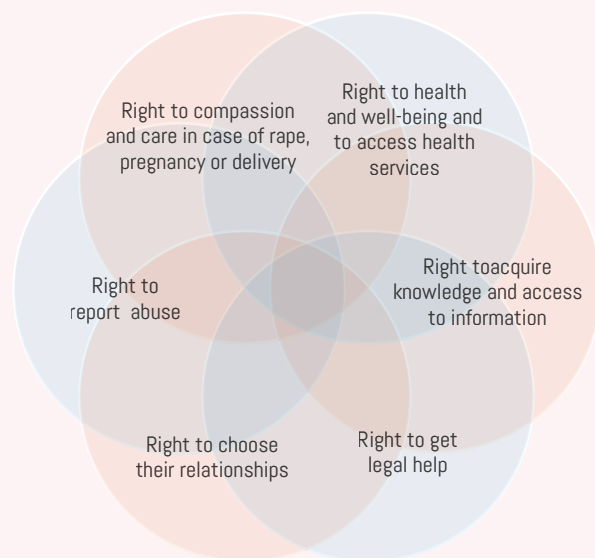


Figure 2: Selected Rights Regarding SRH among adolescents and youth

The theological and ethical perspectives around Sexual diversity continue to be a divisive theme between and within faith communities alike. However, the Faith to Action Network and its' members are grounded in a human rights-approach; all human beings should be respected equally irrespective of anybody's faith, nationality, age, gender or sexual orientation. The dignity and the psychological and physical integrity of each person, should be protected, regardless of their expressed identity. We believe that none of our religions, faiths and beliefs permit hatred, stigma, discrimination or violence. We emphasize the need for faith leaders to speak in one voice and to help our faith communities understand that all are our children; they need to be guided in love and compassion as they navigate through life.

c. Mission of faith communities to preserve health and well-being of adolescents

Our mandate as faith communities is to provide holistic and life-giving teachings as well as services to adolescents. If we act in love, care and compassion, not just providing teachings but the needed services when and where possible, this holistic approach will help them evade actions that endanger their lives. Thus, "Religious actors would like to prevent health complications such as fistulas, early pregnancies, raising responsible young people," thus:⁹



Advocates for non-violence (Ahimsa) and compassion towards all beings, including children. The first precept in Buddhism is to refrain from harming living beings. Buddhism

"Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." - Psalm 82:4



"And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, 'Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?'" Surah 4:75

We acknowledge our limitations, especially in service provision, and as such our approach to training and providing of services requires partnerships, especially if we are to ensure comprehensive education and service provision to our adolescents.



d. Our knowledge on the importance of engaging parents/guardians and other stakeholders

Our efforts to engage different stakeholders in sexuality education should be on-going as encouraged through the socio-ecological model which espouses the involvement of various stakeholders seen in the diagram below. At the individual level, we train adolescents to take responsibility of themselves and others in order to live healthy lives. Our approach also encourages the family and peers of the adolescents to be involved in the education process. Parents bear the greatest responsibility of guiding since they are the immediate care takers and leaders in adolescents' lives.

9. Faith to Action Network. 2023. Report: Side-event at the 2023 Inter-religious convention: Safely navigating adolescence: A roundtable discussion on adolescents' needs for information on sexual and reproductive health rights. Nairobi: Faith to Action Network Secretariat. 6.



Figure 3: The socio-ecological model approach for sexuality education¹⁰

We appreciate that faith-centred sexuality education co-exists with other forms of

education. For instance, the school remains key in implementing the in-school curriculum. This is important as many adolescents go through formal education process and can gain much from this training. Equally important is the role of governments in enhancing laws and policies that facilitate a conducive environment for implementation of right policies and providing services relevant for ASRH. We, faith communities, remain important in providing and supporting implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). Our beliefs around what CSE is, and what it does in the lives of adolescents should be clear. We remain open to educate and affirm the relevance of CSE that liberates our young people in a holistic manner. We also undertake to journey with and support out of school adolescents and young people with age appropriate sexuality education.

10. This model is adopted from Rutgers GTA Module 2: Gender Transformative Approach and Comprehensive Sexuality Education, p. 8. <https://rutgers.international/resources/rutgers-gta-toolkit-module-2/>, Accessed 8 May 2024.

OUR ROLE IN DEMYSTIFYING CSE

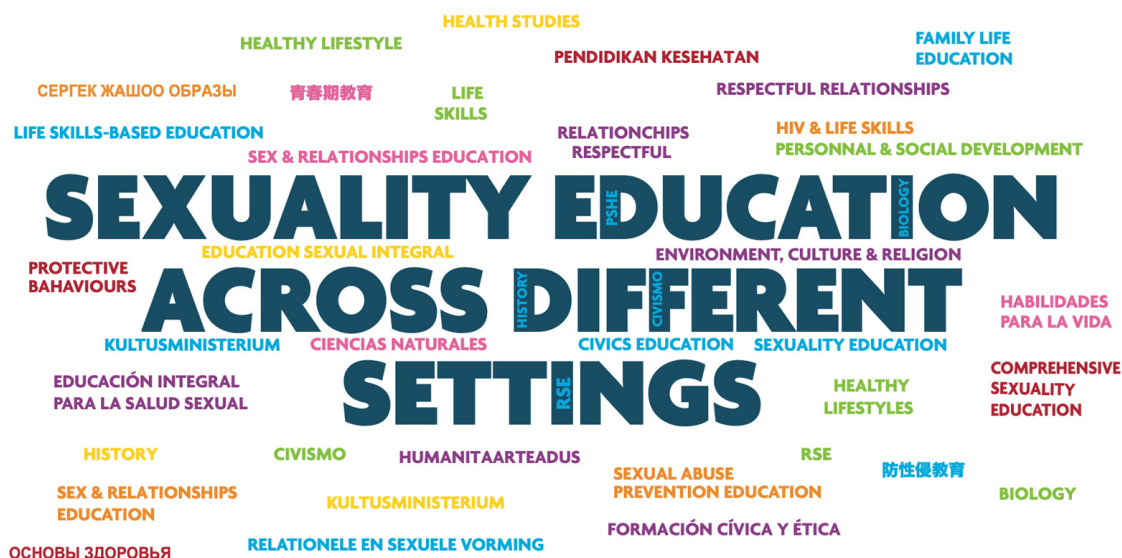


Figure 4: Alternative Terminologies for CSE¹¹

We understand that the term "sexuality" in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) may raise concerns within our faith communities due to cultural and religious backgrounds. However, it's important to clarify that "sexuality" encompasses a broad spectrum of human development and well-being, including the understanding of relationships, respect for oneself and others, and personal safety. It is crucial to provide children, adolescents, and youth with age-appropriate knowledge and guidance to support their healthy development, rather than misinterpret the term as solely related to sex.

Sexuality education has been part of communities long before Christianity, other religions, and formal education. Different cultures had their own ways of teaching boys and girls about sexuality. This

doesn't mean their methods were weak. Today, it is recognized that we use different terms for sexuality education, but none is less important than the others. The choice of terms depends on what the involved groups agree on.

Our earnest call is for us as faith leaders and other stakeholders to take note of issues that divert the attention from what CSE is. UNESCO defines comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. We therefore understand that the main aim of tailoring and implementing CSE is to equip learners with the following targets that are important in empowering them:

11. https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hrp/379607.pdf?sfvrsn=5b6761dc_7&download=true Accessed 7 May 2024. P.14

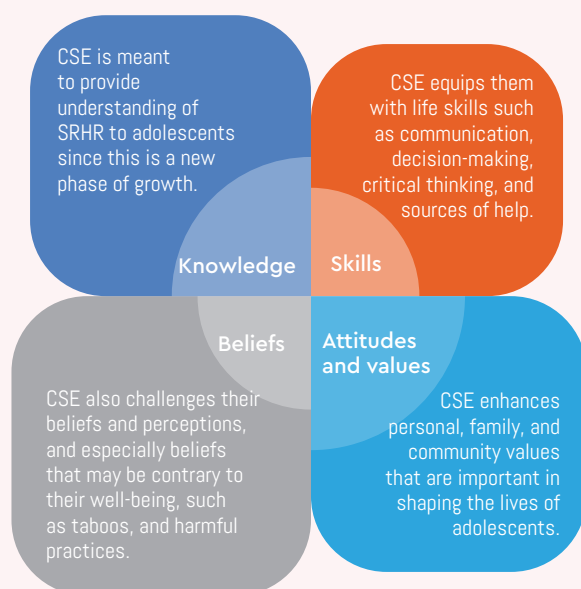


Figure 5: Targets of the CSE Framework

Through the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs, learners are empowered to:

- Realize their health, well-being and dignity;
- Develop respectful social and sexual relationships;
- Consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and,
- Understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.¹⁴

As faith communities, we appreciate the role of knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes and values as contained in the international technical guidance on sexuality education because they contribute not just to their well-being but that of others too. Research has shown that CSE helps learners delay the age of sexual initiation, protecting themselves if they are sexually active, decreasing their risk-taking, and is five (5) times more likely to be successful

in preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections when it addresses the topics of gender and power more directly.¹⁵ This partly contributes to the greater agenda of our faith communities in ensuring that adolescents and young adults abstain, keep healthy relationships and avoid risky sexual behaviours. As faith communities, we should therefore be at the forefront to provide and support knowledge that helps to provide a balance between religious and cultural beliefs as well as upholding human rights.

We also acknowledge that CSE speaks to the need for inclusivity for those going through various challenges posed by sexual development and growth. We are better placed to provide and support relevant teachings that speak to love, compassion, care, motivation, encouragement, and guidance for adolescents at this crucial stage of their development by encouraging a comprehensive understanding of their sexuality. We further acknowledge the need for age- and content-appropriate CSE.

BUT WHAT IS AGE AND CONTENT-APPROPRIATE SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Part of the challenge by some of our faith communities has been the fear of what comprehensiveness of sexuality education entails, and whether such education will expose young learners to issues of sexuality that are beyond their age. To this end, there has been an emphasis on age-appropriate content.¹⁶ In delivering content of the concepts presented below, age should always be considered as a critical factor. The age and content-appropriate CSE entails teaching about a wide range of topics under the concepts presented below, using language that is sensitive to age, yet accurate, realistic and non-judgmental to adolescents.¹⁷

12. UNESCO. 2018. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach. Paris: UNESCO.

13. Unesco, 2018. International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770> Accessed 7 May 2024.

14. UNESCO. 2018. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach. Paris: UNESCO.

15. UNESCO. 2023. Comprehensive Sexuality Education: For healthy, informed and empowered learners. Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/health-education/cse#:~:text=CSE%20is%20five%20times%20more,care%20and%20support%20for%20children>, accessed 5 May 2024.

16. See, e.g., Faith to Action Network 2019–2020 Annual Report: 11.

17. UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators. Paris: UNESCO, 2009. Unesco, 2021. The journey towards comprehensive sexuality education: Global status report. https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hrp/379607.pdf?sfvrsn=5b6761dc_7&download=true Accessed 7 May 2024.



Figure 6: CSE Key Concepts for Age-Appropriate CSE¹⁸

For a good understanding of CSE, we reiterate that stakeholder involvement is important. This is at the level of preparation and implementation of CSE. We are aware that in most cases, where these partnerships are needed faith leaders have been involved. This has been with an aim of building consensus and laying off any fears and misconceptions that may exist about CSE. Using these opportunities, as faith communities we also ensure a culturally and religiously sensitive content for CSE. We have also had the opportunity to learn from the basic characteristics of CSE as contained in the international technical guidance on sexuality education:¹⁹

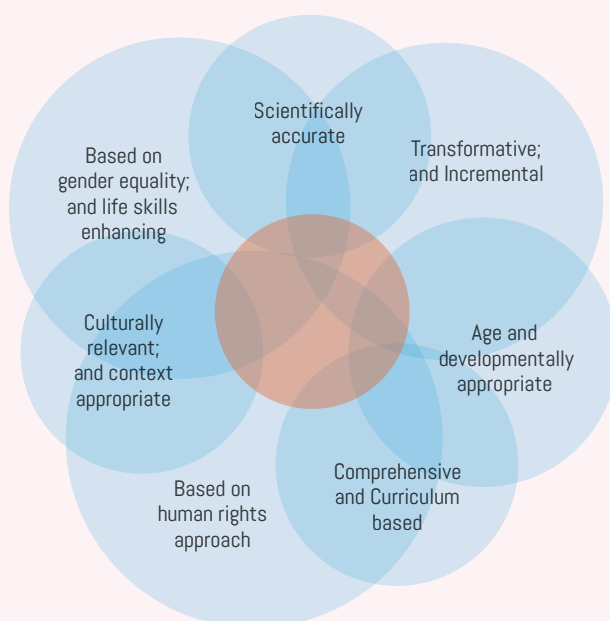


Figure 7: Characteristics for CSE as per the UN technical guidance

We need to remind ourselves that our concerns for adolescents' well-being are anchored on our religious values and beliefs. Our cultural contexts also remain important in determining how we should communicate to our adolescents about their sexuality. Nevertheless, we should also know that it remains important to focus on what has been scientifically proven as required content for adolescents. We need to reflect on these factors more and more as we strengthen our approach



to the sexuality education. If we reflect on the key concepts and characteristics of CSE as presented above, and expand on the positive messaging on ASRHR using the faith platforms, we will be providing a holistic guidance to our adolescents. For this to effectively happen, capacity strengthening through trainings, dialogues, and value clarification processes²⁰ for our members and other relevant stakeholders is important.

18. Unesco, 2021. The journey towards comprehensive sexuality education: Global status report. https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hrp/379607.pdf?sfvrsn=5b6761dc_7&download=true Accessed 7 May 2024.

19. Unesco, 2018. International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770> Accessed 7 May 2024.

20. Wilkinson, O., S. Trotta, C. S. Nam. 2019. Faith Actor Partnerships in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Scoping Study. Washington DC; Bonn: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI); International Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD). Available at https://jlicf.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/191217_PaRD_SDG3_Scoping-Study.pdf, accessed 5 May 2024 Faith to Action Network (2024). Religious Values, Beliefs and Teachings on Comprehensive Sexuality Education. P. 7.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO ADOLESCENTS' CSE



THE ROLE OF OUR RELIGIOUS VALUES, BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS IN RELATION CSE

All over the world as faith communities, we share certain values such as love, peace, stewardship, justice, compassion, among others. These values express what we believe to be good or bad and the course of action for humanity. Passing appropriate knowledge and wisdom through CSE is part and parcel of our faith's mission as seen from different doctrines as exemplified here:

We note that if these teachings, values and belief systems are properly engrained within the right scientifically proven and accepted content for adolescents' sexuality education, they will strengthen ASHR messaging for holistic empowerment of adolescents.

We are also aware that most of our teachings as faith communities revolve around purity, chastity and abstinence, thus:

From these and other teachings that touch on religious moral guidance, our faith communities are aware that:²¹

- Adolescents will be empowered by the values that they gain from religion to respond to the various themes in CSE.
- The interpretation of religious values help us as faith communities to engage in/promote/resists CSE.
- Our different religions should be sensitive to how their internal dynamics are likely to influence adoption of CSE.
- Personal faith commitment of professionals such as teachers may influence the delivery of CSE.²²
- The teachers and administrators in schools are members of faith communities and can experience conflicts in relation to religion, cultural background and gender inequality in implementing CSE.²³

21. Faith to Action Network (2024). Religious Values, Beliefs and Teachings on Comprehensive Sexuality Education. P. 7.

22. Mahoso, T. and M. Finestone. 2023. Teachers' perceptions on teaching comprehensive sexuality education in early grades in Chipinge, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Education* 91: 62–63.

23. Shibuya, F. et al. 2023. The process of overcoming conflicts among teachers in the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education at ordinary public senior high schools in Mataram City, Indonesia: a qualitative study. *Tropical Medicine and Health* 51:7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41182-023-00495-y>

These lessons should inform ways in which we champion and advocate for better provision of CSE. The lessons should help us see the need to continually engage with our communities and advocate for CSE that is age- and content-appropriate, and which is also religious- and cultural-sensitive.

Learning from existing faith-based approaches to sexuality education

As faith communities, we are keen to borrow from what other faith-based communities are doing. We note the active involvement of different religions as well as faith-based agencies in training adolescents and youth on sexuality education using diverse approaches including:

a. Use of Religious Texts

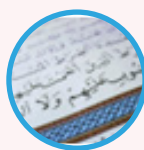
The inclination of different religions is to use religious texts, and interpretations as source of authority. This is because texts are seen as source of knowledge and wisdom thus:



Proverbs 22: 6

Train up a child in the way that he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Hadith, (narrated by Al-bukhaari, 5649; Muslim, 2629)...Whoever is in charge of any of these girls and treats them well, they will be a shield for him against the fire...



Faith leaders within our communities therefore utilise the sacred texts, beliefs and teachings of their traditions to empower adolescents and youth to navigate through the challenges of growing up, thus:



Parents and teachers play a crucial role in guiding and educating children, not just academically but also morally and ethically. The concept of Right Livelihood in Buddhism emphasizes ethical conduct in all professions, including teaching. Buddhism

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." - Deuteronomy 6:6-7



"O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones..." Surah 66:6

We reckon that the use of texts may also provide a source of compassion for young people. An example that suffices here is the need for us to respond to the stigmatisation of teenage girls when they fall pregnant out of wedlock. Thus: "Our value systems compel us to demonstrate love and compassion to our daughters in their hour of need,"²⁴ Many religious texts are in support of this compassion and love as exemplified in a few texts below:



Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." - Colossians 4:6



"And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful." Surah 31:18



Encourages mindful and compassionate communication. The practice of Right Speech (part of the Noble Eightfold Path) guides followers to speak truthfully, kindly, and beneficially.. Buddhism

24. Faith to Action Network et al. n.d. Interfaith Brief on Teenage Pregnancy: "We will walk every step with our Children": Southern African Faith Leaders Commit to Respond to Teenage Pregnancy. Available at <https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Interfaith-Brief-on-Teenage-Pregnancy.pdf>. P.4.

b. Faith-based Training Manuals (tool-kits)

Some faith communities have ASRHR manuals and tool-kits tailored in a way that besides providing the required knowledge on adolescent sexuality, they also use religious texts that speak to their values and belief systems. The manuals are tailored to provide guidance to faith leaders who are involved in ASRHR training for young people. The modules in the manuals transition the learners from one topic to another. They also provide training tips that include ways in which facilitators can group participants to offer exercises that are age relevant. Two examples from the UNESCO-INERELA and Faith to Action Network manuals are as seen below:

UNIT 1:	Introduction - Using Religious Leader Position to Support Young People
UNIT 2:	Sex and Gender
UNIT 3:	Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology
UNIT 4:	Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights
UNIT 5:	Puberty
UNIT 6:	Menstrual Health Management
UNIT 7:	Healthy Relationships and Positive Sexual Behaviour
UNIT 8:	Sexually Transmitted Infections and their Prevention
UNIT 9:	Teen Pregnancy
UNIT 10:	Child Marriage
UNIT 11:	Gender-based Violence against Adolescent and Youths
UNIT 12:	Alcohol and Substance abuse
UNIT 13:	Counselling

Figure 8: Sample 1 of ASRHR Content in a FBO Training Manual.

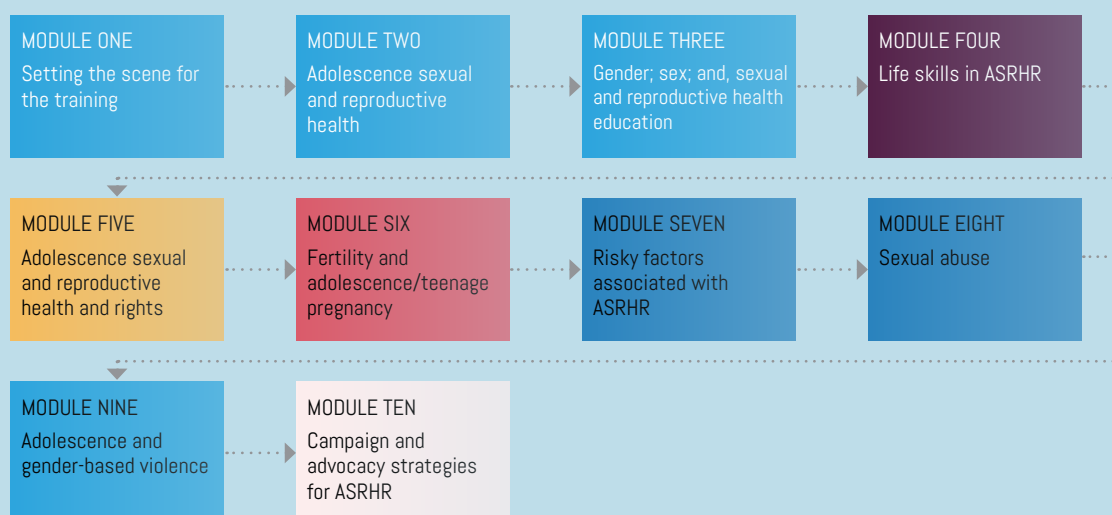


Figure 9: Sample 2 of ASRHR Content in a FBO Training Manual

These are just two samples of training manuals presented to us. We see them as faith-centred curriculum for ASRHR training. There are others that are also religious-specific such as the Age-Appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education manual by the Kenya Muslim Youth Development Organisation (KMYDO). To contribute to the greater agenda for CSE, we are encouraged to compare these manuals to the content offered by other institutions and organizations as we aim to create avenues to engage with these stakeholders for an improved sexuality education for our young people.

c. Use of Interfaith-Based Approaches

As faith communities, we need to be in conversation with each other concerning health challenges that affect our adolescents. Subsequently, interfaith dialogue and approaches to training our adolescents are important because we cannot segregate them for sexuality education according to their faith backgrounds. The interfaith dialogue further remains important because ASRH presents contentious issues to us as faith communities and therefore there is a need to discuss and agree. Some of the ASRH issues flagged as contentious, and which our communities should engage in include:

On these issues, we note that if our communities give candid interfaith dialogue priority, the following may be achieved:

- Consensus building on these controversial topics and how to deliver these to adolescents and youth.
- Interfaith approach to training so that the trainers and participants find and feel a sense of belonging.
- A basis to show that ASRHR is at the centre of religious, family, school and community discussions.
- Diverse religious perspectives that help pursue the right course for adolescents' sexual health and well-being.

d. Use of Appropriate Training Forums

We run different forums for ASRH training. Some of our communities have integrated the trainings into their youth activities in their religious platforms. Others use holiday camps, yet others choose to organize seminars. On delivery of the content, the trainings may be carried out by faith leaders, who have been trained to train the adolescents. Our communities may also use experts in the area of reproductive health, many of whom are members of these faith



Figure 10: Contentious Issues in CSE

communities. There have also been partnerships with community health organizations to organize the trainings. Others are involved in school programs on ASRHR. We are keen to note that these engagements may benefit more from continued improvement of the training content through borrowing from the international technical guidance on sexuality education, as well as other stakeholders.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR FAITH-CENTRED SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

We affirm that age-appropriate sexuality education our faith communities as well as other stakeholders, in and out of school would enable adolescents and youth to:

- Live healthy and respectful lives, and in turn respect others;
- Develop better and healthy interpersonal relationships;
- Make healthy decisions, now and in the future about their sexual health;
- Protect themselves against harassment, coercion and abuse;
- Protect themselves against all forms of STIs, and seek for health services when need be;
- Avoid unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions;
- Regularly attend to their education, with support from their parents and guardians;
- Communicate better about their sexual health needs;
- Understand their sexual rights as young persons;
- Be aware of shared social and cultural values and social norms that may affect their sexuality such as female genital mutilation (FGM), early and forced marriages and gender-based violence (GBV);
- Advocate for their rights and those of others, especially the marginalized groups.

LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCES



WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE WE FACED AS FAITH COMMUNITIES AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR US?

A number of challenges face our communities in an effort to provide sexuality education to our

adolescents. However, we may counter these challenges by taking a number of steps to strengthen our approaches. Our challenge and possible countering strategies are presented in table 3 below:

Table 3: Challenges and Possible Opportunities for CSE

Challenge	Possible countering strategy/opportunities
Lack of access to the right CSE training tools/manuals	Our communities should strengthen opportunities for interfaith collaboration and dialogues and encourage co-creation of resources for use in training.
Circulation of conservative religious and political agenda	If we have well trained communities, then it will be possible to discern right and wrong messages. This challenge therefore calls for capacity enhancement both for our leaders and our communities.
Dictatorial Religious hierarchical structures	Our faith communities and their partners should engage the top-level leadership in decision-making and training workshops for trainers on CSE.
Financial and human resource constraints	We endeavour to form partnerships with community health workers, community health organizations and donors with similar interests. We also aim to create interest in faith leaders to continually attend training workshops that relate to sexual health.

Technological advancement – adolescents relying on this more	We aim to challenge the older generations, and especially trainers, to make use of technology in training sessions.
Generational gaps in knowledge	We encourage inter-generational conversations and engage adolescents and youth in tailoring programs that target them, and advocacy strategies.
Cultural barriers	In tailoring training materials, we aim to make use of culture and context-specific examples to these find acceptability by target communities.
Ethical concerns and the need to get a buy-in from parents.	We encourage comprehensive sensitization and exposure of the training manuals to parents and other stakeholders, for avoidance of doubt.
Varied opinions about the diverse manuals and curricula for schools, faith communities and others	This calls for concerted efforts towards harmonization of the content by the different stakeholders. We encourage conversations that help in find acceptance of training materials both on the religious platforms and in and out of schools.
Limited access to accurate information on CSE	There is a need to borrow from other related efforts while remaining true to our call. There are a number of programmes that are already in existences, especially those that are internationally accepted and learning from these may help us.
Perceived threats to parental authority	The need for stakeholder engagement in our communities remains key. This briefing has called for a reflection on socio-ecological model that encourages involvement of all stakeholders in sexuality education.

