

# PUTTING SEXUALITY BACK INTO COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

## Tips for delivering sex-positive workshops for young people

### Introduction

We know that millions of young people around the world are not getting the kind of education they need and deserve when it comes to understanding their sexuality. Young people (like Dennis, quoted above) tell us that if they do receive sexuality education it is often too little, too late, and too biological. To be truly 'comprehensive' and relevant to young people's lives, good education should go beyond 'pregnancy and infections' to also encourage young people to think critically about gender, relationships, communication, and their own sexual rights and desires. At IPPF we don't think sexuality education should only talk about the risks of sex, but should also empower young people to engage in happy, healthy relationships and to have fulfilling and consensual sexual experiences.

This document is designed to complement IPPF's *Putting sexuality back into Comprehensive Sexuality Education: making the case for a rights-based, sex-positive approach*,<sup>i</sup> which provides background and justification for the importance of talking about sex and sexuality in CSE. The document you are reading now aims to give practical tips for putting this 'rights-based, sex-positive approach' into practice in a range of educational



“The only thing I was taught about sexual and reproductive health was biological – the names of the private parts and the fact that during intercourse the male gametes travel to the female’s ovaries and fertilisation takes place. I kid you not, that’s all most of us in Guyana will learn about sex in a school setting.”<sup>ii</sup>

DENNIS GLASGOW, PEER EDUCATOR AT THE GUYANA RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD ASSOCIATION

settings. Young peer educators from IPPF Member Associations have contributed to and reviewed these tips and resources for other educators wishing to include positive aspects of sexuality in their work.

‘Throughout the world too few young women and men, including those who are living with HIV, receive anything approaching adequate preparation for adult sexual life. In many HIV and AIDS curricula, discussion of sex is simply avoided or else the focus is placed, often exclusively, upon the potential negative consequences of sex. The positive values of life, such as pleasure and reciprocity, are conspicuous in their absence, despite their health promoting potential.’

UNESCO, REVIEW OF SEX, RELATIONSHIPS AND HIV EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS<sup>iii</sup>

## Why is it important to provide positive education about sexuality?

From a very young age, children and young people are interested in sexuality – from showing curiosity about where babies come from, to, at an older age, starting to experiment with their own sexual and romantic relationships. It's important that CSE does not shy away from talking about sexual issues, so that young people can get answers to their questions and make informed choices.

The elements of a sex positive approach in CSE laid out in *Putting sexuality back into Comprehensive Sexuality Education: making the case for a rights-based, sex-positive approach* include: **sexual confidence, sexual literacy, empowerment, competence** and **solidarity**. Confidence and competence do not just mean feeling ready and able to have sex, but having self-esteem and communication skills and feeling empowered to make informed choices, about sex but also wider sexual health and rights issues.

### YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO ACCURATE AND RELEVANT INFORMATION

Young people deserve accurate and non-stigmatising information about sex, so that they are able to make informed choices about their own lives. We know that 'abstinence-only' programmes, which aim to deter young people from sexual activity before marriage (and often present a fairly negative view of sex outside of this context) are not 'effective' at delaying or stopping young people having sex, and may even reduce their likelihood of using condoms or contraception when they do become sexually active.<sup>iv</sup> Silence and stigma around sex can mean that young people do not receive accurate information from their parents, or from their school. Good quality CSE should give young people the information they need and help them know where to go when they do need help, rather than be too scared to access health services.



"Young people can access information on the internet and even from friends. To save them from misconceptions, which are likely to come up from these sources and even from older ones who might want to take advantage of them for lack of knowledge, there is the need to give them comprehensive information on sex."

AKHARIGEYA ATABINORE JOSHUA, PEER EDUCATOR AT PLANNED PARENTHOOD ASSOCIATION OF GHANA

### SEX IS PART OF LIFE

The vast majority of people have one or more sexual relationships in their life. Masturbation is common around the world. Even young people who are not yet sexually active will have questions about sex, gender and relationships based on what they see around them. With more and more young people going online there is increased access to pornography and sexual images and information. It's crucial that young people have the support they need to help them navigate sometimes confusing messages about sexuality in the media and to know fact from fiction.

The median age young women around the world report having had their first experience of sexual intercourse ranges from 15 to 23. The 'Stat Compiler' from USAID<sup>v</sup> gives statistics from around the world which might be useful for your CSE work. [www.statcompiler.com/en/](http://www.statcompiler.com/en/)

### SEX IS NOT JUST FOR REPRODUCTION

For many of us, 'sexuality education' is limited to a basic biology lesson on the reproductive system. However, this doesn't help young people think about wider issues such as relationships, consent and sexual pleasure. It also isn't helpful to just equate sexuality with reproduction – most of the sex happening around the world is not done with the intention of making babies! There are a number of reasons that people choose to have sex, and lots of ways to have sex which do not lead to pregnancy and this should be reflected in CSE so that it's truly inclusive for all.

### SEX SHOULD BE SAFE AND WANTED

If young people don't learn about positive sexual experiences and relationships it will be harder for them to identify negative experiences and to know what they do and don't want. To speak honestly about sexuality is to talk to young people about communication and consent, and to work to examine gender and power and prevent violence and coercion. Young people need to be able to recognise abuse and know that they have a right to report it and seek support.

‘Sex-positive approaches strive to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, sex-positive approaches acknowledge and tackle the various concerns and risks associated with sexuality without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo of young people’s sexuality and gender inequality.’

IPPF, KEYS TO YOUTH-FRIENDLY SERVICES: ADOPTING A SEX POSITIVE APPROACH<sup>vi</sup>

## Tips for delivering sex-positive CSE

### GAINING SUPPORT

- Speaking openly about sexual issues with young people can be difficult in many settings, and you may face resistance from parents or others in the community. Make sure that from the outset you work alongside teachers, parents and others to ensure they understand the rationale for the CSE you are providing, and to reassure them that it will be safe and appropriate for the age group you are working with. Gather evidence which supports your approach (including the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of sexual health that recognises the need for “pleasurable and safe sexual experiences”<sup>vii</sup>) and if necessary, arrange focus groups and meetings to discuss the content of your programme, including young people’s own views and experiences.
- Try to find allies for the work that you are doing, perhaps health professionals who can speak to the realities of young people’s sexual lives and the consequences of being denied information, or other organizations that work on human rights or gender equality.
- IPPF includes ‘pleasure’ as an essential component of CSE<sup>viii</sup> but this can be a tricky subject to address in conservative or religious settings. Think about ‘entry points’ for discussing more sensitive topics relating to sexuality – for example, discussing love and intimacy, or the potential impact of drugs and alcohol on sexual enjoyment and consent, and ensuring sessions on biology or anatomy discuss pleasure responses, not just reproductive capacity.

### CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- All organizations providing CSE should have a strong child protection policy which staff and volunteers are trained on and which is communicated to all partners, including the establishment in which you are working. This is especially important when talking about sensitive issues surrounding sexuality as the educator will need to be clear on laws and policies regarding the age of consent and what to do if young people disclose sexual activity or abuse. Educators using phones and/or social media to connect with young people need to be clear on professional boundaries regarding this type of contact, which should be reflected in up to date organizational policies.
- Always introduce some kind of working agreement or ‘ground rules’ for a session that covers issues relating to sexuality. This helps young people to understand the importance of not sharing personal information about themselves or others, and to know that there are other, confidential ways to seek support. Educators should also take care not to share personal information about themselves, and to avoid gossiping, to respect confidentiality and build trust.
- Whenever talking about sexuality try to use ‘distancing techniques’ to encourage young people not to share personal information – this might be looking at case studies, or using films or role plays that introduce ‘characters’ with particular dilemmas.
- It is important to think about the language you use to speak about sex and sexuality – do young people understand medical and technical words like ‘heterosexual’ or ‘clitoris’? Perhaps they know slang alternatives. It’s important to clarify the correct terms, so that should they need to, young people can understand sexual health literature, speak to health care professionals or report abusive behaviour. The IPPF *Youth Messaging Checklist* may be helpful for providing definitions.<sup>ix</sup>



“In a society like ours, there is no comprehensive sexuality education. Sex is hushed and parents leave this ‘awful’ task to the science teachers at school ... It went no further than a textbook on the functions of my reproductive system.”

AKOSUA AGYEYONG, YOUNG PEER EDUCATOR AT PLANNED PARENTHOOD ASSOCIATION OF GHANA



## WORKING WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS

- Use existing guidelines to determine which topics and resources to use for the groups you are working with. For example, UNESCO provides 'key ideas'<sup>x</sup> for working with different age groups on subjects such as communication, which ranges from "clearly communicating 'yes' and 'no' protects one's privacy and bodily integrity" for 5–8 year olds, moving up to "consensual and safer sex requires effective communication skills" for 15–18 year olds. The WHO *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* state that "sexuality education is a lifelong process [which]... starts at birth" and provides a 'matrix' of CSE topics by age group.<sup>xi</sup>
- Young people with learning disabilities are more likely to experience sexual abuse than their peers.<sup>xii</sup> Although you may need to adapt some activities for different learning styles or abilities, *all* young people do deserve honest information about sexuality, and often those with disabilities are even more likely to miss out on CSE.<sup>xiii</sup> The IPPF Member Association in the UK has produced a manual for working with vulnerable young people which includes activities defining sexual terms for those with varied abilities.<sup>xiv</sup>

## BEING INCLUSIVE

- Educators should not make assumptions about the young people they are working with – not giving the impression that "everybody is having sex", but also acknowledging that there may be young people in the group who have had a sexually transmitted infection, an unplanned pregnancy, or experienced sexual abuse, so it is important to create a respectful, non-shaming environment.
- All educators should be sufficiently trained to deliver non-judgemental and evidence-based sessions on sexuality, including in how to ensure a 'sex-positive' approach. The Pleasure Project has some suggested activities for facilitators wishing to examine their own values and comfort levels with this work.<sup>xv</sup>

- We also all carry ideas about gender, which may influence our own CSE delivery. Try to examine your own values and assumptions and engage young people to challenge gendered stereotypes (such as, "men always want to have sex") through your activities – there are many examples of this in *It's All One Curriculum*,<sup>xvi</sup> which has a whole section on gender.
- Again, think about whether the language you use is inclusive for young people who might be lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender or questioning their sexual orientation. Try not to make assumptions or only present sex as an act between a man and a woman – it can help to use non-gendered terms like 'partner' or 'parent'.

## YOUTH FOCUSED

- Involve young people in your planning, delivery and evaluation to make sure the sessions you are providing are relevant and relatable to their real lives! One engaging method of talking about sexuality might be to start by discussing films, TV shows, music videos or books that are popular with the young people you are working with and use them to talk about relationships, love and sex.
- The young people you are working with may have seen sexual images or pornography and have questions or assumptions that are not being answered. Try to find a way to talk about porn which is not judgemental but uses a distancing approach to think about some of the realities concerning gender, power, body image and so on.<sup>xvii</sup>
- Where young people express resistance over using condoms this is often based on a real or imagined loss of pleasurable feeling. Rather than dismissing this, use pleasure as a way to discuss condom and contraception use<sup>xviii</sup> – have a look at the work of the Pleasure Project in the resources section below. Talking about sex as a broad range of activities can also help young people to think about activities that are 'lower risk' than engaging in penetrative intercourse.



“In Venezuela we have looked at what national legislation says about CSE and we use the policies that support the right to participate in CSE at school or in non formal spaces to answer opposition. Where there aren't national laws to directly support CSE it may be helpful to use a human rights approach.”

GENESIS LUIGI, PEER EDUCATOR AT ASOCIACION CIVIL DE PLANIFICACION FAMILIAR IN VENEZUELA



“At my centre, we organize discussions with young people, parents and others to talk about different aspects of sexuality including gender, abortion, choices, rights, healthy bodies and so on. To bring parents on board, key issues are put forward to motivate parents to be able to talk about sexuality issues with their children, for instance, use of teachable moments like seeing a pregnant woman in the park and answering a child’s questions, or watching a TV commercial featuring condom use.”

JAMES KATO, PEER EDUCATOR AT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH UGANDA

## PROVIDING FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

- Ensure any physical and online materials present a positive view of sexuality and do not use ‘scare tactics’ to encourage young people to refrain from sexual activity or to use contraception. Materials you produce should clearly outline your organization’s confidentiality policies and stress that young people have a right to ask questions about sexual issues.
- Last but not least, don’t forget to give clear information on local sexual health services or helplines and websites that young people can use for follow-up questions. They may not wish to ask questions out loud but should know where they can go if they need confidential support.



“Pleasure is something I never thought about in relation to sex or love. When in the training we talked about sexual pleasure, I really liked the way it was presented – as something natural, as something that we all should expect and enjoy. Not something to be secretive about. Since the training, I have spoken to my family about sex – which I never thought was possible.”

YOUNG PERSON WHO RECEIVED CSE FROM THE FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF NEPAL



“I think it’s a good thing to put a jar of questions in the classroom while you are having a workshop so all the questions that are difficult to ask in front of the class can be asked there anonymously and answered at the end of the session.”

LJUPKA TRAJANOVSKA, PEER EDUCATOR AT H.E.R.A IN MACEDONIA (PLACARD READS, ‘CSE IS IMPORTANT, IT STOPS VIOLENCE’)

- IPPF (2016) Putting sexuality back into Comprehensive Sexuality Education: making the case for a rights-based, sex-positive approach [www.ippf.org/resource/putting-sexuality-back-cse-tips-sex-positive-workshops-young-people](http://www.ippf.org/resource/putting-sexuality-back-cse-tips-sex-positive-workshops-young-people)
- IPPF (2016) ‘Young people at Women Deliver 2016’ [www.ippf.org/blogs/young-people-women-deliver-2016](http://www.ippf.org/blogs/young-people-women-deliver-2016)
- UNESCO (2007) Review of Sex, Relationships and HIV Education in Schools <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001629/162989e.pdf>
- Buse, K, Hildebrand, M, Hawkes, S (2016) ‘A farewell to abstinence and fidelity?’ [www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(16\)30138-3/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(16)30138-3/fulltext)
- The ‘Stat Compiler’ from USAID gives data on ‘median age at first sexual intercourse’ [www.statcompiler.com/en](http://www.statcompiler.com/en)
- IPPF (2011) Keys to youth-friendly services: Adopting a sex positive approach [www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive\\_approach.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive_approach.pdf)
- WHO (2016) Defining Sexual Health [www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/)
- IPPF (2010) IPPF Framework for CSE [www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_framework\\_for\\_comprehensive\\_sexuality\\_education.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_framework_for_comprehensive_sexuality_education.pdf)
- IPPF (2011) Youth Messaging Checklist [www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/youth\\_messaging\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/youth_messaging_checklist.pdf)
- UNESCO (2009) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>
- WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA (2010) Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe [www.bzga-whocc.de/?uid=20c71afcb419f260c6afd10b684768f5&id=home](http://www.bzga-whocc.de/?uid=20c71afcb419f260c6afd10b684768f5&id=home)
- IPPF European Network (no date) Keep Me Safe Project [www.ippfen.org/keepmesafe](http://www.ippfen.org/keepmesafe)
- Advocates for Youth (2016) Sexual Health Education for Young People with Disabilities – Research and Resources for Educators [www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/2559](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/2559)
- FPA (2007) Jiwsi: A pick ‘n’ mix of sex and relationships education activities [www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/jiwsi-sre-activities-english.pdf](http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/jiwsi-sre-activities-english.pdf)
- The Pleasure Project (2013) Toolkit <http://thepleasureproject.org/category/resources/toolkit/>
- The Population Council (2009) It’s All One Curriculum [www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2011PGY\\_ItsAllOneActivities\\_en.pdf](http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2011PGY_ItsAllOneActivities_en.pdf)
- This resource from the UK may be useful: <http://bishtraining.com/planet-porn/>
- Philpott, A, Knerr, W, Maher, D (2006) ‘Promoting protection and pleasure: amplifying the effectiveness of barriers against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy’ [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(06\)69810-3/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(06)69810-3/abstract)

## Useful resources for taking a positive approach to sexuality in your CSE

This list is by no means exhaustive but should hopefully provide some useful resources for taking a positive approach to sexuality in your CSE, which you can adapt to your own context.

### IPPF

IPPF developed *It's All One Curriculum* in partnership with the Population Council to provide educators with a comprehensive manual for delivering sexuality education. It is available in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Bangla and Arabic. The section on 'sexuality' looks at gender, desire, difference and consent. IPPF's *Adopting a sex positive approach* looks at young people's sexual health services and may be useful for linking to your CSE work.

[www.popcouncil.org/research/its-all-one-curriculum-guidelines-and-activities-for-a-unified-approach-to-](http://www.popcouncil.org/research/its-all-one-curriculum-guidelines-and-activities-for-a-unified-approach-to-)  
[www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive\\_approach.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive_approach.pdf)

### RFSU (Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning)

The IPPF Member Association in Sweden believes that "openness is a key factor for prevention and sexual health" and produces resources like *Sex your own way* and the film *Sex on the map* to directly tackle sexuality issues. There is also a guide on masturbation that may help provide background for discussing this topic.

[www.rfsu.se/Bildbank/Dokument/Fakta/sex-your-own-way.pdf](http://www.rfsu.se/Bildbank/Dokument/Fakta/sex-your-own-way.pdf)  
[www.rfsu.se/en/Engelska/Sexuality-Education/Sex-on-the-map](http://www.rfsu.se/en/Engelska/Sexuality-Education/Sex-on-the-map)  
[www.rfsu.se/Bildbank/Dokument/Praktikor/praktika-masturbation-guide2010.pdf](http://www.rfsu.se/Bildbank/Dokument/Praktikor/praktika-masturbation-guide2010.pdf)

### FPA (UK Family Planning Association)

The IPPF Member Association in the UK has a useful policy statement on 'Sexual Wellbeing and Pleasure', which notes the importance of discussing pleasure with young people in CSE. FPA has also produced a sexuality education manual for working with groups with varying learning abilities.

[www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/sexual-wellbeing-policy-statement.pdf](http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/sexual-wellbeing-policy-statement.pdf)  
[www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/jiws-sre-activities-english.pdf](http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/jiws-sre-activities-english.pdf)

### Planned Parenthood

The IPPF Member Association in the United States has produced short videos exploring consent, which you may want to show to young people, and video resources for parents to discuss sexuality with their children. Their website also has games and quizzes.

Consent 101: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJrkChwV0lwQcV0-UqcWiFV](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJrkChwV0lwQcV0-UqcWiFV)

Parenting Tips: A Tool for Talking About Sex [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJrkChwV0lwQcV0-UqcWiFV](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJrkChwV0lwQcV0-UqcWiFV)  
[www.plannedparenthood.org/teens/tools-for-teens](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teens/tools-for-teens)

### Love Matters

Love Matters is an "honest, open and positive resource about sex and love". They produce successful information websites for young audiences in English, Hindi, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic.

[www.rnw.org/activities/love-matters](http://www.rnw.org/activities/love-matters)

### TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues)

TARSHI is based in India and their work on sexuality is "from an affirmative and rights-based perspective". They have produced sexuality education manuals for a range of age groups.

[www.tarshi.net/index.asp?pid=9](http://www.tarshi.net/index.asp?pid=9)

### The Pleasure Project

The Pleasure Project takes a "positive, liberating and sexy approach to safer sex" and shares research and tools for sharing sex-positive sexual health messages, including a toolkit for educators.

<http://thepleasureproject.org>

### The 'Good Sex' Project (Brook)

This UK project looked at the importance of a sex positive approach to working with young people and has resources for training professionals that could be adapted for your context.

<https://goodsexproject.wordpress.com/training-resources/>

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